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A Review of Consumer Affinity Research: Recent Advances and Future Directions¹

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Abstract

Purpose - Consumer affinity may be a key factor in overcoming ethnocentric barriers and promoting a favourable attitude towards specific foreign countries and their products. However, progress in knowledge of this concept in international marketing literature has suffered from a lack of integration and analysis. The purpose of this study was to shed new light on the concept of consumer affinity based on a comprehensive systematic review of the literature, provide a critical analysis of previous research in terms of conceptual, methodological and substantive issues and problems, and offer avenues for future research.

Design/methodology/approach – This structured systematic review of consumer affinity included articles published in international peer-reviewed journals from 2008 to 2021, examining key conceptual, operational and substantive aspects.

Findings - This systematic review of articles on consumer affinity published over the past 14 years revealed that this line of research is a growing vibrant domain in the context of international marketing. It also showed that current knowledge of consumer affinity is

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characterized by theoretical inconsistencies, contradictory empirical results and scant international marketing research in the affinity domain.

Originality – This article provides an overview of extant literature on consumer affinity and yields a consolidated image of its current status, as well as a research agenda that raises new questions for the academic community.

Keywords: Affinity; consumer; positive consumer dispositions; emotional feelings; foreign country; systematic review.

1. Introduction

The concept of consumer affinity, a positive disposition towards particular foreign countries, entered international marketing literature over a decade ago. The seminal paper by Oberecker *et al.* (2008) conceptualized it as a consumer's positive feeling towards a particular foreign country, arguing that this feeling might positively affect consumer response to products from that country. According to Bartsch *et al.* (2016), analysis of consumer affinity in international market research adds favourable feelings for specific countries to the literature on consumer animosity. Previous studies have shown that affinity, as an individual's emotional trait, can influence areas such as consumer decision-making, satisfaction and loyalty, and may therefore act as an important predictor of purchase behaviour (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017). In management, consumer affinity has been proposed as a segmentation variable for both home and host consumer markets (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011). Furthermore, this variable has been positively associated with product trust, which in turn can promote consumer intention to buy products, brands and services from a specific foreign country (e.g., Guo *et al.*, 2018; Oberecker *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, consumer affinity is an especially significant concept for international marketers and policymakers, as it can reduce or counteract the effect of negative attitudes (Asseraf and Shoham, 2017), such as consumer animosity (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007). In this vein, Ercis and Celik (2019) urged academic research to continue to progress in this area, because an analysis of positive underlying feelings can be helpful in understanding why local consumers prefer to buy foreign products or not. This promising concept could mitigate or even eliminate reluctance to buy and/or consume foreign products/services and brands, while enhancing the positioning of others. Furthermore, the study of consumer affinity is a multidisciplinary task with essential managerial applications, as argued by Oberecker *et al.* (2008, p. 51): 'Active management of consumer affinities could be an attractive option for overcoming ethnocentric barriers.'

Despite its strategic importance, surprisingly few researchers have devoted attention to key aspects of the nature of consumer affinity and its managerial implications. One study by Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) developed a scale to measure consumer affinity as a two-dimensional (sympathy and attachment) concept, and empirically demonstrated its positive relationship to consumer willingness to buy products from the focal foreign country. This finding gave this topic impetus in international marketing literature, and led to a total of 20 directly related theoretical and empirical publications. As shown by our systematic review, in spite of the dearth of research on this subject in the last few years, academic interest in this concept and its implications for management have grown. In parallel efforts, other authors have proposed different conceptualizations, drivers and measurement scales for assessing consumer affinity. Empirical studies operationalizing this concept in different ways have yielded a fragmented picture of its antecedents and consequences. As our review shows, although some authors have emphasized the importance of consumer affinity in decision-making on foreign products (e.g., Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2021), efforts to advance knowledge on consumer affinity reflect conceptual, methodological and measurement inconsistencies that hinder the development of a solid theoretical framework in this field. In this light, after more than a decade, research on consumer affinity is still scarce and limited, and is still lacking integration and consolidation, with several consequent gaps. In this sense, as Riefler (2017, pp. 104-105) noted, the concept is ‘...rather young, alternative conceptualizations and scales are proposed, and a coherent and more holistic picture of marketing-relevant consequences is yet to be developed.’ Recently, Fazli-Salehi *et al.* (2020), recognizing that this variable is unexplored in marketing literature, pointed out that consumer affinity is ‘...a concept that is rarely addressed by researchers in the context of domestic nations’ (p. 732).

Against this background, and in response to the need for a better understanding of the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of this important concept in international marketing, the purpose of this study was to provide a critical, up-to-date analysis of publications on consumer affinity and propose avenues for future research in a consolidated review of the literature to date. We therefore reviewed 20 papers on consumer affinity published in international peer-reviewed journals from 2008 to 2021, that is, the total sample of studies on this topic found in the main academic databases, to identify its key conceptual, methodological and operational features. We aimed to (i) contribute a critical review of the literature on consumer affinity, (ii) focus on potentially problematic measurement issues, (iii) examine findings on the main antecedents and consequences of the concept, and (iv) provide clear

guidance for future conceptual, methodological, measurement and substantive research, consolidating existing research by establishing connections and identifying gaps in and between currents. As this literature has not previously been critically reviewed, this would be a useful and timely contribution to the field. Systematic reviews of international marketing research publications have previously been applied elsewhere as a basis for suggesting further research (e.g., Christofi *et al.*, 2019; Christofi *et al.*, 2021; Vrontis and Christofi, 2019; Vrontis *et al.*, 2020). We specifically wanted to clarify, highlight, and interpret similarities and differences in contents and methodology, and draw conclusions about where the field of consumer affinity is heading.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, we present a systematic review of the role of affinity in the context of international marketing, identifying the main characteristics, controversies and gaps in consumer affinity research. Second, we highlight some problematic measurement issues found. Third, the antecedents and consequences of this construct are examined along with the role of moderating and mediating variables. The paper concludes with a synthesis of the main theoretical and practical contributions of this study and recommendations for future directions of research in this field.

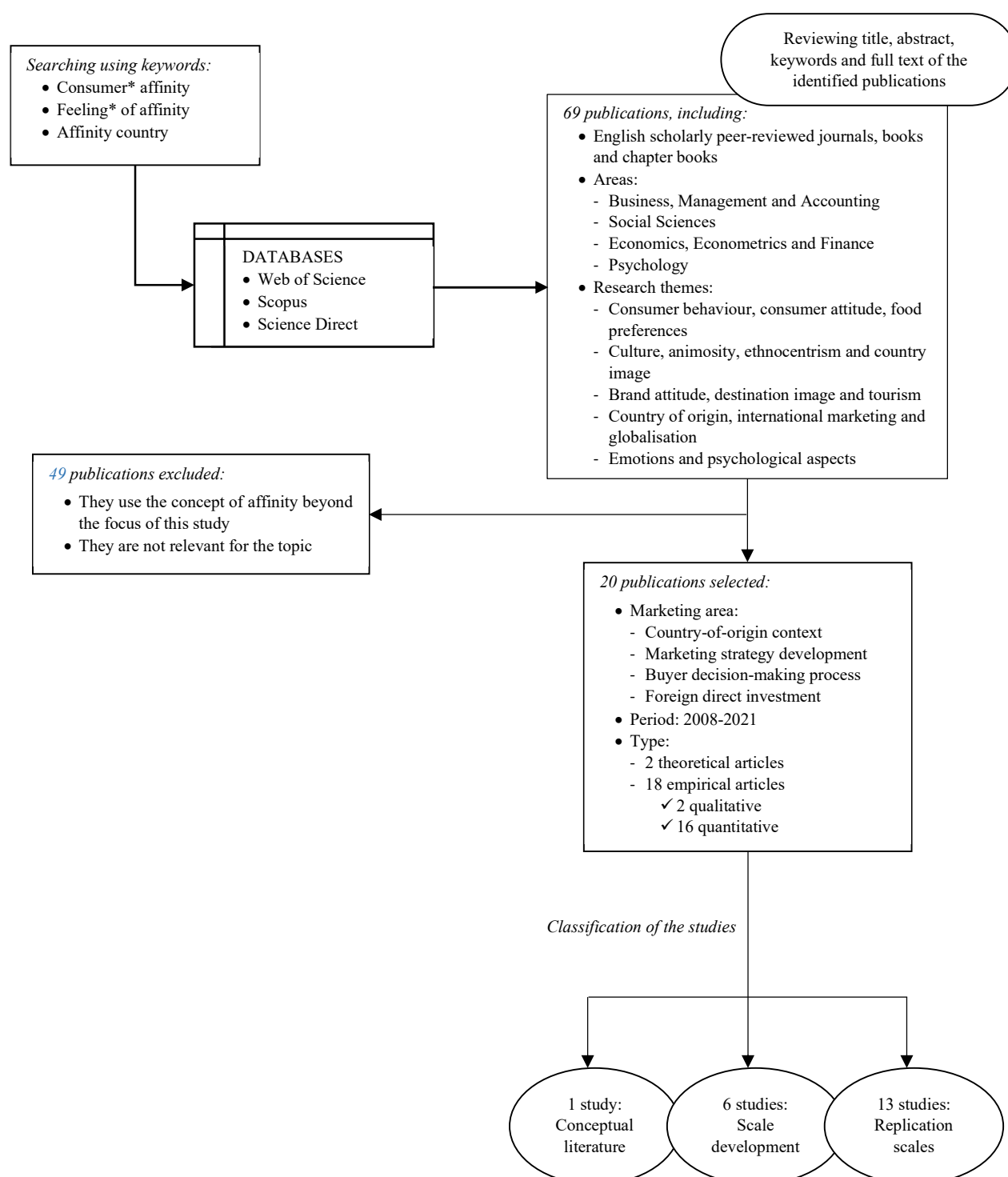
2. The concept of consumer affinity in international marketing literature

2.1. Overview of consumer affinity literature

For our synthesis of consumer affinity research, we made a systematic review of extant literature on the subject in three of the main academic databases, Web of Science, Scopus and Science Direct, applying inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify the most relevant, highest-quality publications on the topic (see Figure 1). These databases were chosen because they are popular search engines that cover most of the literature in international marketing. The keywords in our first search were ‘consumer* affinity’, ‘feeling* of affinity’, and ‘affinity country’ because they cover the topic amply, and any more keywords would have shifted the scope of the review away from the consumer affinity concept. Then, we examined the title, abstract and keywords in the publications resulting from the search, and selected a first set of articles for review of the full text. These articles were mainly in Business, Management and Accounting, Social Sciences, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, and Psychology. After that, we identified the publications and papers most relevant to the scope of this study, selecting those articles in English appearing in scientific peer-reviewed journals, including books and chapters in books. This process found 69 articles. Research themes were determined by the co-occurrence of keywords in a cluster analysis, which produced five clusters, each having a

conceptually logical purpose and interpretable theme. The first theme, ‘consumer behaviour, consumer attitude, food preferences’, encompassed articles focused on the use of affinity to examine the many motives that can shape consumers’ attitudes towards foods. The articles by De Böer and Schösler (2016) and Boizot-Szantai *et al.* (2017) are examples of research in this area. The second theme, ‘culture, animosity, ethnocentrism and country image’, involves formation of country image based on consumer attitude towards a particular foreign country and its culture. This theme has become more popular over time, as shown by the articles by Josiassen (2011), Lu *et al.* (2016) and Gineikiene *et al.* (2017).

Figure 1. Flowchart of publication searching and selection process.



Articles by Tavares *et al.* (2018) and Mathijsen (2019) are examples of the third theme, ‘brand attitude, destination image and tourism’, which deals with analysis of the impact of destination image and brand origin on tourism. The fourth, ‘country of origin (COO), international marketing and globalisation,’ includes studies that delve into international marketing, market segmentation and globalisation of manufacturing and distributing of foreign products/brands. Examples of research in this theme include papers by Wood *et al.* (2008) and Cleveland *et al.* (2014). Finally, the fifth theme, ‘emotions and psychological aspects’, which studies the underlying role of emotions, a feeling of affinity, or lack of feeling in emotional responses, such as the articles by Manning and Holmes (2014) and Badrinarayanan and Sierra (2018), was the theme with the fewest number of papers. We excluded publications that used the concept of affinity outside the scope of this study and those that were not relevant to the topic. Thus, we focused on specific articles that covered areas such as consumer affinity in the context of COO, marketing strategy development, and buyer decision-making on products or direct foreign investment (emphasizing marketing). This strategy resulted in two theoretical articles (Naseem *et al.*, 2015; Toffoli *et al.*, 2015) and 18 empirical articles on consumer affinity (qualitative: Asseraf and Shoham, 2017; Oberecker *et al.*, 2008; and quantitative articles: Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui, 2014; Cakici and Shukla, 2017; Eguchi and Yamashita, 2016; Ercis and Celik, 2019; Fazli-Salehi *et al.*, 2020; Guo *et al.*, 2018; Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017; Kock *et al.*, 2019; Moraes and Strehlau, 2020; Nes *et al.*, 2014; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2019, 2021; Wongtada *et al.*, 2012) published from 2008 to 2021, as summarized in Table I. The characteristics and key findings of these studies are examined and areas of concern are identified below.

The primary research objectives of the 20 articles can be classified into three groups: conceptual, scale development, and replication and adaptation (see first column in Table I). The

first group, i.e., conceptual articles, includes the seminal study by Oberecker *et al.* (2008), which analysed the theoretical foundations of the consumer affinity concept. This group identifies the underlying basis/sources of consumer affinity. The *second group* of articles, i.e., scale development, encompasses five studies (Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Kock *et al.*, 2019; Nes *et al.*, 2014; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Wongtada *et al.*, 2012), which all engage in (often parallel) efforts proposing and empirically testing measures for assessing consumer affinity. In the *third group*, articles on replication and adaptation, the majority aim to replicate the results of Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) in different geographic settings and research contexts (in chronological order, Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui, 2014; Naseem *et al.*, 2015; Toffoli *et al.*, 2015; Eguchi and Yamashita 2016; Asseraf and Shoham, 2017; Cakici and Shukla, 2017; Halim and Zulkamain, 2017; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017; Guo *et al.*, 2018; Ercis and Celik, 2019; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2019; Fazli-Salehi *et al.*, 2020; Moraes and Strehlau, 2020; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2021).

In the following, first, research on consumer affinity is reviewed at a conceptual level, analysing the nature of this construct, the main theoretical premises for its conceptualization, and how this concept differs from other related variables.

Next, the conceptual dimensionality and supporting measurement models are discussed, and the main issues are identified. Then, we analyse the 18 empirical studies on consumer affinity for their key study design properties, and integrate their findings with regard to the relationship of consumer affinity with other variables, particularly focusing on its effect on intention to purchase. Our final goal was to provide a framework for interpreting the literature in a new light. Figure 2 provides an overview of studies on consumer affinity, classifying the main contributions in this field and highlighting the main illustrative studies in each theme.

2.2. Conceptual definition and nature of the construct

Consumer affinity has been mainly related to affective influence in the form of positive feelings towards a specific referent, for example, a country, which is known as the ‘affinity country’ (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007). Oberecker *et al.* (2008, p. 26) defined consumer affinity in an international consumption context as ‘...a feeling of liking, sympathy, and even attachment toward a specific foreign country’. There is broad agreement on this definition of the notion across studies. Most of them have adopted it or have proposed definitions that differ only slightly in their wording, although they portray the same core meaning (chronologically, Nes *et al.*, 2014; Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017), by which affinity is considered ‘...an important predictor of consumer behaviour [that] emphasizes the role of

(positive) feelings in affecting it' (Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011, p. 61). From a managerial perspective, affinity has been recognized as a promising concept for key strategic marketing principles such as country market segmentation (Riefler, 2017). Consumer affinity has further been proposed as a concept that could help reduce or eliminate the effect of negative attitudes towards a country (Asseraf and Shoham, 2017), including animosity (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007) and ethnocentrism (Balabanis and Siamagka, 2017), thus rendering it important to international marketers and policymakers.

Figure 2. Main contributions to research on consumer affinity.

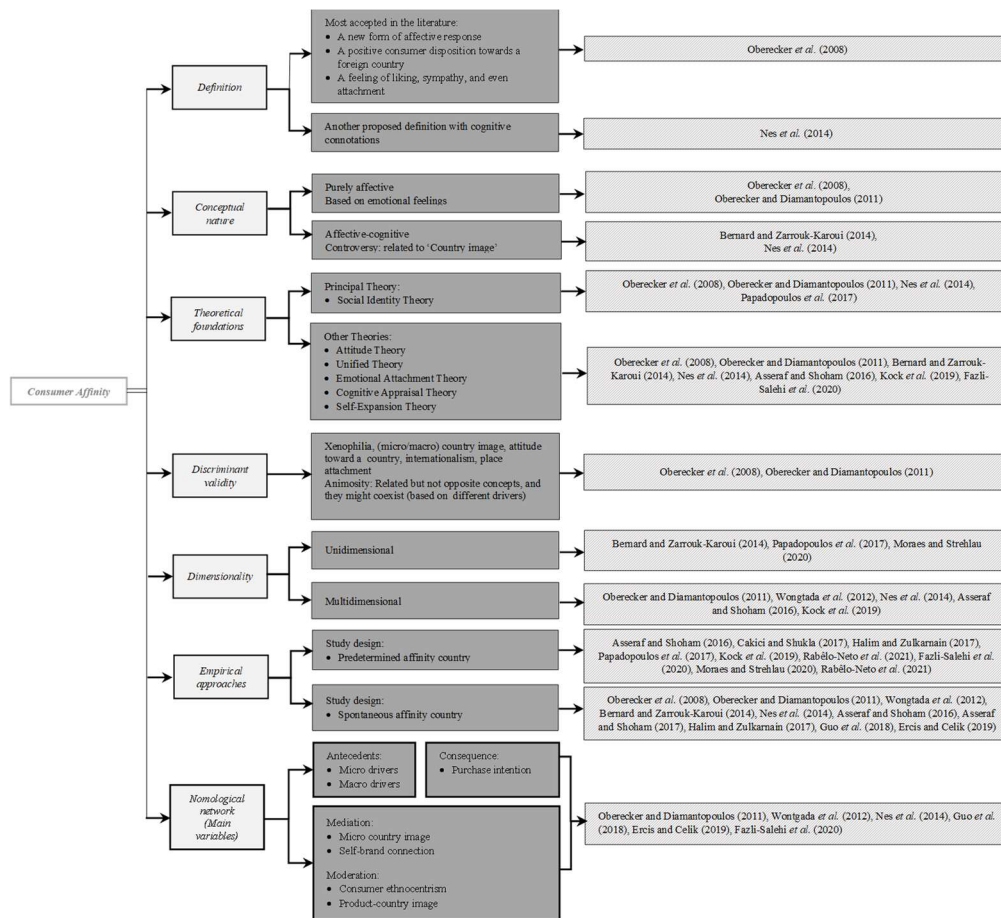


Table I. Overview on consumer affinity literature from 2008 to 2021.

Author/s (Year)	Research aims(*) Theoretical framework(◇)	Sampling Data collection	Drivers Antecedents	Moderators Mediators	Consequences	Key findings
CONCEPTUAL ARTICLES						
Oberecker et al. (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify underlying sources of consumer affinity ▪ Explore the behavioural outcomes of affinity ▪ Investigate the bases and behavioural consequences of consumer affinity in a different national context ▪ Research propositions ◇ Social identity theory and attitude theory ◇ Conceptual and empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Study 1: N= 11 ▪ Study 2: N= 12 ▪ Study 3: N= 10 ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Purposive sampling ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: Study 1 and 2: Austria; Study 3: Belgium ▪ Foreign country: <i>Spontaneous</i>; Study 1 and 2: Greece, Italy and Spain; Study 3: France and Canada 	<p><i>Macro drivers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lifestyle ▪ Scenery ▪ Culture ▪ Politics and economics <p><i>Micro drivers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contact ▪ Stay abroad ▪ Travel 	<p><i>Moderator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Product judgment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purchase intentions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity and animosity are not polar opposites of the same continuum. ▪ Xenophilia and internationalism are positively but moderately related to consumer affinity. ▪ Positive impact of affinity on willingness to buy products from the focal country (stronger for hedonic than for utilitarian product categories). ▪ Affinity captures influence that is not product related and can affect buying decisions directly and is independent of product judgments.
SCALE DEVELOPMENT ARTICLES						
Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conceptually advance the consumer affinity construct ▪ Develop a measurement instrument for capturing affinity feelings ◇ Social identity theory, Druckman's social psychological perspective and Unified theory ◇ Conceptual and empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Study 1: N=226 ▪ Study 2: N=201 ▪ Study 3: N=241 ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Quota sampling ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: Austria ▪ Foreign country: <i>Spontaneous</i>; Italy, Greece and Germany 	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>n.p.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceived risk ▪ Purchase intentions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity dimensions: sympathy and attachment. ▪ Consumer affinity negatively affects perceived risk. ▪ Affinity positively affects consumers' willingness to buy and intentions to visit and invest in the affinity country. ▪ Ethnocentrism does not influence consumer behaviour when products from the affinity country are involved. ▪ Affinity and country micro image have differential effects on perceived risk.
Wongtada et al. (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Propose a further scale to measure affinity ▪ Test whether affinity and animosity represent two ends of the same continuum or are separate constructs ◇ Social identity theory ◇ Conceptual and empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N= 824 ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Purposive sampling ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: Thailand ▪ Foreign country: <i>Spontaneous</i>; U.S, China, Singapore, Malaysia 	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>n.p.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Product judgment ▪ Purchase intentions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity dimensions: people, business achievement and education. ▪ The influence of general animosity is greater for willingness to purchase while that of affinity is larger for product judgment. ▪ Affinity not only forms a different construct from animosity, it also behaves differently from animosity.
Nes et al. (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide insights into how affinity and its dimensions relate to buying behaviour ▪ Test whether affinity and animosity are different constructs ◇ Social identity theory and appraisal theory ◇ Conceptual and empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=54 (qualitative study) ▪ N=573 ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Convenience sampling ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: U.S. and Norway ▪ Foreign country: <i>Spontaneous</i>; <u>U.S.</u>: Italy, France, Mexico, and Ireland; <u>Norway</u>: Italy and Sweden 	<i>n.p.</i>	<p><i>Mediator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Micro country image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purchase intentions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity dimensions: culture/landscape, music/entertainment, people and politics. ▪ Model 1 (affinity as a separate variable) received better results than Model 2 (affinity as a higher-order construct). ▪ Affinity positively influences purchase intentions. ▪ Micro country image strengthens the effect of affinity on purchase intentions. ▪ Affinity and animosity are distinct constructs rather than bipolar opposites of the same construct.

Author/s (Year)	Research aims(*) Theoretical framework(◇)	Sampling Data collection	Drivers Antecedents	Moderators Mediators	Consequences	Key findings
Asseraf and Shoham (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the relative explanatory power of affinity, animosity, cosmopolitanism and ethnocentrism simultaneously ▪ Analyse the coexistence of affinity and animosity toward the same country ▪ New scale of affinity ◇ Cognitive dissonance theory ◇ Conceptual and empirical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N= 202 ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Sampling: not provided ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: Israel ▪ Foreign country: <i>Predetermined</i>; Italy 	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>n.p.</i>	Product judgment Product ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity dimensions based on Oberecker et al., 2008: lifestyle, scenery, culture and contact. ▪ People can harbour positive and negative affect toward countries and sub-nations. ▪ Affinity and animosity of Israeli Jews toward Arab-Israelis and Italians are not bi-polar of the same continuum and they can coexist. ▪ Affinity outweighs animosity with respect to impacting product judgment and ownership.
Kock et al. (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and tests multidimensional affinity and animosity constructs, as well as a holistic country affect component ◇ Attitude theory ◇ Conceptual and empirical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=174 (Denmark; Germany) ▪ N=260 (U.S.; Germany) ▪ N=244 (U.S.; Italy) ▪ Sampling: not provided ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: Denmark and U.S. ▪ Foreign country: <i>Predetermined</i>; Germany and Italy 	<i>Antecedent</i> Country imagery	<i>Mediator</i> Country image	Purchase intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Animosity and affinity drive behavioural intentions directly and indirectly by informing the performance related country image. ▪ Animosity relates positively to resistance to positive information while affinity relates positively to willingness to buy. ▪ Both animosity and affinity relate to holistic country affect.
REPLICATION AND ADAPTATION ARTICLES						
Bernard and Zarruk-Karoui (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Propose four antecedents of affinity feelings ◇ Emotional attachment theory ◇ Conceptual and empirical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=179 ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Convenience sampling ▪ Experimental study ▪ Home country: France ▪ Foreign country: <i>Spontaneous</i>; Germany 	<i>Antecedents</i> Personal experience Beauty of nature Culture Quality of life	<i>Moderator</i> Country image	Purchase intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity sources: a consumer's personal experience with the country, positive evaluation of the natural landscapes, and knowledge of the country's culture. ▪ The source quality of life was not significant.
Naseem et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Propose to model consumers' affinity as moderator of the effect of global brand attitude on willingness to purchase ◇ Social identity theory and attitude theory ◇ Conceptual	–	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>Moderator</i> Consumer affinity <i>Mediator</i> Global brand attitude	Global brand attitude Purchase intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As affinity for a global brand increases, the relationship between global brand attitude and purchase intentions will become stronger; as well as the perceived utility derived from affective states increases. ▪ Global brand attitude will partially mediate the relationship between consumer affinity and purchase intention. ▪ Affinity will positively affect the emotional component of perceived value scale.
Toffoli et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Propose the effect of affinity in the context of the cultural interaction between the service supplier country and host country nationals' decision makers ◇ Social identity theory ◇ Conceptual	–	Direct experience with services of supplier country	<i>Mediator</i> Country image	Purchase intentions Consumer ethnocentrism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity could have a direct negative effect on ethnocentrism. ▪ Affinity could positively impact willingness to buy mediated by country image.

Author/s (Year)	Research aims(*) Theoretical framework(◇)	Sampling Data collection	Drivers Antecedents	Moderators Mediators	Consequences	Key findings
Eguchi and Yamashita (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analyse the influence of affinity to word of mouth provider influences on purchase decision making in affinity conditions when WOM contradicted with eWOM ◇ Theory: not discussed ◇ Empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=81 student sample ▪ N=1 student sample ▪ N=1 professor (Tokyo Metropolitan University) ▪ Experimental study ▪ Sampling: not provided ▪ Home country: Japan ▪ High/low affinity for two products (industrial machines) 	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>n.p.</i>	WOM EWOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity directly influences decision making to evaluation of trustworthiness of WOM and EWOM. ▪ When EWOM comments are negative, affinity to WOM provider makes significative differences.
Asseraf and Shoham (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analyse the role of affinity's drivers, including cultural similarity and collective memory ◇ Theory: not discussed ◇ Conceptual and empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=12 ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Sampling: not provided ▪ Qualitative study ▪ Home country: Israel ▪ Foreign country: <i>Spontaneous</i>; Italy 	Oberecker <i>et al.</i> (2008)'s macro and micro drivers	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>n.p.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The existence of cultural similarity and collective memory as drivers for affinity. ▪ In contrast to Oberecker <i>et al.</i> (2008), they suggest cultural similarity plays a major role in the creation of affinity. ▪ Collective memory might serve as a precondition for affinity's creation.
Cakici and Shukla (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analyse the role of affinity with the misclassified country of origin ▪ Explore consumers' evaluation of fashion luxury goods ◇ Cognitive dissonance theory ◇ Empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=148 ▪ Student sample ▪ Two experimental studies and online survey ▪ Random sampling ▪ Home country: Turkey ▪ Foreign country: <i>Predetermined</i>; France, Italy and UK 	Information about misclassification of country of origin (COO)	<i>n.p.</i>	Cognitive dissonance Purchase intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High affinity with the misclassified COO leads to greater dissonance than low affinity. ▪ High affinity toward the real COO compared with the misclassified COO show significantly higher behavioural intentions.
Halim and Zulkarnain (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Replicate Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) model, using the most popular product in Indonesia (e.g. automotive, electronics and food) ◇ Emotional attachment theory ◇ Empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=164 ▪ Student sample ▪ Sampling: not provided ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: Indonesia ▪ Foreign country: <i>Predetermined</i>; Japan 	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>n.p.</i>	Purchase intentions Perceived risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity reduces the risk perception towards foreign products. ▪ Affinity feelings outweigh ethnocentric tendencies in affecting perceived risk and willingness to buy. ▪ The absence of a positive effect on the relationship of affinity toward willingness to buy.
Papadopoulos et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examine country and people images, product images, affinity, and animosity and their effects on purchase intentions from the perspective of the ethnic consumers' homeland ◇ Social identity theory ◇ Conceptual and empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=308 ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Purposive sampling ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: Egypt ▪ Foreign country: <i>Predetermined</i>; Tunisia 	Country/people image Product image	<i>n.p.</i>	Purchase intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity did not appear for Israel but was a robust predictor of likelihood to purchase for Tunisia and Brazil. ▪ Affinity relationship with country/people and product scales needs to be re-examined.
Guo et al. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analyse the relationship between affinity and ethnocentrism in cross-cultural context ▪ Explore their effect on product trust and willingness to buy ◇ Social identity theory ◇ Empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=392 ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Convenience sampling ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: China and Taiwan ▪ Foreign country: <i>Spontaneous</i>; Unspecified 	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>Moderator</i> Ethnocentrism <i>Mediator</i> Product trust	Purchase intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity positively affects willingness to buy. ▪ The indirect effect of affinity on willingness to buy as mediated through product trust was stronger for consumers with high levels.

Author/s (Year)	Research aims(*) Theoretical framework(◇)	Sampling Data collection	Drivers Antecedents	Moderators Mediators	Consequences	Key findings
Ercis and Celik (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investigate the interplay between subjective norms, affinity and animosity in consumers' foreign products judgement and willingness to buy ◇ Social identity theory ◇ Empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N= 271 ▪ Student sample ▪ Simple random sampling ▪ Home country: Turkey ▪ Foreign country: <i>Spontaneous</i>; Unspecified. 	Subjective norms		Product judgement Willingness to buy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is a relationship between affinity and product judgement but there is no relationship between consumer affinity and willingness to buy. ▪ Subjective norms are related to affinity but not related to animosity and subjective norms have effects on products judgement but have no any effects on willingness to buy.
Rabêlo-Neto et al. (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analyse the influence of antecedents (i.e., brand preference, affinity toward a country, and cosmopolitanism) on the internationalization of cultural products ◇ Social identity theory ◇ Empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N= 478 ▪ Student sample ▪ Sampling, contact method: direct personal interview ▪ Home country: Portugal ▪ Foreign country: <i>Predetermined</i>; Brazil 	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>n.p.</i>	Internationalization of cultural products Soft power Country image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity (in addition to brand preferences and cosmopolitanism) positively influenced the internationalization of cultural products and, indirectly, influenced soft power and country image.
Moraes and Strehlau (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluate the country of origin and brand on Younger Millennials' willingness to buy global brands ◇ Attitude theory ◇ Empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=367 ▪ Brands (Apple, McDonald's and Levi's) ▪ Student sample ▪ Convenience sampling ▪ Cross-sectional study ▪ Home country: Brazil ▪ Foreign country: <i>Predetermined</i>; United States 	<i>n.p.</i>	<i>n.p.</i>	Purchase intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Country image and country affinity are strongly correlated (for the three brands). This is in line with Nes et al., (2014), whose scale included both cognitive and affective aspects. ▪ Affinity has a positive impact on Younger Millennials' willingness to buy brand (only Apple) from a country.
Fazli-Salehi et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examine the effect of country affinity, ethnocentrism and product quality judgment on self-brand connection regarding both domestic and foreign brands ◇ Social identity theory ◇ Empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=239 ▪ Domestic and foreign brands (Television brands) ▪ Student sample ▪ Online experiment ▪ Home country: US ▪ Foreign country: <i>Predetermined</i>; Japan 	<i>n.p.</i>	Self-brand connection	Product judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For foreign brands, consumer self-brand connection increased through the effect of country affinity and product quality judgment. ▪ For domestic brands, self-brand connection was influenced by ethnocentrism (and not country affinity or product quality judgment)
Rabêlo-Neto et al. (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investigate the moderating effect of soft power on the relationships between affinity toward country, country image, cosmopolitanism and preference on the internationalization of cultural products. ◇ Cognitive emotion theory ◇ Empirical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N=478 ▪ Brazilian cultural products ▪ Consumer sample ▪ Random sampling ▪ Home country: Brazil ▪ Foreign country: <i>Predetermined</i>; Portugal 	<i>n.p.</i>	Soft power	Preference for cultural products Internationalization of cultural products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affinity in relation to Brazil positively influenced the preference for cultural products from that country. ▪ Moderation effects of soft power on the relationship between affinity toward country and preference were marginally significant but negative (not supported).

^a *Spontaneous* reflects those studies in which respondents were asked to name their favourite country vs. *Predetermined*, that shows studies in which they were asked for a specific country.

^b Top affinity countries selected by the majority of respondents.

^c *n.p.* = not proposed.

Empirical evidence has demonstrated the positive connection between affinity and business activities (e.g., the study by Chey, 2012, on direct foreign investment, or Martínez, 2019, on emotional affinity towards sustainability). Two terms have been coined from the perspective of relationship marketing: ‘affinity marketing’ described as an ‘individual’s level of cohesiveness, social bonding, identification, and conformity with the norms and standards of a particular reference group’ (Macchiette and Roy, 1993, p. 55), and ‘cultural affinity’ (or ‘cultural liking’), which has been shown to be a key element of perceived psychic distance between trading partners of different national backgrounds (Swift, 1999). Affinity marketing is an enduring strategy for building and supporting customer relationships (Steffes *et al.*, 2008), while cultural affinity has been identified as a relevant factor in the process of buyer-seller interaction (Holden and Burgess, 1994).

The conceptual nature of the consumer affinity construct has raised some debate in the literature. While some researchers have defined affinity as purely affective (Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Oberecker *et al.*, 2008) towards a specific referent, others propose a dual cognitive-affective nature of consumer affinity (Nes *et al.*, 2014). According to the first definition, affinity depicts an emotion, feeling or affect (used interchangeably) that impacts on behavioural intentions regardless of cognitive evaluation of a country’s products or services. In this context, affinity is described as a stable positive consumer disposition towards a country rather than a general mood or affection (Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011). According to the second definition, emotions are often anchored in cognitive considerations, and therefore, affinity is an attitude entailing both affective and cognitive elements. For example, Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui (2014) referred to cognitive mechanisms (country-image) as well as affective (feelings of affinity). This would appear to conceptually overlap with country image, which is ‘a mental network of affective and cognitive associations connected to the country’ (Verlegh, 2001, p. 25), whereas the first definition intentionally focuses on affective responses to countries without inducing cognitive biases in favour of them, which is how consumer affinity should be understood.

The literature further distinguishes between idiosyncratic and normative affinities (Oberecker *et al.*, 2008). Idiosyncratic affinities ‘depend on the perceiver’s unique experience, psychology’ (Hartz *et al.*, 2005, p. 636) and are thus specific to individuals. On the contrary, normative affinities are the result of social influences and ‘affect large numbers of people’ at a countrywide level (Hartz *et al.*, 2005, p. 636). Thus, consumer affinity may appear on two different levels (Wongtada *et al.*, 2012): (1) individual, based on favourable personal experiences, for example, and (2) national, shared by many people in the home country. This

differentiation is similar to the categories of personal and national consumer animosities (Ang *et al.*, 2004).

Several theoretical approaches have been used to define this concept. For their consumer affinity construct, Oberecker *et al.* (2008) drew upon the *Social Identity Theory* to relate to individuals' in/outgroup categorization of subjects and people (Stets and Burke, 2000). Consumer affinity is thus based on a distinction between group loyalties (ingroup vs. outgroup) towards country-related concepts, considering the possible inclusion of an outgroup as part of one's ingroup (Druckman, 1994, p. 60). Oberecker *et al.* (2008) asserted that consumers might consider the specific foreign country part of their ingroup, eventually leading to more willingness to buy products from the affinity country. Moreover, the conceptual roots of consumer affinity also draw on the *Attitude Theory*, which considers this notion a favourable and primarily affective attitude towards a focal foreign country. Later, Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011, p. 47) proposed an alternative definition of consumer affinity applying the *Unified Theory*, describing the affinity country as 'a (highly) positively valenced outgroup' and explaining that the positive perception of the affinity country does not necessarily result in identification with or loyalty to that country. Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui (2014) approached affinity from the perspective of the *Emotional Attachment Theory*, that '...individuals need to be linked to other people but can also be attached to various objects (brands, countries, etc.)' (Bowlby, 1979, p. 58). As 'attachment' is considered an emotional bond (more or less intense) between a person and a specific referent (such as a foreign country), this emotional connection affects how a person interacts with that referent. Later, Nes *et al.* (2014), based on the *Cognitive Appraisal Theory*, a theory of emotions widely accepted in psychology (Ellsworth and Scherer, 2003), argued contrary to Oberecker *et al.* (2008) that affinity implies cognitive connotations as well as affective feelings. In this sense, Nes *et al.* (2014, p. 775) noted that 'Feelings are often anchored in cognitive considerations.' However, appraisal theories can be distinguished from dimensional theories of emotion that usually focus on feelings and subjective experience (Ellsworth and Scherer, 2003). In this regard, consumer affinity is linked to subjective experiences with a foreign country through a series of micro and macro drivers (e.g., culture, people, landscape). Finally, Fazli-Salehi *et al.* (2020) explored consumer behaviour dynamics in an analysis of the self-brand connection in both domestic and foreign brands, by comparing the *Social Identity Theory* with the *Self-Expansion Theory*, according to which individuals possess an inherent motivation to incorporate others (i.e., brands) into their self-concept (Aron *et al.*, 2004). They concluded that this second theory is 'the prominent fundamental theory in the area of global branding and nation sentiments' (Fazli-Salehi *et al.*, 2020, p. 745).

2.3. Conceptual distinction from related concepts

Nomological validity studies have (a) differentiated consumer affinity from related but distinct concepts, and (b) clarified its relationship to consumer animosity. This section summarizes the conceptual differences; empirical studies on nomological relationships are discussed further below.

Consumer affinity is differentiated from related concepts, such as country (product) image (Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 2000), country attitude (Jaffe and Nebenzahl, 2006), internationalism (Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011) and xenophilia (Bartsch *et al.*, 2016), in that while these are all relevant to the international marketing domain, consumer affinity is unique in its affective focus. This crucial characteristic differentiates it, for example, from country image and country-specific concepts, such as xenophilia or internationalism. It therefore complements other relevant positive consumer dispositions (see also Bartsch *et al.*, 2016, for a review).

The particular relationship between affinity and animosity, which captures ‘remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political or economic events’ (Klein *et al.*, 1998, p. 90), is conceptually described by Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2006) as conceptually opposite. However, many scholars are sceptical of this interpretation, as favourable and unfavourable affect are different dimensions and provoke different types of reactions (e.g., Nes *et al.*, 2014; Oberecker *et al.*, 2008; Wongtada *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, both types of affects are commonly treated as being independent rather than ‘bipolar’ (e.g., Verlegh, 2001). Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011, p. 64) argued that ‘consumers rarely experience feelings of affinity and animosity for a specific country at the same time’; however, these feelings are produced for different reasons, and therefore, could coexist. Empirical discriminant validity and co-existence are discussed later.

3. Measurement of consumer affinity

3.1. Conceptual dimensionality

In their pioneer study, Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) modelled consumer affinity as a two-dimensional concept comprising soft (sympathy) and intense (attachment) positive emotions towards a specific foreign country. While numerous subsequent studies have adopted this two-dimensional structure (e.g., Guo *et al.*, 2018; Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2019), others have developed alternative unidimensional (e.g., Moraes and Strehlau, 2020; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017) and multidimensional (e.g., Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Kock *et al.*, 2019; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2021) conceptual and/or empirical models.

Multidimensional proposals are usually perceived as useful because they (a) provide a more holistic representation of complex phenomena, (b) allow researchers to match broad predictors with broad outcomes, and (c) increase explained variance (Edwards, 2001; Law *et al.*, 1998). In contrast to a set of interrelated unidimensional variables, the components of a multidimensional construct can be conceptualized by an overall abstraction, which can then be used as a theoretically meaningful and parsimonious representation of the dimensions (Law *et al.*, 1998; Polites *et al.*, 2012). Critical voices contend to the contrary that multidimensional constructs are conceptually ambiguous, explain less variance than explained by their dimensions taken collectively, and confound relationships between their dimensions and other constructs (Bearden *et al.*, 2006, 2011).

While the majority of authors take a multidimensional approach to consumer affinity, they disagree on the number and content of dimensions. As shown in Table II, conceptualizations include two to seven dimensions and overlap in their content. For example, Wongtada *et al.* (2012) included people, business and education affinity as dimensions. They specifically argued that while animosity is triggered by political and economic issues, affinity is based on a focal nation's people, business and academic achievements. Following this reasoning, Nes *et al.* (2014) suggested that affinity is a multidimensional construct encompassing general affinity, culture/landscape, entertainment, people and politics, dimensions somewhat related to the macro and micro drivers of Oberecker *et al.* (2008). In a similar approach, Asseraf and Shoham (2016), also building on the drivers of Oberecker *et al.* (2008), defined consumer affinity as a multidimensional concept comprising lifestyle, scenery, and culture (as macro-drivers), as well as contact (as a micro-driver). Recently, Kock *et al.* (2019) proposed a three-dimensional model differentiating admiration and liking dimensions, while keeping the attachment dimension in the Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) model. They argued that not all countries that are liked are also admired, and vice versa.

Among the unidimensional conceptualizations (Table II), Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui (2014) found a structure comprising Oberecker and Diamantopoulos' (2011) three facets. Similarly, Papadopoulos *et al.* (2017) analysed a unidimensional concept of 'affinity country', adapting two items from Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) and including five additional items, which captured friendliness, the feelings evoked when one thinks of the target country, and its similarity to one's home culture. More recently, Moraes and Strehlau (2020) also found a unidimensional structure based on the Oberecker and Diamantopoulos dimensions (2011).

Table II. Consumer affinity scales

Author/s (Year)	Dimension/s	Items	Replications and/or adaptations	Answer format and Measurement Model	Test for reliability/validity																		
Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011)	Sympathy	Pleasant feeling Like Feelings of sympathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Unidimensional (adaptation and replication)</i>: Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui (2014). 7 items from the original scale of ‘Consumer affinity’ (CS). Papadopoulos <i>et al.</i> (2017). 2 items adapted from the original scale of CS and 5 additional items. Moraes and Strehlau (2020). 10 items (not provided). ▪ <i>Multidimensional (replication)</i>: Naseem <i>et al.</i> (2015), Cakici and Shukla (2017), Halim and Zulkarnain (2017), Rabêlo-Neto <i>et al.</i> (2019), and Rabêlo-Neto <i>et al.</i> (2021). 2 dimensions with 7 items as the original scale of CS. ▪ <i>Multidimensional (adaptation)</i>: Guo <i>et al.</i> (2018). 2 dimensions with 4 items (pleasant feeling for Sympathy; captivated, love and feeling attached for Attachment). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Five-point scale (1 = “slightly,” 3 = “moderately,” 5 = “extremely”) Absence of a given emotion was scored by 0 = “don’t harbour this feeling” ▪ Reflective measurement model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Composite Reliability: provided. - Cronbach’s alpha - Chi-square difference ▪ Average Variance Extracted: provided. ▪ Discriminant Validity (Fomell and Larcker, 1981): provided. 																		
	Attachment	Captivated Feeling attached Love Inspired				Wongtada <i>et al.</i> (2012)	People affinity	[CITIZENSHIP] are friendly [CITIZENSHIP] are likeable	No replications or adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Five-point Likert (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”) ▪ Reflective measurement model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Composite Reliability: provided. - Cronbach’s alpha - Chi-square difference ▪ Average Variance Extracted: provided. ▪ Convergent, Discriminant Validity and Criterion-related validity: provided. 	Business affinity	The [COUNTRY] is the world business leader [CITIZENSHIP] companies are very competitive All of the leading companies in the world are located in the [COUNTRY]	Education affinity	I admire the quality of education in the [COUNTRY] The education in the [COUNTRY] stresses the importance of analytical thinking instead of merely memorizing information [CITIZENSHIP] are well-educated All [CITIZENSHIP] have the opportunity for a good education	Nes <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Affinity	I like [COUNTRY] I feel fondness for [COUNTRY]	No replications or adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seven-point Likert (1 = “strongly agree” to 7 = “strongly disagree”) ▪ Reflective measurement model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Composite Reliability (Churchill, 1979): provided. - Cronbach’s alpha - Chi-square per degrees of freedom ▪ Average Variances Extracted: not provided. ▪ Discriminant Validity (Fomell and Larcker, 1981): provided. 	Culture/ Landscape	I appreciate this country’s history I appreciate [CITIZENSHIP] food and cuisine I appreciate nature and landscape in [COUNTRY] I like this country’s arts I like this country’s architecture
Wongtada <i>et al.</i> (2012)	People affinity	[CITIZENSHIP] are friendly [CITIZENSHIP] are likeable	No replications or adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Five-point Likert (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”) ▪ Reflective measurement model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Composite Reliability: provided. - Cronbach’s alpha - Chi-square difference ▪ Average Variance Extracted: provided. ▪ Convergent, Discriminant Validity and Criterion-related validity: provided. 																		
	Business affinity	The [COUNTRY] is the world business leader [CITIZENSHIP] companies are very competitive All of the leading companies in the world are located in the [COUNTRY]																					
	Education affinity	I admire the quality of education in the [COUNTRY] The education in the [COUNTRY] stresses the importance of analytical thinking instead of merely memorizing information [CITIZENSHIP] are well-educated All [CITIZENSHIP] have the opportunity for a good education																					
Nes <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Affinity	I like [COUNTRY] I feel fondness for [COUNTRY]	No replications or adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seven-point Likert (1 = “strongly agree” to 7 = “strongly disagree”) ▪ Reflective measurement model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Composite Reliability (Churchill, 1979): provided. - Cronbach’s alpha - Chi-square per degrees of freedom ▪ Average Variances Extracted: not provided. ▪ Discriminant Validity (Fomell and Larcker, 1981): provided. 																		
	Culture/ Landscape	I appreciate this country’s history I appreciate [CITIZENSHIP] food and cuisine I appreciate nature and landscape in [COUNTRY] I like this country’s arts I like this country’s architecture																					
	Music/ Entertainment	I like [CITIZENSHIP] music I like the movies and entertainment from [COUNTRY] I like the language in [COUNTRY]																					
	People	I feel the people in [COUNTRY] are open and friendly to foreigners I like the way of living in this country I trust the people in this country I like the mentality of the people in this country My experiences with the people from this country are positive I cannot identify with the people from [COUNTRY]																					

Author/s (Year)	Dimension/s	Items	Replications and/or adaptations	Answer format and Measurement Model	Test for reliability/validity
	Politics	I like [CITIZENSHIP] government policies I like this country's political system The role of the country in world politics is admirable			
Asseraf and Shoham (2016)	Lifestyle	[CITIZENSHIP] are friendly people [CITIZENSHIP] are helpful people [CITIZENSHIP] are hospitable people [CITIZENSHIP] are people who know how to enjoy life [CITIZENSHIP] are pleasant people	No replications or adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seven-point Likert (1 = "strongly agree" to 7 = "strongly disagree") Reflective measurement model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Composite Reliability: provided. - Cronbach's alpha - Chi-square per degrees of freedom ▪ Average Variances Extracted: not provided. ▪ Discriminant Validity (Neter et al., 1989): provided.
	Scenery	The scenery in [COUNTRY] is natural The nature in [COUNTRY] is wild and diverse The scenery in [COUNTRY] is peaceful and relaxes			
	Culture	The history of [COUNTRY] is very interesting The culture of [COUNTRY] is very interesting [COUNTRY] adhere their tradition [COUNTRY] ascribe importance to their history			
	Contact	I know lots of [CITIZENSHIP] I worked with many [CITIZENSHIP]			
Kock et al. (2019) Scale adapted from Thomson et al. (2005)	Admiration	Captivated Impressed Admire	No replications or adaptations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seven-point Likert (1 = "strongly agree" to 7 = "strongly disagree") ▪ Reflective measurement model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Composite Reliability: provided. - Chi-square difference ▪ Average Variances Extracted: not provided. ▪ Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981): provided.
	Liking	Like Fondness Sympathy			
	Attachment	Connected Bonded Attached			

Summarizing, the conceptual dimensionality of consumer affinity formulated by Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) is the most widely accepted and validated in the literature. However, the documents reviewed above lack consensus on the number and nature of consumer affinity dimensions.

3.2. *Measurement models and scales*

Our review found five scales measuring individual consumer affinity (see Table II) based on the above conceptualizations. In light of the rather young tradition of this concept in international marketing literature, this number is relatively high. Multiple operationalisations may become problematic for measuring different conceptual domains bearing the same or similar labels (Bartsch *et al.*, 2016). With this in mind, some important differences in the proposed scales are highlighted below.

First, one of the main concerns in measuring consumer affinity, aside from its conceptual and empirical dimensionality, is differentiation of its drivers (i.e., reasons for positive feelings towards a country) from affect/attachment towards a specific country (i.e., the positive feeling itself) in the underlying measurement models. The original ‘consumer affinity scale’ (Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011) explicitly differentiated between the consumer affinity feeling and its underlying reasons. It assessed feeling with a second-order reflective measurement model (Edwards, 2001; Jarvis *et al.*, 2003) comprising the two dimensions of sympathy and attachment, which were measured in seven items (e.g., ‘I like this country’). The underlying reasons (i.e., micro and macro drivers) were modelled as explanatory variables that might be idiosyncratic to particular geographic settings. Many later studies have also applied this approach (e.g., Guo *et al.*, 2018; Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2019). Kock *et al.* (2019), following this approach in their effort to reconceptualize consumer affinity, included only affective items in their consumer affinity scale.

On the contrary, some alternative measurement models proposed in the literature have not drawn this distinction between drivers and country feeling. Instead, the drivers of consumer affinity are integrated in consumer affinity itself. As such, the scale items refer to the reason for a positive attachment (e.g., ‘I admire the quality of education in the [COUNTRY]’ in Wongtada *et al.* (2012); ‘My experiences with the people from this country are positive’ in Nes *et al.* (2014); or ‘The scenery in [COUNTRY] is natural’ in Asseraf and Shoham (2016), to mention a few examples). However, from the standpoint of measurement theory, this conceptualization appears to violate a basic premise of reflective measurement, the interchangeability of items (which consequently results in high positive inter-item correlations and the relevance of internal

reliability measures, e.g., Bollen and Lennox, 1991). As such, conceptually, individuals would have to be positive about all the aspects in the affinity measure (e.g., the country's scenery, the people, and its educational system) in order to score high on consumer affinity. While the consequences of a misspecification of measurement models is discussed in detail in some studies (see, for example, Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001, or Jarvis *et al.*, 2003), in a number of other papers, this seems to be a critical aspect lacking appropriate consideration.

Second, the divergent perspectives of the concept's nature discussed above reflect the differences in the conceptual domains of the proposed scales. While Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011)'s scale measures affinity as a purely affective disposition, subsequent operationalisations by Wongtada *et al.* (2012) and Nes *et al.* (2014) also assess cognitive aspects (see Table II), which really render these scales conceptually similar to country image scales (e.g., Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009).

Third, the proposed scales (Table II) differ in their underlying development. While some scales (e.g., Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011) were developed and rigorously tested following scale development guidelines (DeVellis, 2003), others (e.g., Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017) fall short in applying or reporting such measures. However, a sound development process is a prerequisite for reliable and valid measurement (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Neter *et al.*, 1989), and any negligence could result in conceptually and/or psychometrically flawed scales. In this context, the frequent use of (only) student samples for scale development (Cakici and Shukla, 2017; Wongtada *et al.*, 2012) seems controversial, as students do not represent the demographic and psychographic profile of the focal group of affinity measures, i.e., a country's overall population. Furthermore, the use of single items from affinity dimensions to generate a multi-item scale for one construct (as in Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017) also appears problematic (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2012; Sarstedt *et al.*, 2016). While single items are beneficial to scale parsimony and survey length, multiple items help average out errors and specificities inherent in single items, thus increasing reliability and construct validity (DeVellis, 2003).

In brief, the above review of affinity scales shows partially parallel efforts to measure the concept. Researchers aiming at measuring consumer affinity for substantive research are thus confronted with a range of slightly similar, slightly divergent scales, and lack guidance for selecting a scale that is psychometrically sound and suitable for the research context. Consequently, the measurement of consumer affinity requires further methodological investigation, as we highlight in our agenda for future research.

4. Empirical studies

The 20 articles on consumer affinity included 18 empirical studies (see Table I). The following section (i) analyses key properties of the study designs, and (ii) integrates empirical findings on the relationship of consumer affinity with other variables.

4.1. Study designs

Geographic Settings. The body of empirical research was conducted in home markets in Europe (i.e., Austria, Denmark, France, Norway and Portugal), the Americas (i.e., Brazil, United States), Africa (i.e., Egypt, Tunisia), and Asia (i.e., China, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand and Turkey), and compiled information about consumers in those countries and their positive emotions towards a specific foreign country. For the target affinity (i.e., foreign) country, the majority of studies followed Riefler and Diamantopoulos (2007) and asked respondents to specify affinity countries (i.e., *spontaneous* foreign country) (Asseraf and Shoham, 2017; Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui, 2014; Ercis and Celik, 2019; Guo *et al.*, 2018; Nes *et al.*, 2014; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Oberecker *et al.*, 2008; Wongtada *et al.*, 2012). As reported in Table I, the most popular target countries were Italy, Greece, and Germany. The remaining studies (e.g., Cakici and Shukla, 2017; Fazli-Salehi *et al.*, 2020; Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017; Kock *et al.*, 2019; Moraes and Strehlau, 2020; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017; Râbêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2019, 2021) predefined affinity countries for conceptual reasons (i.e., *predetermined* foreign country), such as being able to test relative effects of consumer animosity and consumer ethnocentrism towards a single target country (Asseraf and Shoham, 2016). As Table I shows, the majority of affinity countries were geographically close to the respective survey countries, regardless of how they were defined.

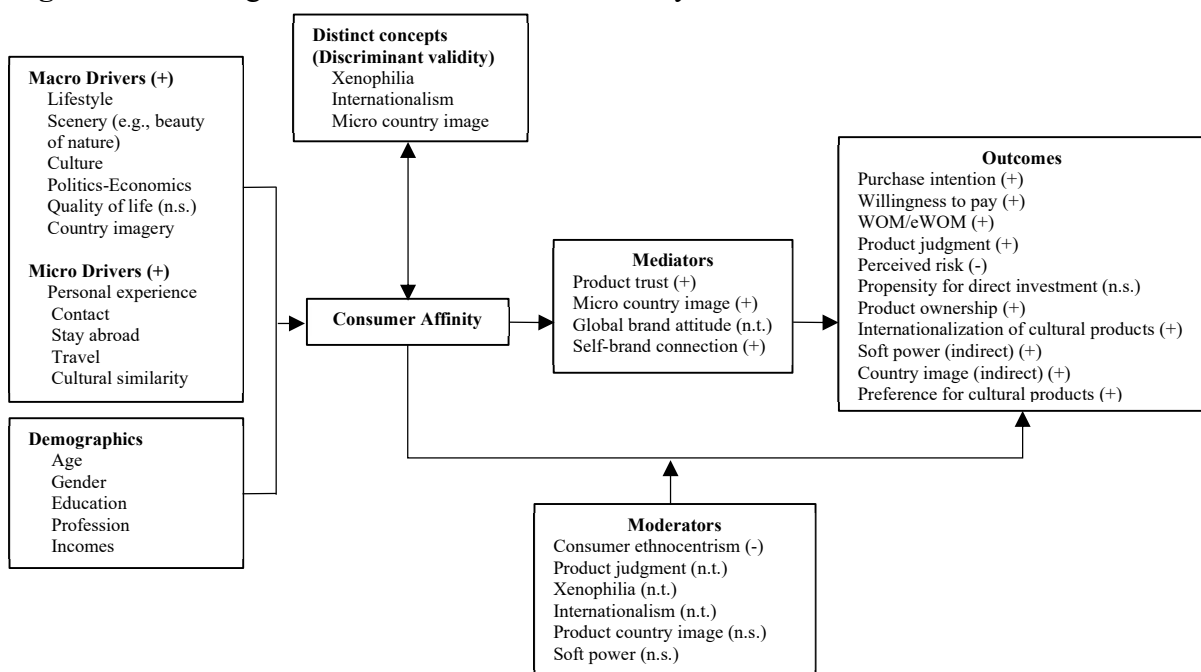
Research Method and Sampling. Most of the empirical studies were based on cross-sectional data from consumer samples (Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Guo *et al.*, 2018; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2019) and student samples (Cakici and Shukla, 2017; Wongtada *et al.*, 2012). Other possible research designs for examining the effects of affinity, such as experimental studies, were largely neglected. Convenience sampling was the sampling design predominant in these studies (e.g., Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui, 2014; Guo *et al.*, 2018; Nes *et al.*, 2014; Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007), with noteworthy exceptions (i.e., Cakici and Shukla, 2017; Naseem *et al.*, 2015; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2021) of random sampling. Sample sizes range from 81 respondents (Eguchi and Yamashita, 2016) to about 480 (Guo *et al.*, 2018; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2019, 2021).

Product Categories. The studies used three reference approaches for empirically assessing the hypothesized positive relationship between consumer affinity and purchase intention: (1) generic assessment of relationships with products of the affinity country in general (e.g., Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Guo *et al.*, 2018; Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2021); (2) a category-specific approach selecting product categories important in the context at hand (e.g., Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui, 2014; Kock *et al.*, 2019); or (3) a brand-related approach assessing the effects on selected consumer brands (e.g., Moraes and Strehlau, 2020; Naseem *et al.*, 2015). Most studies applied the generic approach implicitly assuming a general effect of consumer affinity regardless of the specific product category, neglecting category specificities, on the one hand, and potentially overestimating the concept's importance for strong brands, on the other hand.

4.2. Empirical findings on the relationship of consumer affinity with other variables

The 18 empirical studies listed in Table I yielded insight into empirical relationships of consumer affinity within a nomological network of selected antecedents, outcome variables, mediators and moderators. Figure 3 summarizes the extant body of empirical knowledge adding relevant variables that have been conceptually proposed but not yet empirically investigated. The following section provides an overview of extant empirical knowledge and highlights blind spots.

Figure 3. Nomological network of consumer affinity.



Note: + positive and significant relationship, - negative and significant relationship, n.s.= non-significant, n.t.= it has not been tested.

Antecedents of Consumer Affinity. Oberecker *et al.* (2008) proposed seven stable categories of affinity drivers distinguishing between direct (i.e., micro-drivers) and indirect (i.e., macro-drivers) experiences with a country. Later research modelled these (and similar) drivers as either antecedents (e.g., Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011) or as part of the affinity concept, as mentioned above (e.g., Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Nes *et al.*, 2014).

Findings on the drivers of affinity were mixed, differing in their explanatory strength. Lifestyle and scenery, which were found to be key drivers for feelings of affinity, could be used to direct marketers' search for affinity for their countries (Oberecker *et al.*, 2008). Whereas Oberecker *et al.* (2008) did not empirically support politics and economics as an antecedent for consumer affinity, Asseraf and Shoham (2017) provided evidence that collective memory plays an important role in explaining it. The findings on the relevance of cultural similarity were also different. While Oberecker *et al.* (2008) empirically found consumer affinity to be independent of countries' cultural similarity, Asseraf and Shoham (2017) suggested that cultural similarity might be an important driver for creating consumer affinity.

In addition to macro and micro-drivers, demographic variables have received attention in empirical studies as potential antecedents and/or control variables. According to Oberecker *et al.* (2008), women and the elderly are more sensitive to certain scenarios, suggesting that these would deteriorate their feelings of affinity. Similarly, this consumer profile (women and elderly) is more prone to a declining willingness to consume products from the affinity country in response to consumption-related scenarios. These results are in line with the general findings of buying behaviour in the literature, which show that women tend to be more critical consumers (Bruwer *et al.*, 2011).

Summarizing, empirical studies have demonstrated the importance of micro and macro-drivers for building affinity feelings among consumers. At an individual level, psychographic variables that might induce consumer affinity have not yet been proposed or empirically investigated.

Consequences of Consumer Affinity. The focal outcome variable in the affinity studies was the intention to purchase products from the affinity country (see Figure 3). The majority of the studies found empirical support for a significant positive relationship between consumer affinity and intention to purchase foreign products or brands (Ercis and Celik, 2019; Guo *et al.*, 2018; Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017; Kock *et al.*, 2019; Moraes and Strehlau, 2020; Nes *et al.*, 2014; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Wongtada *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, affinity was shown to be positively related to willingness to pay (Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui, 2014) and positive word-of-mouth (Eguchi and Yamashita, 2016). However, there is a lack of clear

consensus on how affinity affects product judgement. Wongtada *et al.* (2012), Asseraf and Shoham (2016) and Ercis and Celik (2019), for example, empirically demonstrated that there is a significant positive relationship between affinity and product judgement. Furthermore, while Oberecker *et al.* (2008) argued that affinity does not affect product judgement, asserting that other variables, such as product quality and price, are also key attributes in the consumer decision process, Fazli-Salehi *et al.* (2020) later showed that country affinity has a positive effect on product judgment for both global and domestic brands. Further studies have analysed other outcomes of consumer affinity. Thus, feelings of affinity were found to reduce perception of product risk (e.g., Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017). However, no empirical support was found for a proposed relationship between affinity and the propensity for direct investment in the affinity country (Li *et al.*, 2019). Râbelo-Neto *et al.* (2019) concluded that affinity towards a country positively influences the internationalisation of cultural products, and indirectly, country image and soft power. Râbelo-Neto *et al.* (2021) recently demonstrated empirically that affinity towards a country positively influences the preference for cultural products from that country.

Mediators. Very few mediators have been proposed for the underlying process from consumer affinity to outcome variables (see Figure 3). Product trust has been shown to mediate the relationship between consumer affinity and willingness to buy (Guo *et al.*, 2018). Naseem *et al.* (2015) suggested that global brand attitude mediates the relationship between consumer affinity and purchase intention, however this relationship has not yet been tested. Surprisingly, neither perception of quality nor perceived risk have been modelled as mediators, despite their conceptual relevance as such (Oberecker *et al.*, 2008). Contrary to Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011), Nes *et al.* (2014) confirmed an indirect effect of affinity on buying intentions through micro country image. Ercis and Celik (2019) demonstrated empirically that self-brand connection has a positive connection between country affinity and product quality judgment.

Moderators. The majority of moderating effects illustrated in Figure 3 have been proposed conceptually, but lack empirical demonstration. Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui (2014) failed to prove the hypothesized moderating effect of product country image. Studying consumer ethnocentrism, Guo *et al.* (2018) found the relationship between consumer affinity and product trust to be stronger in consumers with high levels of ethnocentrism than for those with low levels.

Discriminant Validity. In our discussion of the conceptual distinctiveness of consumer affinity as related to other concepts, we mentioned that empirical studies have confirmed its

discriminant validity (Figure 3). Affinity and xenophilia have been found to be unrelated constructs, as have affinity and country image (Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011). On the contrary, the empirical correlation between affinity and internationalism was proven significant and positive, but with a small effect size, supporting Oberecker *et al.* (2008, p. 47), who suggested that the two constructs are ‘conceptually related but distinct ... as internationalist consumers may or may not have a favourite country.’

Summarizing, as shown in Figure 3, current empirical research mainly focuses on a very small set of antecedent and outcome variables. There is a lack of empirical research on a broader set of relevant antecedent and outcome variables, just as there is a lack of empirical research on key mediators and moderators. Figure 3 further illustrates that different effects (such as outcome or moderating) of those variables (such as product judgement) are modelled. This reflects a lack of agreement on the consumer-affinity conceptual model.

5. Research findings and conclusions

International marketing literature has shown a growing interest in consumer affinity for describing and interpreting the positive emotions consumers have towards specific foreign countries. Although it was introduced over a decade ago, this line of research suffers from a lack of integration and development. In view of this background, our review aimed at providing a critical synthesis of extant conceptualizations, operationalisations, and substantive findings in the consumer affinity literature in order to shed light on and improve understanding of its nature, measurement and relationships with other variables. Since Oberecker *et al.* (2008)’s pioneering study, and despite the significant growth in consumer affinity literature in the last few years, a surprisingly small number of articles have been published, showing that affinity is still an incipient research field. As demonstrated in this review, a clear consensus on the concept, nature, and measurement of consumer affinity remains lacking.

Definition and nature. After analysing the first theoretical approaches and later developments in the definition and nature of consumer affinity, the most widely accepted *definition* in the literature is still the one by Oberecker *et al.* (2008). When first proposed in 2008, the concept of consumer affinity was presented as a new form of affective response (Oberecker *et al.*, 2008). On this basis, it can be argued that consumer affinity reflects a positive disposition or emotional feeling towards a focal country. Consumer affinity is therefore a subjective concept based on the emotional bond that individuals develop with a specific referent or object, influencing how the subject, a person, interacts affectively with the object, a country, company, brand, product, etc. (e.g., Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui, 2014). However, even though

the first conceptualizations of consumer affinity conceive this notion from a purely affective perspective (Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Oberecker *et al.*, 2008), later developments have considered it to have a dual cognitive-affective nature (e.g., Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Nes *et al.*, 2014). Nevertheless, we are in favour of the affective *nature* of this notion for several reasons. First, considering the cross-fertilisation between social psychology and marketing in the analysis of consumer affinity, the psychological roots of the term ‘affinity’ show that it involves feelings of closeness, sympathy or liking for someone or something (e.g., Decety and Chaminade, 2003). Second, previous studies have empirically demonstrated the nomological validity of this construct on the basis of emotions, feelings, positive dispositions, or attachment (e.g., Kock *et al.*, 2019; Nes *et al.*, 2014; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017). Finally, the mechanisms explaining consumer affinity rely on emotional attachment to the country and not on cognitive beliefs about the country’s characteristics. Thus, the dual cognitive-affective consideration is closer to the ‘country attitudes’ concept than to emotional feelings, which lead consumers to develop their perception of the ‘country image’.

In addition, affinity has been described as a positive and though relatively unstable consumer disposition towards a foreign country. Therefore, it should be emphasised that consumer affinity, although it may be long-lasting, is not irreversible, and its stability and duration depend, not only on the individual’s experience, or idiosyncratic affinity, but also on national cultural influences, or normative affinity, shared by many in the home country. Moreover, its innate instability and relative nature implies that both personal positive experiences with the foreign country and policies that favour normative exposure of individuals towards that country should be promoted by institutions and organisations. Another sign of the relative nature of affinity found by Oberecker *et al.* (2008) is that ‘a revoked feeling of affinity for the country does not necessarily translate into reduced purchase intentions for the focal country’s products’ (p. 45).

In a context of international marketing, the *object of consumer affinity* should be linked to a foreign country (see, for example, Guo *et al.*, 2018), and not the home country, as suggested by a recent article by Fazli-Salehi *et al.* (2020), as it could then be confused with ‘ethnocentrism’ (see Josiassen, 2011). Moreover, another problem in considering the home country as the object of consumer affinity is that it could be confused with ‘country attachment’ or ‘place attachment’ (e.g., Chan and Ilicic, 2019), which have been mainly coined in a context of tourism and leisure, and explain how people associate meanings with a country as ‘the affective bonds that individuals develop with their physical environment’ (Giuliani, 2003, p. 138). Another important issue is the choice of the object of affinity, that is, the country or countries, in

empirical studies. It may be argued that if the analysis is focused on a generic product/brand approach, it might be more suitable for surveys to ask the name of the country or countries (e.g., Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Guo *et al.*, 2018; Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017) than to ask about a predetermined affinity country (e.g., Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui, 2014; Kock *et al.*, 2019). Previous studies have empirically supported Oberecker *et al.* (2008), who argued that cultural similarity is not a prerequisite for a country to be an affinity referent, because the object of feelings of affinity is unique to each person. Respondents should therefore be allowed to identify their affinity country rather than specify it for them, imposing a specific object of affective evaluation. Most studies have applied the generic approach, that is, analysing consumer affinity to a foreign product or brand, which implicitly assumes a generic effect of consumer affinity, regardless of the specific product category, neglecting category specificities and potentially overestimating the relevance of the concept for strong brands.

Theoretical foundations. The Social Identity Theory has been the most widely used as the concept's *theoretical foundation*, although other theories, such as the Unified Theory, the Emotional Attachment Theory, the Cognitive Appraisal Theory and the Self-Expansion Theory, have also been used to explain it. Although there is no consensus about its theoretical basis, there is agreement that consumer affinity is fundamentally social, and therefore depends on a specific referent or object outside the consumer home group (the country). How this affinity is built up and developed is unclear in the literature, which draws on theories about (social) identification and affect. However, we think a stronger emphasis should be placed on consumer psychology and self-concept, as the inherent motivation of individuals to incorporate others (foreign country) into their self-concept is not necessarily explained by their identification with ingroup (home country) cues. In this sense, the Emotion-Congruent Theory (Kamins *et al.*, 1991; Kim *et al.*, 2010) offers another interesting perspective for understanding consumer affinity, in which individuals positively evaluate an object when the emotional tone of that object is congruent with the emotion that they directly and/or indirectly experience (Septianto *et al.*, 2020). Both own feelings as a source of consumer information (see Feelings-as-Information Theory by Schwarz, 2011) and congruency with their self-concept, may be determinant in explaining affinity towards specific foreign countries, regardless of social and cultural influences.

Dimensionality. The majority of researchers have found a multidimensional construct (e.g., Kock *et al.*, 2019; Nes *et al.*, 2014; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011), although some others have defined it as one-dimensional (Bernard and Zarrouk-Karoui, 2014; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2017). The multidimensional definition of consumer affinity seems to be the most

comprehensive approach to its conceptual richness and complex nature. Of the few approaches to the dimensionality of consumer affinity (Asseraf and Shoham, 2016; Kock *et al.*, 2019; Nes *et al.*, 2014; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Wongtada *et al.*, 2012), we advocate the sympathy and attachment dimensions suggested by Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011). In our view, it is essential to avoid the use of drivers or antecedents in defining consumer affinity, mainly because these components are related to the referents or objects leading to consumer affinity (e.g., cultural similarity, people, climate, business, education, entertainment, etc.) and not the affective nature of the concept itself. This is the case of the dimensions found by Wongtada *et al.* (2012), Nes *et al.* (2014), and Asseraf and Shoham (2016), which are undoubtedly interesting proposals describing the main triggers of the consumer's emotional bond with a foreign country. However, the affinity concept's dimensionality should focus on its affective nature and what defines this emotional feeling, as essential to understanding it. In this light, Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) appear to have the most coherent and valuable explanation for the great complexity of this higher-level construct, although further research should still be undertaken to explore potential new components. Kock *et al.* (2019) recently added a third dimension (admiration), but this component is related to a preference for a product from an admired country over a product from another country, and could be more related to cognitive judgements than emotional feelings.

Relationship of affinity with other variables. Research has addressed the theoretical delimitations between consumer affinity and the related concepts of animosity, xenophilia, (micro/macro) country image, attitude towards a country, internationalism and place attachment. In this sense, it should be noted that affinity and animosity are related, not opposite concepts, and might coexist, as they are based on different drivers (see, for example, Nes *et al.*, 2014; Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Wongtada *et al.*, 2012). From the perspective of discriminant validity and relationships with other variables, studies of affinity's consequences have prevailed over its antecedents. The first variables analysed were its macro and micro drivers and their impact on intention to purchase. However, in later studies, more attention has been given to its consequences. The significant positive relationship between affinity and intention to purchase has been proven often (Guo *et al.*, 2018; Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017). The most recent outcomes found have been product trust and internationalization of cultural products, with positive results demonstrating their relationship with affinity (Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2019, 2021). We again emphasize the lack of empirical studies testing moderation and mediation in affinity models.

6. Directions for further research

The findings of this review reveal clear areas of emerging research previously overlooked, as well as theoretical and empirical inconsistencies. It therefore provides the basis for future research in areas where additional knowledge is still required. In this sense, we discuss below several conceptual, methodological and empirical areas identified as fruitful directions for future study:

Conceptual research. Our review of the literature has revealed a number of conceptual matters that require more careful consideration. First, the nature of the consumer affinity concept has not been completely resolved. The divergent perspectives on its affective or affective-cognitive nature have yielded parallel, partly overlapping and contradictory conceptualizations. These divergent perspectives render the construct conceptually fuzzy and with different operationalisations, which therefore result in substantive findings that are difficult to compare. This fuzzy conceptualization further hampers delineation from other significant concepts, such as country (product) image, which are considered essential in international marketing literature. In addition, a coherent and explicit theoretical base is lacking. This review verifies a gap previously observed by the academic community. Furthermore, the concept's nomological validity must be addressed in empirical studies comparing the purely affective with dual cognitive-affective nature of consumer affinity, emphasizing both psychological and social components. Similarly, the Emotion-Congruent Theory should be explored for analysing how consumption of foreign products affects consumers' emotional state and, subsequently, behavioural outcomes.

Second, the numerous approaches to the concept's dimensions hint at similar problematic aspects. On the one hand, it remains unclear whether the underlying reasons for consumer affinity should be modelled as independent antecedents (e.g., Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011) or as conceptual dimensions of the affinity construct (e.g., Asseraf and Shoham, 2016). Some authors have suggested that the drivers of consumer affinity should be integrated into the consumer affinity concept itself, and therefore, the scale items would refer to the reason for a positive attachment. However, from the standpoint of measurement theory, this conceptualization appears to violate a basic premise of reflective measurement, which is the interchangeability of items. Thus, future research should clearly delineate the affinity drivers/reasons from its dimensions, and further academic attention to conceptual as well as resulting measurement issues is warranted.

Third, and related to the above, the field would benefit from convergence on a commonly accepted set of dimensions that could be used across studies. In this context, an agreement

would have to be reached on whether the consumer affinity concept follows an emic (i.e., general) or etic (i.e., country-specific) approach (e.g., Douglas and Craig, 2006) as both approaches currently co-exist (see Table II). Furthermore, in the literature, consumer affinity is an affective construct (Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011) with two dimensions (soft=sympathy and hard=attachment), so one possible direction might be to examine the conceptual and empirical adequacy of its dimensions in view of later studies on brand love (e.g., Batra *et al.*, 2012) and brand attachment (Donvito *et al.*, 2020). Future research would be necessary to explore the relative nature of consumer affinity and how it can be incorporated into the study of its dimensionality, which must be validated in multiple settings. In this sense, the empirical validation of a robust conceptual proposal for measuring consumer affinity would help managers understand what defines consumer affinity so it can be enhanced by organizations and institutions, which would increase willingness to buy foreign products/brands (or mitigate the reluctance to buy specific foreign products/brands), leading to better market segmentation and development of improved foreign product manufacturing and distribution strategies.

Fourth, consumer affinity has been understood as an emotional bond with a specific '*foreign*' country. Nevertheless, a recent article by Fazli-Salehi *et al.* (2020) considered consumer affinity for both foreign and domestic markets, highlighting that the concept has rarely been approached in the context of home countries. However, an ambiguous conceptualization further hampers distinction from other concepts such as 'attitude toward local products' (e.g., Bartsch *et al.*, 2016) or 'country image' (Halim and Zulkarnain, 2017). Themes in the literature for future research should include conceptual differentiation and relationship with other related concepts, such as macro and micro country image and country-specific concepts (i.e., xenophilia or internationalism), as well as consumer animosity and country attachment, in order to resolve the existing controversy.

Methodological research. The major methodological concern revealed by our review of the literature is the lack of a widely accepted measurement scale. This scale first needs to be based on a robust conceptualization tackling the critical aspects discussed in the previous point. Second, it should be based on an appropriate measurement model carefully considering the reflective or formative nature of its dimensions and manifest variables (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). Based on our review of the available scales, it is more than likely that measurement misspecification is prevalent in this literature, yielding unfavourable consequences, such as biased parameter estimates (e.g., Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). We refrain from proposing that there is any need to develop yet another new scale. Instead, future research might consolidate the extant

measurement scales and engage in additional empirical investigation aimed at establishing (i) psychometric stability, (ii) nomological validity, including empirical discriminant validity of related concepts, such as country image (Roth and Diamantopoulos, 2009) or place attachment (Xu and Zhang, 2016), and (iii) ideally, cross-national applicability (DeVellis, 2003). Another methodological concern revealed by this literature review is overreliance on cross-sectional data. Meyer *et al.* (2017), in a JIBS editorial, argued for an increased use of experimental designs, making it possible to test for causality between variables of interest in a systematic manner (Leung and Morris, 2015; Tung and Stahl, 2018). According to Meyer *et al.* (2017, p. 541), empirical study designs would be useful in affinity research because they ‘offer interesting opportunities to advance international business knowledge that have yet to be fully exploited in the field’. Thus, future study samples should be from the general consumer population so they are as representative as possible, and not limited to students. Furthermore, they should also avoid selecting single items to analyse the affinity dimension, since multiple items increase reliability and construct validity. More quantitative research is necessary, using random sampling procedures and adopting experimental design studies or other appropriate analytical techniques.

Substantive research. Extant empirical literature is characterized by a predominant focus on the relationship between affinity and purchase intention, which has been replicated and demonstrated in several country settings. Aside from this finding, the current body of empirical knowledge is rather scant, and therefore, offers numerous directions for additional research. First, the set of focal outcome variables should be enlarged. As in other fields, variables of interest might include, among others, non-hypothetical willingness to pay (e.g., Wertenbroch and Skiera, 2002) or actual purchase behaviour (Bartsch *et al.*, 2016). In this regard, most studies refer to products in general rather than focal product categories or specific brands. Appropriateness of the impact on different product categories should be tested. Second, the process underlying the positive relationship between consumer affinity and purchase behaviour warrants more conceptual and empirical study. At this time, why consumers deliberately intend to purchase from affinity countries is mainly a matter of speculation. The mediating variables proposed in the literature (product judgement, perceived risk, product trust) as well as other variables (such as perceived value) should be discussed theoretically and followed by empirical study. Moreover, it would be interesting to examine the effect of the emerging concept of locavorism in COO research (Young, 2021) as a potential outcome of consumer affinity. Third, and as in the case of the mediating variables, there is a lack of empirical research on moderating effects on the affinity-purchase intention relationship. While it has been empirically shown that

high levels of consumer ethnocentrism mitigate consumer affinity effects (Guo *et al.*, 2018), the moderating effect of other individual characteristics (such as price sensitiveness), product characteristics (such as product category), or country characteristics (such as product country image) is as yet untapped.

Fourth, consumer affinity is only one consumer disposition in a whole range in international marketing, including consumer cosmopolitanism, consumer animosity, and consumer globalisation attitudes, to name but a few (for a review, see Bartsch *et al.*, 2016). In this light, more substantive research examining relative, complementary, and contradictory effects across dispositions for key variables in the international marketing domain appears to be required. Such knowledge would advance the science of international marketing in general as well as increase the practical relevance of consumer affinity literature.

Finally, future research should give more attention to exploring the managerial implications of the study of consumer affinity. Apart from its importance in increasing consumer intention to purchase foreign products, further developments should focus on how marketers could maximize the positive outcomes of affinity feelings, such as positive word-of-mouth, trust or loyalty, or even minimize the reluctance to buy foreign products. Other subjects of study would be the potential use of consumer affinity as a segmentation criterion, for example, considering Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Soares *et al.*, 2007) to analyse whether consumers from different cultures (or similar) respond differently to international marketing strategies based on this concept, or potential country differences (e.g., proximity, education system, environmental concerns) to see whether consumer affinity levels differ and what the underlying mechanisms explaining such effects are.

We believe that advancing in the study of consumer affinity along these (and other) lines would lead to (a) a common understanding of the concept, and (b) a better understanding of its relevance to international marketing strategies.

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