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Country Image Effects in the Era of Protectionism

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ABSTRACT

The research presented in this article examines the effects of protectionist measures on the perceptions that consumers of a targeted country form of the country having adopted these measures as well of other countries not directly involved in the conflict. An experiment was conducted in which 148 Canadian adult consumers were informed that Germany had announced its decision to impose import tariffs on Canadian products. Two types of protectionist measures were considered, either initiated by Germany (i.e., proactive context) or as a response to similar measures adopted by Canada (i.e., reactive context). Consumers' perceptions concerned the quality of products made in Germany, its image as a travel destination, and as a place to live. These perceptions were also obtained for three European countries differing with respect to their psychic distance with Germany; Austria (shortest distance), France (medium distance), and Spain (greatest distance). The results show that consumers' perceptions depend on the type of protectionist measures adopted (proactive versus reactive), primarily among consumers interested in international economic news. Reactive protectionist measures were perceived as more legitimate than proactive measures and, in turn, legitimacy had a negative effect on the degree to which consumers developed situational political animosity toward Germany and, consequently, more negative country perceptions. These results were shown to spill over other countries as a function of their psychic distance with Germany. Implications for firms involved in global trading and for governments are derived from these results.

KEYWORDS

Country distance; country image; protectionism; spillover effects

The 2008 financial crisis has led to an increase in protectionist measures around the world, particularly among the G20 countries, despite the apparent consensus of these latter countries not to follow this path (Bussière et al. 2011; Georgiadis and Gräb 2016). While modern protectionism has generally been subtle and targeted, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States has signaled the return of a more traditional and assertive type of protectionism (Enderwick 2011; Georgiadis and Gräb 2016). The imposition by the U.S. of import tariffs (i.e., steel and aluminum) on such important commercial partners as Canada and the European Union, the renegotiation of NAFTA – now the United States-Mexico-Canada (USMCA) trade agreement –, and the unprecedented commercial war that China and the U.S. are engaged in (BBC News 2019) are representative examples of this new era in global trading.

The adoption of protectionist measures can have some negative impact on a country's image. Countries can be seen as brands (Fetscherin and Dinnie 2010; Kotler and Gertner 2002) or even as persons (d'Astous and Boujbel 2007) and their image can be negatively altered by inappropriate moves in the global arena. In the context of a growing interdependence between nations, country image represents a major asset to remain competitive.

Research on country image effects has shown in countless studies that a country's image influences consumers' perceptions and behaviors, as regards the evaluation and purchase of its products (Bilkey and Nes 1982; Kotler and Gertner 2002; Peterson and Jolibert 1995; Pharr 2005; Roth and Diamantopoulos 2009; Verlegh and Steenkamp 1999) as well as its attractiveness as a touristic destination (Elliot, Papadopoulos, and Kim 2011; Papadopoulos 2004; Roth and

Diamantopoulos 2009). The objective of this research is to examine the role played by a country's protectionist actions in this context. More precisely, its aim is to evaluate the impact of different types of protectionist measures on the perceptions that consumers of a country targeted by such measures develop with respect to the country that has implemented them. The main contribution of this research lies in linking the literature on protectionism with that on country image effects. The research literature on protectionism is by and large dominated by the economic perspective and to some extent has ignored consumers, apart from seeing them as the source of protectionism (Johnston 2013) or looking at their perceptions in the context of generalized protectionism (Chan, Chan, and Leung 2010). This research takes a different approach by examining the impact of protectionism on consumers' country image perceptions when the protectionist measures are either proactive (i.e., initiated by the country) or reactive (i.e., as retaliatory responses). Moreover, the research examines the extent to which these perceptions may spill over other countries as a function of their psychic distance with the protectionist country (Ghemawat 2001).

The organization of this article is as follows. After reviewing briefly the research literatures on protectionism, country image, and country distance, the conceptual framework of this research is developed and specific predictions are put forward. This is followed by a presentation of the methods used to collect the data and the analyses that have been conducted to test the theoretical predictions. The research results are then reviewed in light of their contribution to the literature. The article ends with a presentation of some implications for firms and governments, and some avenues for future research.

Literature review

The literature review is structured around three main themes. There is first a brief presentation of the protectionism phenomenon and its different forms. This is followed by a synthesis of the research literature on the effects of country image, including a discussion of the concept of

situational animosity. The last section centers on showing the relevance of the spillover effect to the domain of country image in general and for the objectives of this research in particular.

Protectionism

There is a large consensus among economists around the belief that protectionism has negative effects, notably because it tends to reduce competition among firms on their domestic market, with the consequences of less competitiveness and lower gross domestic product (GDP) for the countries involved (Bussière et al. 2011). This belief has been crystalized following the disastrous impacts of the protectionist measures (i.e., mainly tariff-based) that were adopted during the Great Depression (Rose 2013). These measures resulted in a decrease of nearly 60% of global trading (Bussière et al. 2011). The economic growth that followed the Second World War led to an era of market liberalization (Goldstein 1986) characterized by a steady increase of global exchanges and free-trade agreements (Bussière et al. 2011). However, the 2008 financial crisis led to a resurgence of protectionism, as attested by the data collected by Global Trade Alert (2019) which show that since 2008 there has been more than 14,000 protectionist measures put forward by countries – principally countries of the G20 (Bussière et al. 2011; Georgiadis and Gräb 2016)–, which correspond to about 70% all state interventions influencing global trade.

Protectionist actions involve two sets of protagonists: the nations that adopt the measures and those which are their targets. A country which decides to implement protectionist policies may do so for political reasons or as a result of pressures from various domestic lobbies (i.e., a proactive posture), or it may do so as a retaliatory response to the nations that initiated the conflict (i.e., a reactive posture) (Gawande and Hansen 1999). In the first case, country leaders wish to capitalize upon the protectionist dispositions of some of their constituencies, which often stem from the anxiety and insecurity related to the international political and economic environment (Johnston 2013). In the second case, the protectionist measures represent a logical and

effective response given the targeted country's coercive power (Gawande and Hansen 1999) and one that can be seen as legitimate by consumers. The retaliatory imposition of tariffs on various products originating from the U.S. by Canada (Radio-Canada 2018) and by the European Union (Le Devoir 2018) following the decision by the U.S. to impose a 25% tariff on steel and a 10% tariff on aluminum imports are recent examples of such reactive protectionist actions.

Country image effects

A product's country-of-origin (COO) is an intrinsic attribute information that consumers use to make their evaluations and facilitate their choices (Bilkey and Nes 1982). Associating the origin of a product with a country – whether the association is factual or not – is assumed to activate in consumers' mind the image of that country (Roth and Diamantopolos 2009). This image is composed of cognitive (i.e., beliefs concerning that country), affective (i.e., feelings and emotions that the country triggers), and conative (i.e., intentions and memories of past behaviors related to the country) mental representations (Roth and Diamantopoulos 2009). The literature on the effects of country image on consumers has been dominated by studies having looked at its impact on product perceptions, evaluation, and choice. The meta-analyses carried out by Peterson and Jolibert (1995) and Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) have revealed that the effects of country image are more important as regards consumers' perceptions (e.g., perceived quality) than purchase intentions. Although product perceptions, product evaluation and purchase intentions constitute a highly relevant context to study the effects of country image, research has shown that country image effects are observed in other contexts as well, such as the evaluation and choice of touristic destinations (d'Astous and Boujbel 2007; Elliot, Papadopoulos, and Kim 2011; Papadopoulos 2004) and perceived quality of life (d'Astous and Boujbel 2007).

The research paradigm of the majority of country image studies consists in looking at the effects, on different dependent variables, of varying, more or less systematically, country stimuli.

For instance, a great number of studies have shown that products originating from more economically developed countries are perceived as being of better quality than products from less economically developed countries (Iyer and Kalita 1997; Li and Monroe 1992; Roth and Romeo 1992). In such studies, country image is considered as a relatively fixed mental representation. However, a country's image may change as a result of various events, such as the advent of terrorist attacks on tourists (Boujbel 2016) or product recall crises (Peijuan, Ting, and Pang 2009). Thus, it seems logical to think that a country's decision to impose protectionist measures may have an impact on the image that consumers in the targeted country will form of that country.

In this context, the concept of animosity is particularly relevant. The animosity that a consumer has toward a country consists in some level of hostility stemming from past or current events of military, political, or economical origin (Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998; Riefler and Diamantopoulos 2007). Animosity means more than anger, since it is accompanied by fear and may lead consumers to avoid a country and the products that it makes (Harmeling, Magnusson, and Singh 2015). It may be seen as a general disposition or as something situational (Jung et al. 2002; Leong et al. 2008; Riefler and Diamantopoulos 2007). Whereas situational animosity may develop following some particular event, dispositional animosity corresponds to an accumulation of animosity over time (Jung et al. 2002). Situational animosity toward an entity is stronger when the entity is perceived as being responsible of the negative event (e.g., imposing import tariffs) and is even stronger when it is believed that the entity had the power to prevent the event's outcomes (Leong et al. 2008). Based on this rationale, the situational animosity toward a country provoked by the adoption of protectionist measures should be less intense if it is felt that the country had good reasons to adopt this policy (e.g., a reactive posture), hence making the country's decision to impose protectionist measures more legitimate.

Country distance and interrelatedness

The image of a country can be described in an objective manner, but fundamentally it

corresponds to a psychological experience. It is therefore important to understand how such experience comes about. A useful framework to this aim is offered by the memory network model (Collins and Loftus 1975; Wyer and Carlston 1979) where knowledge is conceptualized as a set of interconnected concepts that can be activated. When a concept is activated (e.g., thinking of China), the activation is assumed to spread to other concepts to which it is linked (e.g., Asia). The links between concepts are assumed to vary according to their distance; the stronger the links between concepts, the quicker the spreading activation.

The memory network model has been used in brand management research to understand such phenomena as brand dilution (Pullig, Simmons, and Netemeyer 2006), brand equity (Krishnan, 1996), brand extension (Aaker and Keller 1990), and brand scandal (Dahlén and Lange, 2006; Roehm and Tybout 2006). Because countries can be considered as brands (Fetscherin and Dinnie 2010; Kotler and Gertner 2002), the model seems relevant to predict the effects that protectionist measures may have on the image of the country having implemented them but also on other countries associated with that country in consumers' minds. Roehm and Tybout (2006) have shown for instance that a scandal affecting a brand is likely, through the process of spreading activation, to have a negative impact on other brands in the same product category. In a different context, Carrillat, d'Astous, and Christianis (2014) have shown that a scandal involving a celebrity endorser not only affects negatively the endorsed brand but also its direct competitors.

Countries can be seen as more or less similar depending on various factors. This similarity reflects the extent to which they are distant from each other, on such dimensions as geography, culture, politics, and economy (Ghemawat 2001). However, the objective distance between countries does not necessarily correspond to the distance as perceived by consumers – that is, the psychic distance –, although it has been shown that objective distance factors are important antecedents (Håkanson and Ambos 2010; Sousa and Bradley 2006). According to the memory network model, the concepts associated with a given

country should spread more easily to countries that are close in consumers' minds than to distant ones. Thus, the negative content stemming from the protectionist measures of a country should spill over other countries as a function of their psychic distance with the protectionist country.

Conceptual development

The conceptual framework of this research is presented in Figure 1. In general, it is proposed that the perceptions that consumers form of a country that has implemented protectionist measures, as well as of countries that are more or less psychologically distant from that country, are the result of mediating processes involving the perceived legitimacy of the country's protectionist actions and the situational animosity that this creates.

The literature on protectionism indicates that protectionist measures may be initiated by a country following, for instance, internal pressures (i.e., a proactive posture), or adopted as a retaliatory response to some protectionist measures (i.e., a reactive posture) (Gawande and Hansen 1999). The reactive posture is believed to be more legitimate as it is meant to dissuade the instigator to embark in a commercial war, particularly when the two countries have comparable coercive powers (Drezner 2003; Gawande and Hansen 1999; Miyagiwa, Song, and Vandenbussche 2016).

All consumers do not necessarily hold negative opinions about protectionism (Johnston 2013), although its consequences are objectively harmful for the economic development of nations (Bussière et al. 2011). Consumers who feel more insecure about the international environment often have positive attitudes toward protectionism (Johnston 2013), which reflects a certain unfamiliarity with, and sometimes plain ignorance of the dynamics of protectionism. Consumer knowledge is indeed a common moderating variable in country-of-origin research (Ahmed and d'Astous 2008; Pharr 2005; Roth and Diamantopoulos 2009) as well as research on country distance (Dow and Karunaratna 2006; Håkanson and Ambos 2010; Sousa and Bradley 2006). Because the phenomenon of protectionism

is largely covered by the medias, consumers' level of knowledge should be a direct function of the degree to which they follow international economic news. The relationship between the type of protectionist measures (i.e., reactive versus proactive) and the perceived legitimacy of these measures is therefore expected to be moderated by consumers' interest in international economic news. More precisely, reactive protectionist measures should be perceived as more legitimate than proactive measures, and this difference should be greater among consumers who follow international economic news.

As shown in the conceptual framework (Figure 1), the perceived legitimacy of protectionist measures is hypothesized to have an impact on the felt animosity toward the protectionist country; the greater the perceived legitimacy of the measures the lower the situational animosity. Leong et al. (2008) have shown that situational animosity toward a country stems from consumers' inference that the country is to blame for its actions, a result which is in line with the predicted negative relationship between legitimacy and animosity.

Finally, it is hypothesized that the level of situational animosity resulting from the perceived legitimacy of the protectionist measures adopted by a country has an impact on consumers' country image perceptions, more precisely on the perceived quality of the products originating from the protectionist country, the perception of the country as a touristic destination, and as a place to live. Moreover, although this is not directly indicated in the framework, it is hypothesized that the smaller the psychic distance between a given country and the protectionist country, the greater the likelihood that the negative impact of protectionist measures will spill over the

perceptions of that country on perceived product quality, attractiveness as a touristic destination and attractiveness as a place to live.

Method

Overview

An experiment was conducted where a sample of Canadian consumers were informed by means of a fictitious Web-based article that Germany had decided to impose import tariffs on Canadian products. The participants were randomly distributed among two conditions; (1) the protectionist measures were proactive (i.e., Germany's initiative), or (2) they were reactive (i.e., Germany's response to Canada's own import tariffs on German products).

Experimental design and stimuli

The choice of Germany as the stimulus country for a protectionist conflict with Canada rested on three considerations. First, it was important to select a country with coercive powers comparable to Canada in order to increase the plausibility of a retaliatory response from that country to Canadian protectionist measures (Miyagiwa, Song, and Vandenbussche 2016). Second, the selected country had to be in relatively good terms with Canada in order to limit the influence of external events on the participants' reactions and to ensure that the initial perception of that country was somewhat neutral. The United States, for instance, would not have been an optimal choice since at the time the data for this study were collected, the Canada-U.S. relations were rather unstable. Third, the country had to fit within a proper context for the outbreak of the protectionist conflict. The Canada-European

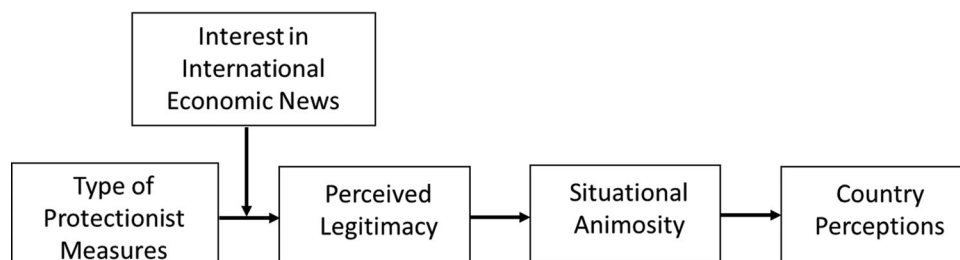


Figure 1. The conceptual framework.

Trade Agreement (CETA) having entered into force in 2017 offered such a context and Germany, Europe's largest economy, seemed to be well suited for this context. The analysis of Canada's distance to Germany according to Ghemawat's (2001) country distance framework as well as semi-structured interviews with two international trade experts supported the choice of Germany as a country that could effectively be opposed to Canada in a protectionist conflict.

In order to verify the extent to which consumers' responses to the protectionist measures would spill over countries more or less distant from Germany, three European countries were chosen: Austria, France, and Spain. On the basis of their culture, their political and legal environment, and their economy, Austria was presumed to be the less distant country, followed by France and Spain in that order. These assumptions are supported by Håkanson and Ambos (2010) who have notably measured the psychic distance between Canada and the aforementioned countries among academically trained Canadian managers with at least four years of business experience in these countries.

A one-factor completely randomized experimental design was planned to test the conceptual framework. It included two conditions: protectionist measures initiated by Germany as regards imported Canadian products (proactive condition), and protectionist measures by Germany as a retaliatory response to Canada's protectionist measures (reactive condition). In each condition, the participants had to read a one-page fictitious Web-based article in which it was announced that Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, was starting off a European tour to strengthen the relationships of Canada with its European partners in the context of the CETA. In the proactive condition, the article mentioned that the tour was an excuse to meet with German Chancellor Angela Merkel because, following pressures from the German population, she had announced the return of import tariffs on Canadian products. In the reactive condition, the upcoming import tariffs on Canadian products were presented as a response from Germany following Canada's imposition of import tariffs on German products. A short definition of

a protectionist measure was presented to the participants before the fictitious article. The Appendix shows the article that appeared in the proactive condition.

Measures

Perceptions of Germany were measured with six items taken from d'Astous and Boujbel (2007). They covered product quality (two items – e.g., “A country which makes quality products”), touristic destination (two items – e.g., “An interesting travel destination”), and quality of life (two items – e.g., “A country with a great quality of life”). The same items served to assess country perceptions of Austria, France, and Spain. Each item was rated using a seven-point bipolar numerical scale with endpoints *totally disagree/totally agree*.

Situational animosity was assessed with eight items adapted from Smirnova, Mai, and Hoffman's (2011) scale. The adaptation consisted in contextualizing the items as regard the presumed Canada-Germany conflict (e.g., “Germany represents a threat to Canada”, “I feel anger toward Germany”). The items were rated using seven-point bipolar numerical scales with endpoints *totally disagree/totally agree*.

A scale aimed at assessing the concept of perceived legitimacy was designed specifically for this study. Six seven-point bipolar numerical items were developed based on Suchman's (1995) classic article on the concept of animosity: “The adoption of protectionist measures by Germany against Canada is: totally unacceptable/totally acceptable, a very grave act/an act not grave at all, a decision that is hard to explain/a decision that is easy to explain, dishonest/honest, illegitimate/legitimate, unjustified/justified.”

Interest in international economic news was assessed with eight seven-point bipolar numerical items adapted from Zaichkowsky's (1985) involvement scale: “For me, international economic news are: unimportant/important, uninteresting/interesting, irrelevant/relevant, insignificant/significant, of no concern in my life/of concern in my life, boring/exciting, unamusing/amusing, a waste of time/an essential activity”.

Two seven-point bipolar numerical items were used to measure the level of familiarity with

Germany in order to verify that the participants' associations with this country were neutral: "Germany is a country: that I don't know at all/that I know very well, that I am not familiar with/that I am familiar with". These scales served to measure the respondents' familiarity with German Chancellor Angela Merkel as well.

Two items were also developed in order to verify the effectiveness of the manipulations: "The protectionist measures adopted by Germany are: (1) An initiative from Germany toward Canada; (2) A response of Germany against Canada. The items were rated with seven-point bipolar numerical totally disagree/totally agree scales. The psychic distance between Germany, France, Austria, and Spain was assessed using seven-point bipolar numerical scales with endpoints *very different/very similar* (Spain-Germany, France-Austria, etc.). Three items served to evaluate the extent to which the participants believed that Germany had really adopted protectionist measures against Canada (seven-point bipolar numerical scales): *improbable/probable*, *impossible/possible*, *unlikely/likely*. The questionnaire ended with sociodemographic questions (gender, age, education, occupation, annual household income).

Data collection

The data were collected using a drop-off delivery survey procedure. Streets were randomly selected in residential areas of a major Canadian city. Two interviewers knocked on the door of every other dwelling on these streets in order to ask for the resident's participation. A convenient moment for picking up the questionnaire once completed was agreed upon with people having accepted to participate. From a total of 504 visits that were made, a contact was established with 271 people (contact rate: 53.8%). From these, 123 persons accepted to fill in the questionnaire (acceptance rate: 45.4%). From a total of 97 questionnaires that were picked up, four were judged to be invalid and were thus eliminated (final response rate: 78.9%). The random distribution of the questionnaires among the participants resulted in the following sample size breakdown in the two experimental conditions: proactive ($n = 47$), and reactive ($n = 46$).

Results

Description of the sample

The sample is composed of an approximately equal number of male (50.5%) and female (49.5%) participants. The mean age of the respondents is 51.1 years with a 18-79 range. They are well educated since 56.5% indicated that they had some university education. They also are financially comfortable with 55.4% having reported an annual household income of 100,000 CAN\$ or more before taxes.

Psychometric assessment of the measures

The country perceptions items were factor analyzed (i.e., principal components analysis) with a forced three-factor solution. In the case of Germany the items loaded strongly on their proper evaluative dimension (explained variance = 90.2%; mean intra-factor loading = 0.87; mean extra-factor loading = 0.24). Similar results were obtained for France (explained variance = 90.2%; mean intra-factor loading = 0.92; mean extra-factor loading = 0.17), Austria (explained variance = 91.8%; mean intra-factor loading = 0.84; mean extra-factor loading = 0.30), and Spain (explained variance = 90.7%; mean intra-factor loading = 0.85; mean extra-factor loading = 0.20). All bivariate correlations among the items were positive, strong, and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) (Germany: product quality, $r = 0.75$; travel destination, $r = 0.89$; quality of life, $r = 0.75$ – France: product quality, $r = 0.78$; travel destination, $r = 0.82$; quality of life, $r = 0.79$ – Austria: product quality, $r = 0.67$; travel destination, $r = 0.94$; quality of life, $r = 0.85$ – Spain: product quality, $r = 0.86$; travel destination, $r = 0.89$; quality of life, $r = 0.67$). Altogether, these results show that the country perceptions dimensions are distinct and that their measures are reliable. The mean of the items served as indicators of the concepts.

The eight items aimed at measuring the situational animosity toward Germany were factor analyzed. After a first run, one item was eliminated because it had a low communality (0.35). Following a second run resulting in a two-factor solution, a second item was eliminated because it

loaded strongly on both components. The final analysis led to a two-factor solution explaining 76.7% of the total variance. The first factor was composed of three items and is interpreted as political animosity (e.g., “Germany represents a threat to Canada”) whereas the three-item second factor was interpreted as affective animosity (e.g., “I feel anger toward Germany”). These two types of situational animosity are consistent with Jung et al. (2002) assertion that animosity comprises cognitive and affective components. The factors were very much distinct (mean intra-factor loading = 0.87; mean extra-factor absolute loading = 0.09). Each scale is reliable (Cronbach’s alpha – affective animosity: 0.88; political animosity: 0.76). In each case, the mean of the items served as an indicator of the concept.

The factor analysis of the six items aimed at assessing the perceived legitimacy of Germany’s decision to use protectionist measures led to a single factor explaining 60.9% of the total variance. The reliability of the scale is excellent as attested by a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.87. The factor analysis of the eight items purported to measure the participant’s interest in international economic news led to a single factor explaining 66.1% of the total variance (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.93). The factor analysis of the three items serving to estimate the extent to which the participants believed that Germany had really adopted protectionist measures against Canada resulted in a single factor explaining 88.5% of the total variance (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.93). The factor analysis of the two items measuring familiarity with Germany and subsequently with Angela Merkel confirmed the presence of a single factor explaining respectively 82.9% and 94% of the total variance (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.79 and 0.93, respectively). For all these scales, the mean of the items served as an indicator of the concept.

Preliminary analyses

The participants in the proactive experimental condition rated Germany’s protectionist measures as being an initiative to a greater extent (mean = 4.07) than those in the reactive condition (mean = 2.76) ($t(90) = 3.81, p < 0.001$). They also rated the measures as being a response against Canada

to a lesser extent (mean = 3.46 versus mean = 5.13) ($t(90) = 4.74, p < 0.001$). These results confirm that the manipulation of the type of protectionist measures (i.e., proactive versus reactive) was effective.

The participants’ levels of familiarity with Germany (mean = 4.19) and Angela Merkel (mean = 4.01) confirm the assumption that they had a relatively neutral perception of this country. The difference between the familiarity of Germany and Angela Merkel was not statistically significant ($t(92) = 3.81, p > 0.05$).

A within-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to contrast the psychic distance between Germany and Austria, with that between Germany and France, and that between Germany and Spain. As expected, the greatest psychic distance was with Spain (mean = 5.16), followed by France (mean = 4.16), and Austria (mean = 2.50). Overall, these psychic distance differences were statistically significant ($F(1.94, 168.57) = 107.40, p < 0.001$). Moreover, the contrasts involving these distances were statistically significant as well (Germany-Austria versus Germany-France: $t(87) = 5.47, p < 0.001$; Germany-France versus Germany-Spain: $t(87) = 13.57, p < 0.001$). These results confirm the appropriateness of choosing Austria, France, and Spain to verify if the negative impact of the protectionist measures adopted by Germany spills over other countries as a function of their psychic distance with Germany.

Overall, the perceived plausibility of the protectionist scenarios was good without being excellent (mean = 4.03). The mean difference between the two experimental conditions was not statistically significant (proactive: mean = 4.01; reactive: mean = 4.03). The important variance observed on this variable among the participants (range = 6; std. dev. = 1.47) confirmed the relevance of using it as a covariate in the statistical analyses.

Test of the conceptual framework

The test of the conceptual framework (Figure 1) necessitates three steps (MacKinnon 2008). First, it must be shown that the type of protectionist measures and the interest in international economic news have an interactive impact on

perceived legitimacy. Second, it must be shown that perceived legitimacy has a statistically significant effect on situational animosity in the context of the relationship between the type of protectionist measures and situational animosity. Finally, it must be shown that situational animosity significantly impacts perceptions of Germany in the context of this two-mediator sequential model.

Step 1

The conceptual framework posits first that the effect of the type of protectionist measures on the perceived legitimacy of Germany's actions depends on consumers' degree of interest in international economic news. This prediction was tested by means of an ANOVA using as dependent variable perceived legitimacy and as independent variables type of protectionist measures (proactive versus reactive), interest in international economic news, and their interaction (type \times interest), with the addition of perceived plausibility of the scenarios as a covariate. As expected, the type \times interest interaction was statistically significant ($F(1, 88) = 5.22, p < 0.05$). Using the median as a cutoff point to interpret this interaction, participants who had more interest in international economic news rated the proactive measures as less legitimate (mean = 3.76) than the reactive measures (mean = 4.07). In contrast, and somewhat surprisingly, the reactive measures were perceived as less legitimate (mean = 3.59) than the proactive measures (mean = 4.06) in the group of consumers with less interest in international economic news.

Step 2

In the conceptual framework (Figure 1), the impact of the type protectionist measure on the situational animosity toward Germany is assumed to be explained by the perceived legitimacy of Germany's actions (i.e., legitimacy is a mediating variable). In order to verify that this is the case, it is necessary to regress situational animosity on perceived legitimacy and type of protectionist measures. Since animosity was shown to be either affective or political, this was done for each type of animosity with the inclusion of plausibility of the scenarios as a covariate. As regards affective

animosity, the effect of perceived legitimacy was not statistically significant ($b = -0.18, t(89) = 1.44, p > 0.05$) and therefore it is concluded that legitimacy does not play a mediating role in this relationship. With respect to political animosity however, legitimacy had a statistically significant negative effect ($b = -0.18, t(89) = 1.70, p < 0.05$, one-tailed test) as expected. Moreover, the effect of the type of protectionist measure was not statistically significant ($t(89) = 0.83, p > 0.40$), which means that the mediation effect is total.

Step 3

The last step in validating the conceptual framework consists in testing the mediating effect of both perceived legitimacy and situational animosity (political only) in the context of the relationship between the type of protectionist measures and country perceptions. This entails regressing perceptions of Germany on the presumed mediators and the experimental variable. This was done for each dimension of country perceptions, that is, perceptions of products made in Germany, perceptions of Germany as a travel destination, and perceptions of Germany as a place to live. The three regressions included in addition the perceived plausibility of the scenarios as a covariate.

The results of the three multiple regressions were identical. In all cases, the only statistically significant variable was the political animosity toward Germany (product quality: $b = -0.37, t(88) = -3.85, p < 0.001$; travel destination: $b = -0.28, t(88) = -2.30, p < 0.05$; quality of life: $b = -0.40, t(88) = -4.00, p < 0.001$). As expected, the impact of political animosity on country perceptions was negative. In addition, because the effect of the type of protectionist measures and that of perceived legitimacy were not statistically significant, it is concluded that the sequential mediation effect is total.

Spillover effects

One idea that has guided this research is the possibility that the negative content that is associated with the adoption of protectionist measures against Canada by Germany would not only impact the perceptions of that country by

Table 1. Spillover effects.

	Austria (shortest psychic distance – 2.50)			France (medium psychic distance – 4.16)			Spain (longest psychic distance – 5.16)		
	Proactive	Reactive	Difference	Proactive	Reactive	Difference	Proactive	Reactive	Difference
Product quality	4.07	4.49	0.42 ^b	4.90	5.24	0.34 ^b	4.36	4.64	0.28 ^{NS}
Travel destination	5.81	5.96	0.15 ^{NS}	6.10	6.36	0.20 ^b	6.16	6.40	0.24 ^b
Quality of life	4.56	4.00	0.43 ^a	4.67	4.82	0.15 ^{NS}	4.69	4.83	0.14 ^{NS}
Overall Perception	4.65	4.98	0.33 ^b	5.22	5.48	0.26 ^b	5.07	5.29	0.22 ^b

^a $p < 0.05$ (one-tailed test).^b $p < 0.10$ (one-tailed test).

NS not statistically significant.

Canadian consumers but other countries as a function of their psychic distance with Germany. The shorter the psychic distance of a country with Germany, the greater the likelihood that the negative content generated by Germany's protectionist measures will spill over that country. As discussed previously, based on the memory network model, the negative content associated with Germany should spread more easily to countries that are close to Germany in consumers' minds than to distant ones. Three European countries have been shown as having short, medium, and long psychic distance with Germany: Austria, France, and Spain in that order.

In order to test these predictions, several multiple regression analyses were conducted using the same structural model as in Step 3 of the preceding section. The dependent variables corresponded to different country perceptions combining countries (i.e., Austria, France, and Spain) and perceptual dimensions (i.e., product quality, travel destination, and quality of life) (i.e., nine regression models in all). In addition, a mean overall country perception was computed and served as an additional dependent variable for each country (i.e., three additional regression models). Combining perceptions of product quality, travel destination, and quality of life into an overall perceptual score seems reasonable inasmuch as these perceptions are positively correlated. The reliability of the resulting scale is in general very acceptable (Austria: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$; France: $\alpha = 0.69$; Spain: $\alpha = 0.71$).

The results of these analyses are presented in Table 1. For each perceptual dimension (product quality, travel destination, quality of life, overall perception) and each country (Austria, France, and Spain), the table displays the mean country perception associated with the conditions of

proactive and reactive protectionist measures by Germany, their mean difference, and the associated statistical test.

Some pertinent observations can be made on the basis of the results presented in Table 1. First, it is worth noting that to the exception of Austria as a place to live, all country-perception combinations are more positive in the reactive than in the proactive experimental conditions, although in many cases these differences are not statistically significant. This is in line with the idea that the negative content associated with Germany may spill over countries that are more or less distant in Canadian consumers' minds. Second, in general the country perception differences associated with Austria are the largest, followed by France, and Spain. This is consistent with the prediction that the spillover of negative content increases as the psychic distance between Germany and a given country decreases. Using the mean overall country perceptions as reference points, it can be seen that the differences between the two experimental conditions (reflecting the degree of negative content) are the greatest in Austria (0.33), followed by France (0.26), and Spain (0.22). Moreover, these mean differences follow closely the psychic distances that were estimated in the survey in an almost perfect linear fashion. In sum, the results presented in Table 1 generally conform with the spillover effects that were predicted.

Discussion

This research has examined the effects of protectionist measures on the perceptions that consumers of a targeted country form of the country having adopted these measures as well of other countries not directly involved in the conflict. The results show that the effects of protectionist

measures on a country's image are not generalized. Their impact is mediated by the degree to which consumers perceive these measures as legitimate and the subsequent effect of these perceptions on the political animosity that is felt toward the protectionist country. In addition, this two-mediator sequential process is contingent upon consumers' involvement in international economic news. Thus, consumers who have a better knowledge of the international economic environment through the medias perceive the imposition of tariffs by some country as more legitimate when this decision is a retaliatory response subsequent to protectionist measures adopted by the targeted country than when it is an initiative motivated by the desire to please some domestic constituencies. This moderating effect is consistent with research on country-of-origin effects and on country distance which has shown that when forming their judgments, knowledgeable and more involved consumers are more analytical and consider more information (Dow and Karunaratna 2006; Lee et al., 2005; Pharr 2005; Sousa and Bradley 2006). In this research, consumers who said they had little interest in international economic news appeared to display a relative ignorance of protectionism since they considered proactive import tariffs imposed on their country's products as legitimate.

The results of this study also show that the perceived legitimacy of a country's protectionist actions reduces consumers' felt animosity toward that country as regards its political dimension (e.g., threat, economic domination) but not with respect to its affective dimension (e.g., people, anger). These diverging results may be explained by the fact that a protectionist conflict is essentially politically based since it involves country leaders. The observed mediation effect of the perceived legitimacy of the protectionist country's actions in the relationship between the type of measures (proactive versus reactive) and situational political animosity is consistent with Leong et al.'s (2008) finding that consumers' external attributions relative to a political conflict (i.e., Germany's imposition of import tariffs) and their perception of external control (i.e., the decision belongs to Germany) both contribute to increase consumers' situational felt animosity.

The statistical mediation analyses performed on the data of this experimental study confirmed that the political animosity felt by Canadian consumers toward Germany explained their perceptions of that country as regards the quality of its product, its attractiveness as a travel destination, and as a place to live. In general, an increase in Canadian consumers' animosity led to less favorable country perceptions. These results are in line with those of many country image studies having shown the negative impact of animosity on country-of-origin perceptions (Chan, Chan, and Leung 2010; De Nisco et al. 2016; Leong et al. 2008; Pharr 2005; Riefler and Diamantopoulos 2007). Moreover, the type of protectionist conflict, through its impact on perceived legitimacy and situational political animosity, also influenced consumers' perceptions of countries which were not involved in the conflict. As predicted by the memory network model in conjunction with the concept of psychic distance between countries, in general the shorter a country's psychic distance with Germany, the greater the impact of the differential effect of Germany's protectionist measures (i.e., proactive versus reactive) on Canadian consumers' perceptions of that country as regards its products and its attractiveness as a travel destination and as a place to live. These spillover effects parallel those observed in different domains, such as branding (Roehm and Tybout 2006) and celebrity endorsement (Carrillat, d'Astous, and Christianis 2014). These results show that countries are interrelated entities and that the protectionist actions of one country may have some impact on the image of other countries.

Managerial and country implications

The results of this research are of interest for firms that have global activities in countries having adopted protectionist measures or in countries that are strongly associated with protectionist countries. In the advent of a protectionist conflict, firms in the protectionist country or in one with which the latter country is associated in consumers' minds should plan on implementing marketing strategies to attenuate the resulting negative consequences on their image and that of their products and brands. If the

situation is serious, this may involve taking actions aimed at reducing the strength of their association with their country of origin (i.e., the country-brand association), since this is a subjective attribute that can be modeled to some extent (Andéhn and L'Espoir Decosta 2016). In contrast, firms from countries that are targeted by protectionist measures could play on consumers' felt animosity toward the protectionist countries and put forward their national origin in order to promote local purchasing.

As regards the governments that adopt protectionist measures, the results of this research show that consumers' perceptions of their country as a travel destination and as a place to live are likely to be affected. The deterioration of their country's image for political reasons may have important negative consequences on the flow of human capital and the magnitude of direct foreign investments (Kotler and Gertner 2002). In addition, for a great number of countries, tourism is a very lucrative industry whose performance rests on country image (Nadeau et al. 2008). The results of this research suggest that governments of protectionist countries can attenuate the negative impact of their actions on consumers' perceptions and behavior by increasing their perceived legitimacy. For instance, government leaders could argue that the protectionist measures are justified because their country has a commercial deficit with the targeted countries (see e.g., Carr 2018). Conversely, the government leaders of targeted countries could question the perceived legitimacy of the protectionist country's actions. The perceived legitimacy of a country's protectionist posture, whatever the perspective that is taken up – that of protectionist countries or that of targeted countries – is likely to be impacted by the information that circulates in traditional and social medias. As the results of this research have shown, this impact depends on people's interest in international economic news. The nature of the information that is transmitted should therefore be adapted as a function of this level of interest, concentrating primarily on education in the case of people with little interest in international economic news and on the development of solid arguments with those more involved.

Conclusion

Protectionism is expanding worldwide (Global Trade Alert 2019). In this context of international political tensions, this research offers several contributions. A first contribution is a perspective on protectionism that places consumers' perceptions at the forefront. While the protectionism literature has centered mainly on establishing its negative effects at the national level (e.g., Bussière et al. 2011) and on examining how consumers represent a source of this phenomenon (Johnston 2013), this research has attempted to understand how a country's protectionist actions may affect them. This research also contributes to the literature on country image by showing the impact that protectionist measures may have not only on consumers' product-country perceptions – a frame of reference that dominates this literature – but also on the perceptions that consumers develop of protectionist countries as regards their attractiveness as tourist destinations and as places to live. Another contribution of this research is the integration of the mediating effects of consumers' perceptions of the extent to which the protectionist measures adopted by a country are legitimate and of the situational animosity that these perceptions may in turn create or prevent. This is the first research that has considered such a two-mediator sequential model to explain how the actions of a country may affect consumers' perceptions of that country. Finally, this research also contributes to the country image literature by showing how the negative mental content created by a country's protectionist measures against another country may spill over different countries depending on their psychic distance with the protectionist country in consumers' minds. Although this research has focused on protectionism as the source of negative mental content, such spillover effects are presumably not limited to this particular context.

This research suggests several pertinent research avenues. First, there is a need to replicate this study using different country stimuli, different protectionist methods (e.g., import quotas, subsidies), and different data collection sites. Second, future studies should collect data among consumers in the protectionist country

(i.e., changing the content of the fictitious scenarios) in order to understand how they react to their country's adoption of such measures. The concepts of legitimacy and situational animosity would seem to remain relevant in this context. Consumers' degree of ethnocentrism – that is, the perceived immorality of buying and consuming foreign products for economic and patriotic reasons (Shimp and Sharma 1987) – could be incorporated in the conceptual development as a possible moderating variable. Third, it would be interesting to study the effects of protectionist measures among organizational buyers. The uncertainty and hostility caused by a protectionist conflict could impact their willingness to source their goods from protectionist countries. In addition, organizational buyers are different from consumers because they have to make decisions in a more complex and sometimes riskier environment, they are more prone to resist change, and are generally better informed (Ahmed and d'Astous 1995). These characteristics may change the nature of the relationships among the different concepts examined in this research. Finally, because this research has shown that the effects of protectionist measures depend on the extent to which consumers see them as legitimate, it would be pertinent to explore the effectiveness of different strategies aimed at increasing their perceived legitimacy (e.g., arguing about the trade deficit, invoking economic difficulties, signaling the loss of jobs and the increase of offshore manufacturing). The experimental setting adopted in this research would be appropriate to do that.

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
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Appendix






Web-Based Article Presented in the Proactive Protectionist Measures Condition


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World

High-Level Meeting between Canada and Germany

Agence France-Presse- Posted: June 19, 2018 7:43 AM ET



Less than a year after the Canada-European Union Trade Agreement's (CETA) entry into effect, prime minister Justin Trudeau starts off a European tour whose objective is to strengthen the relationships of Canada with its main commercial partners. However, many observers of the international scene believe that this tour is an excuse for meeting German Chancellor Angela Merkel, since she announced the imminent return of import tariffs on Canadian products.

This protectionist measure is an initiative from Germany that may be explained by pressures from its population and political class who see the massive arrival of Canadian products as a threat to Germany's economy and employment.

Reactions from many managers of exporting Canadian firms to this initiative of Germany have been prompt. For example, the President and CEO of Bombardier Inc. Alain Bellemare said in an interview "we are disappointed, and really surprised by this decision of the German government".

The Trudeau-Merkel meeting is an important one for Canada, since Germany, Europe's largest economy, is an important market for the development of Canadian firms on the European market.