

ANIMOSITY AGAINST RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF ANTECEDENTS AND INTENTIONS TO PURCHASE PRODUCTS WITH RELIGIOUS ENDORSEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The world is fraught with conflicts between countries, regions, religions, ethnic groups, political beliefs, social convictions, groups with different sexual orientations, to name but a few. The animosity that can result from such conflicts affects consumers' purchase decisions. While the international marketing literature is awash with studies that look at the impact of different country images on the purchase of products originating from different countries (cf. the entire country-of-origin literature), there are comparably few contributions that looked at the impact of conflict and animosity on purchase intent *within* a given country.

In this paper, we look at animosities within country-markets and their impact on purchase intent. Specifically, we analyse situations in which a company would like to increase the appeal of its products through an endorsement directed towards a particular subgroup. While such an endorsement is most likely appealing to the targeted subgroup, we suggest that it may lead to a *decrease* in purchase intent among other market segments, if they harbor animosities against the very subgroup targeted through the endorsement.

Thus, in such situations an endorsement could become potentially controversial in character and, from a purely economic point of view, the company faces a trade-off between an expected revenue gain through the endorsement (additional sales from the subgroup targeted by the endorsement) versus a potential revenue loss (lower purchases by segments that associate the endorsement with subgroups towards which they harbor animosities).

While inter-group animosities within country-markets and their impact on purchase intent of products carrying potentially controversial endorsements is applicable to a wide variety of different controversies, we have developed our arguments in the context of potential conflicts between different religious sub-groups. There are two reasons for this: first, the discussion is more tangible; second, there are ample examples for religious endorsements (e.g. Kosher or Halal) and, unfortunately, there is also evidence of animosity between different religious sub-groups.

Taking the route described above, we are proposing a conceptual model and associated hypotheses which attempt to capture the antecedents of animosity towards religious minorities as well as the impact of the latter on the willingness to purchase products with religious endorsements.

The contribution of our paper is threefold: First, we offer a literature review on different types of endorsements with the help of a classification table. Second, we draw attention to a neglected research area which, we believe, will gain importance in increasingly multi-cultural country environments. Third, we provide a conceptual basis for the development of measures and the empirical investigation of the consequences of animosity on the willingness to purchase products with potentially controversial endorsements. Finally, we also hope that our contribution will stimulate further research in a hitherto neglected field which is both of practical and theoretical relevance.