



How Does Situational Consumer Animosity Affect National Brand and Purchase Intentions in the US-China Trade War?

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ABSTRACT

Trump's second presidency has initiated more intense global trade conflicts. This study investigates the impact of situational consumer animosity on national brand and consumers' purchase intentions during the US-China trade war. This study centres on the USA as the focal country, smartphones as the product category, and Chinese consumers as the subject. Utilising the ABC Attitude Model, Theory of Reasoned Action, and the Revised Halo-Aggregate Effect Model as the theoretical framework. A quantitative research methodology was utilised to conduct an offline questionnaire survey with 310 customers in five major cities in China, employing covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM). The findings confirmed that the national brand exerts a significant influence, with the interrelation among the three components being Perceived Category Image → "Made In" Image → Perceived Country Image. This research enhanced the Revised Halo-Aggregate Effect Model by incorporating the Affective Country Image into the comprehensive national brand. This study is limited to China, with future studies potentially expanding this paradigm to the United States. This study advises the U.S. government to modify its trade war policies since it will diminish hostile nations' perceptions of the U.S. national brand, subsequently influencing their purchase intentions for U.S. product brands.

Keywords: US-China Trade War, Situational Consumer Animosity, National Brand, Made In Image, Purchase Intention

JEL Classifications: M300, M310, M370

1. INTRODUCTION

On January 20, 2025, Donald Trump commenced his second presidential term. On February 01, Trump enacted a tariff order putting an extra 25 per cent duty on imports from Canada and Mexico, a 10 per cent tariff on energy resources from Canada, and a 10 per cent charge on top of the existing duties on all items imported from China. Trump stated that this aligns with the protectionist measures he advocates. According to statistical analyses, Shannon K. O'Neil and Julia Huesa (February 01, 2025) deemed that nearly half of U.S. imports—more than \$1.3 trillion—come from Canada, China, and Mexico¹. The Washington,

D.C.-based Tax Foundation estimates that the tariffs will generate about \$100 billion annually in additional federal tax revenue. Still, they could also impose significant costs on the broader economy: disrupting supply chains, raising costs for businesses, eliminating hundreds of thousands of jobs, and ultimately pushing up consumer prices.

Some scholars have specifically studied consumer animosity caused by Trump's first term and the Biden administration's continuing trade war policy against China. Lee et al. (2021) conducted a study offering a new perspective on human behaviour during the trade crisis between the United States and China. Research indicates that consumer brand engagement (CBE) can mitigate the adverse impacts of economic animosity (EA)

¹ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/analysis-the-potential-economic-effects-of-trumps-tariffs-and-trade-war-in-9-charts>

on purchase intention (PI) and enhance the beneficial effects of country-of-origin (COO) on PI. Lau et al. (2025) initially examined the formation mechanism of situational consumer animosity (SCA) during the trade conflict between the US and China and its impact on individuals' purchase intentions (PI). They elucidated the process of situational consumer animosity by demonstrating that susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) impacts economic threat perception (PET), which then influences consumer ethnocentrism (CET), ultimately affecting situational consumer animosity (SCA) (Lau et al., 2025).

National brands significantly influence rivalry among countries, organisations, and brands. A national brand primarily reflects its overall image abroad (Anholt, 2016; Dinnie, 2002). The trade war initiated by the United States against China, which has extended to the European Union, India, Japan, and other nations, along with the self-serving economic and trade sanctions imposed on various countries and regions, will undoubtedly adversely affect the national brand image of the United States. In 2018, GfK launched a global study on country brand image, encompassing 50 nations and territories, and surveyed 20,185 persons aged 18 and above via online interviews. Germany reclaimed the foremost position in the Anholt-GfK National Image Index (NBISM)², with France occupying the second position. The United Kingdom rated third; Japan entered the top five, tying with Canada, while the United States plummeted from first to sixth place, relinquishing its leadership in worldwide perceptions. Among 50 countries, only the United States had a decrease in its overall National Image Index (NBI) score. Simon Anholt, the founder of the North Industrial Research Institute, remarked, "The deterioration in the US 'governance' category indicates that we are observing a 'Trump effect' resulting from President Trump's emphasis on his 'America First' political agenda.

The evolution of national brand research has transitioned from the product's country of origin image and country image to the concept of country brand or national brand (Schooler, 1965; Kotler and Gertner, 2007; Samiee, 1994; Anholt, 2002). The national brand has evolved into a complex and diverse notion. Researchers propose three tiers: the national level, the product level, and the category product level, alongside two aspects: cognitive and emotional national image (Li et al., 2014; Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994; Yiweng Yang et al., 2016; 2018; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Wang et al., 2012; Yiweng Yang, 2017). However, very few studies have examined the effects of situational consumer animosity on national brand (three tiers and two aspects) and consumers' purchase intention in the context of the US-China trade war.

For the first time, this study combines the impact of situational consumer animosity on national brand (three tiers and two aspects) and the impact of national brand on consumers' purchase intentions with the US-China trade war. The authors propose the following research questions (RQs) derived from their conducted research:

- RQ1: In what manner does situational customer animosity influence the national brand across three tiers and two aspects?

- RQ2: In what manner can situational consumer animosity further affect consumers' purchase intentions and behaviours via the national brand, including three tiers and two aspects?
- RQ3: What processes govern the influence of national brand (three tiers and two aspects) on purchase intentions for high-involvement products?

This paper structures its content as follows: Initially, we conduct a thorough analysis of research and conclusions about situational consumer animosity and the national brand in the context of the US-China trade conflict. Secondly, utilising the ABC attitude theory, the Revised Halo-Summary Effect Model, the idea of rational consumer behaviour, and pertinent literature, a framework for this study is proposed, and corresponding research hypotheses are established. The questionnaire was constructed following the established scales in the existing literature. We gathered pertinent data for the study via postal surveys and assessed the research model and hypotheses utilising CB-SEM. Ultimately, we present the study's essential findings along with its theoretical and practical consequences. This study delineates its shortcomings and proposes a direction for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

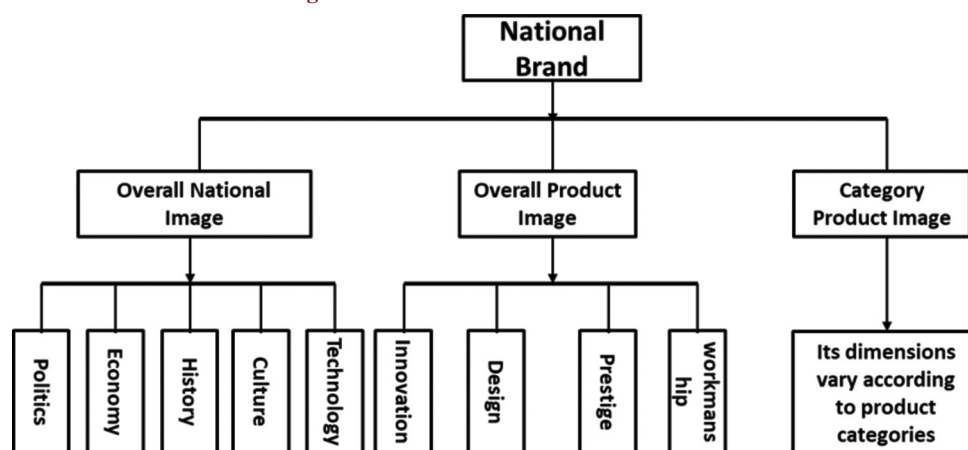
2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Consumer animosity

Klein et al. (1998) first introduced the concept of "consumer animosity" in marketing, defining it as the aversion or repulsion experienced by consumers due to military, political, or economic events occurring between nations. They posited that such animosity influences consumers' purchasing intentions regarding products from antagonistic countries (Klein et al., 1998). This animosity may be rooted in disputes over geographical territory (e.g., Israel and Palestine), economic and political disagreements (e.g., the trade war between China and the USA), and religious beliefs (e.g., the perception of halal products by non-Muslim consumers in India) (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007; Tao et al., 2022; Zdravkovic et al., 2021; Latif et al., 2019).

The concept of "situational consumer animosity" was first introduced by Ang et al. (2002) and is defined as temporary and triggered by events or short-term economic strains; it is usually triggered by trade disputes, tariffs, and other economic events or policies. Nes et al. (2012) argued that situational consumer animosity is triggered by specific economic events or policies and is usually temporary and context-dependent; it is more noticeable in a particular situation but may quickly fade if the context changes (Nes et al., 2012). Researchers have successfully studied situational consumer animosity from several angles, including cognitive and affective reactions (Harmeling et al., 2021), its economic implications and impact on purchasing behaviour (Wagh, 2019; Kiraci, 2017), its impact on branding and corporate strategy (Hua et al., 2022), and its measurement and conceptualisation (Hoffmann et al., 2011; Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007).

2 1. The latest national image list: all Western countries except Japan are the top ten. http://news.ifeng.com/a/20171119/53402275_0.shtml

Figure 1: The three levels of national brand

Source: Yang, Y., Sun, G., Zhang, X. (2016). Study on National Brand Effect and Its Moderating Variables (in Chinese). *Enterprise economy*, 35(3), 11-16, p. 12.

2.1.2. National brand and its three tiers and two aspects

A national brand, or country brand, constitutes the cornerstone of a nation's "soft power" and serves as a significant strategic asset (Niss, 1996; Kalamova and Konrad, 2010). Philip Kotler, a prominent figure in modern marketing, introduced the concept of national branding in 1993 (Kotler et al., 1993, p. 141) and provided an extensive definition of national image from a branding standpoint: "The aggregate of individuals' beliefs and perceptions regarding the location." The image signifies a substantial correlation and simplicity of information about a location. Since that time, National Brand has emerged as a significant and novel domain within brand theory research. Moreover, a growing number of nations regard brand image as an essential strategic asset, engaging consulting firms to execute practical initiatives such as comprehensive national brand strategy and national image planning and dissemination. This has attracted considerable interest from academics and stimulated additional theoretical inquiry into national brands.

Huilin Han and Guohui Sun (2014) assert that the concept of National Brand has grown from marketing theory studies and is more varied. The research approach specifically entailed a progression from Country of Origin (COO) and Country Image to National Brand (Schooler, 1965; Kotler, 1993; Samiee, 1994; Anholt, 2002). National Brand is a multi-level and multi-dimensional concept. Scholars suggest that the National Brand includes three tiers and two aspects (Figure 1). Three tiers denote the national level, the product level, and the category product level. Two dimensions pertain to cognitive and emotional national imagery (Li et al., 2014; Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994; Yiweng Yang et al., 2016; 2018; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Wang et al., 2012; Yiweng Yang, 2017).

2.1.3. Theory of reasoned action (TRA)

American scientists Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) introduced The Theory of Reasoned Action (Figure 2). This theory examines the factors influencing conscious behavioural intentions, applies to elucidating various forms of human behaviour, and is among the most fundamental and impactful theories in the study of human behaviour. The idea posits that an individual's behaviour is influenced by behavioural intention, which is shaped by the

individual's attitude towards the behaviour and the subjective standards around it. Attitude is an individual's assessment of the desirability of a behaviour. It is a consistent inclination developed by learnt experiences. The outcome of the behaviour is influenced by the individual's beliefs. Faith represents an individual's perspective on a particular matter. Subjective norms denote the societal pressure individuals experience about the undertaking of actions (Myers, 2014). Subjective norms are influenced by labelled views and people's conformity to established ideas. The prevailing notion is that the reference group asserts people ought not to engage in certain actions. The behaviour will thereafter offer feedback to beliefs and established norms.

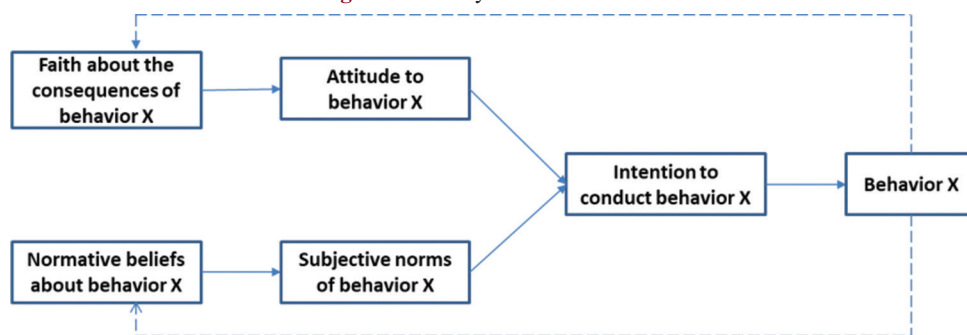
2.1.4. Attitude theory and ABC attitude model

Attitude Theory posits that attitude encompasses cognition, emotion (specific feelings), and conation (behavioural purpose) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Roth and Diamantopoulos (2009) assert that cognitive, affective, and conative attitudes are interdependent rather than autonomous. Ajzen (2001) established that cognitive and emotional attitudes together influence conative attitudes. These studies indicate that cognition and emotion influence conation, highlighting the significance of consumer and product attributes in reconciling these two factors (Haddock & Zanna, 1998; Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Kempf, 1999; Verlegh, 2001).

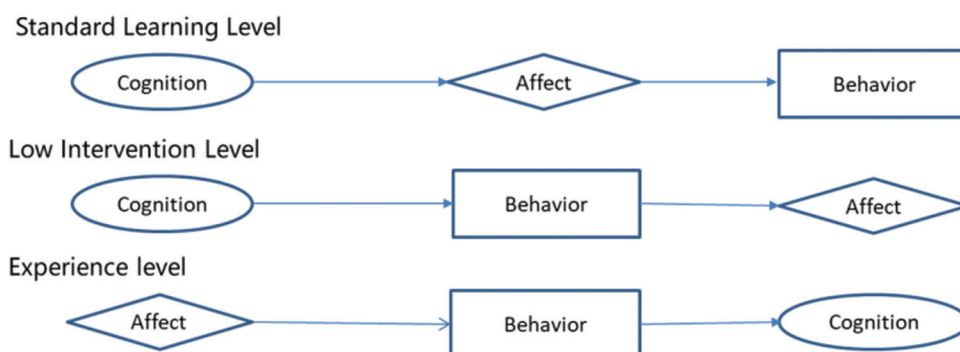
Ashman et al., (2015) comprehensively examines the interplay between customers' cognition, emotion, and behaviour (intention) via the ABC Model of Attitudes. Consequently, he formulated the Hierarchy of Effects within Attitude Theory to elucidate the varying interconnections among cognition, emotion, and behaviour during consumer decision-making processes (standard learning, minimal involvement, and experiential hierarchy), as illustrated in Figure 3.

2.1.5. Signalling theory and the revised halo-summary construct effect model

In 1973, Michael Spence formulated the Signalling Theory to mitigate information asymmetry between two parties (Spence, 2002). Since that time, the signalling theory has been widely applied in various disciplines, including finance (Steigenberger

Figure 2: Theory of reasoned action

Source: Yiweng Yang. National brand from consumer perspective [M]. Beijing: Intellectual Property Publishing House, 2017

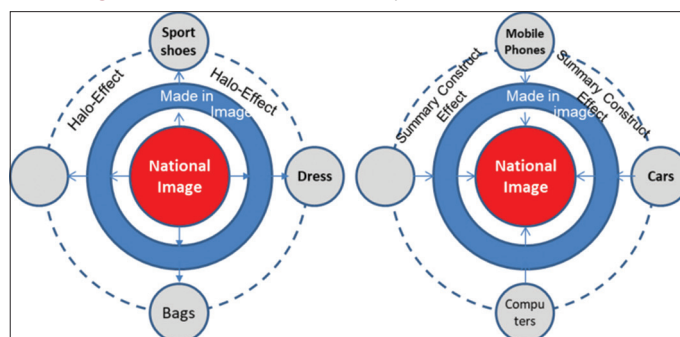
Figure 3: ABC model of attitudes and hierarchy of effects

Source: Yiweng Yang. National brand from consumer perspective [M]. Beijing: Intellectual Property Publishing House, 2017

and Wilhelm, 2018; Zhang and Wiersema, 2009), management (Connelly et al., 2011; Stiglitz, 2002), and marketing (Chu and Chintagunta, 2011; Kirmani and Rao, 2000; Rahman et al., 2018).

Han (1989) introduced the “Halo Effect Model” using signalling theory. He asserts that when consumers choose and purchase foreign products, especially in the absence of internal product information—specifically when they lack familiarity with items from a given country—they will pursue outward cues. This involves depending on their views and feelings concerning the country-of-origin effect and the national brand image. In the same study, Han also proposed the “Summary Construct Model”. This model posits that when individuals recognise products or brands from a specific country or region, they will synthesise and internalise the “Made In” image of that locale based on their perceptions of the product’s manufacturing process and the attributes linked to the brand. This “Made In” image subsequently affects consumers’ perceptions of the brand or products from that nation.

Yiweng Yang (2017) contends that the Halo—Summary Construct Effect Model posited by Han (1989) is deficient in elucidating the National Brand effect, primarily due to its focus on the National Brand at the aggregate product level (“Made In” image) and category product level (category image), while neglecting the National Brand (National Image) at the comprehensive national level. He revised the Halo-Summary Construct Effect Model to more thoroughly investigate the correlation among the three tiers of the national brand when consumers engage in various decision-making processes, subsequently presenting a Revised Halo-Summary Construct Effect Model (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Revised Halo-Summary construct effect model

Source: Yiweng Yang (2017, P. 29, Figures 2-7), national brand from consumer perspective, intellectual property publishing house

2.2. Hypotheses Development and Model Construction

2.2.1. Hypotheses development

Ruijuan Wu (2015) focused on China’s consumers to the United States and Japan, and took cars, cameras, and sportswear as the categories of products purchased by consumers. When studying the image of consumer animosity toward emotional countries, she found that consumer animosity and emotional country image are two independent variables, both of which contain the cognitive and emotional components of consumers. The two are both different and related, and consumer animosity negatively affects the emotional country image. In addition, she also found that Chinese consumers are more hostile to Japan and have a better evaluation of the emotional country image of the United States.

As the US-China trade war broke out and continued to exist, but long influenced by American culture, Chinese consumers have formed the habit of liking, buying, and owning many US products, especially Apple's mobile phone, as a typical representative of American products, which has been widely known in China and has a high reputation and loyalty. The author specially chose the category of mobile phone products to test the impact of consumer animosity on the image of the national brand. The main purpose is, will the consumer animosity caused by the trade war affect the emotional brand image of National Brand? The author assumes that under the background of a huge foreign trade war, Chinese consumers' animosity caused by perceived economic threats will have a negative impact on the affective country image of the United States. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1: Situational consumer animosity negatively affects the affective country image

Laroche et al. (2005) posited that the cognitive aspect of the national image mostly pertains to the consumer's perception of national industrial advancement and scientific and technological growth. Wang et al. (2012) characterised perceived country image in their study as individuals' perceptions of a nation, encompassing its economic progress, living standards, industrialisation, and scientific and technological advancement. Ruijuan Wu's (2015) study established that Chinese customers' animosity does not affect the perceived country image associated with the three categories of automobiles, cameras, and sports apparel in Japan and the United States. The author claims that customer animosity may not influence perceptions of a country's image, as consumers may harbour negative feelings towards a nation due to war or economic issues; however, they cannot disregard the country's economic and technological advancements. Consequently, the author posits hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2: Situational consumer animosity (SCA) does not influence the perceived country image (PCI).

Nagashima (1977) contended that the "Made In" label embodies a long-term image, reputation, and stereotype associated with items from a certain country, characterised by enduring attributes. Li et al. (2014) established that consumers frequently possess distinct stereotypes regarding a nation's overall image. American products exemplify innovation; Japanese products signify reliability; German items represent advanced technology; and French products embody romance (FutureBrand, 2014).

The "Made In" image of the United States is renowned for its ingenuity, as exemplified by the Apple mobile phone. The author contends that despite the emergence and persistence of the trade war between China and the United States, the "innovative" perception of the United States' "Made In" image, long established in the minds of Chinese customers, would not rapidly alter due to this conflict. Consequently, the author presents the subsequent assumption.

Hypothesis 3: Situational consumer animosity (SCA) does not influence the "Made In" image (MII) of the United States.

Pappu et al. (2007) postulated that the National Brand effect correlates with the product category. Yiweng Yang (2017)

contended that a nation's product category image, exemplified by customers' overall inclination towards French red wine, Swiss watches, and German automobiles, eventually influences consumers' purchasing decisions about category products. His investigation also revealed that the category product image is incongruent with the overall product image ("Made In" image). Cuba's overall "Made In" reputation is often mediocre, yet their cigars are internationally acclaimed. Consequently, it is recommended that researchers examine not just the influence of the "Made In" image on customer decision-making but also the effect of the category product image on consumer choices.

The author posits that the cognitive category image primarily encompasses consumers' comprehensive assessment of product quality, craftsmanship, materials, functionality, technology, aesthetics, operational efficacy, usability, durability, and cost-effectiveness, derived from prolonged perceptions of a particular product category within a specific nation. Once this perception is established, it becomes enduring and persistent. Consequently, the author presents the subsequent hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Situational consumer animosity (SCA) exerts no influence on cognitive category image (CCI).

Ruijuan Wu's (2015) research delineated emotional national image as consumers' affective assessment of a particular country and its populace, whereas cognitive national image pertains to an evaluation of the nation's industry, economy, science and technology, history, culture, and other dimensions. They constitute two autonomous elements of the national image framework. The study established that consumers' affective country image of a particular country does not affect their perceived country image of that country; in other words, there is no causal relationship between affective and perceived country images. Consequently, the author presents the subsequent assumption.

Hypothesis 5: The affective country image (ACI) does not affect the perceived country image (PCI).

Yiweng Yang (2017) introduced a Revised Halo-Summary Construct Effect Model, which, through empirical research, demonstrated that when consumers engage in high-level product purchase decisions, the National Brand exerts a comprehensive effect; specifically, the interrelation among the three tiers of National Brand is as follows: Cognitive Category Image to "Made In" Image to Perceived Country Image, which serves as a valuable complement to the Halo-Summary Construct Effect Model (Han, 1989). This research focuses on the smartphone category, classified as high-intervention products, and customers are advised to adhere to the Revised Halo-Summary Construct Effect Model when making purchasing decisions (Yiweng Yang, 2017). Consequently, the author presents the subsequent assumption.

Hypothesis 6: The "Made In" image (MII) serves as a mediator between the cognitive category image (CCI) and the perceived country image (PCI).

Ruijuan Wu's (2015) study established that the Emotional Country Image constitutes an emotional assessment of the perception of that country and its populace. Ultimately, it constitutes a form of cognition accompanied by emotional assessment. The emotional

components depicted in the image of a sentimental nation encompass both positive and negative sentiments, relevant to all amicable and antagonistic countries. The emotional assessment within the context of the emotional nation is nuanced, contextual, and dynamic. Consequently, consumers' emotional assessments influenced by the perception of an emotionally charged nation may fluctuate due to disputes or alterations in diplomatic ties. The affective country image influences consumer information processing and product selection. Nevertheless, given that the Affective Country Image and the Emotional Category Image occupy the first and third levels, respectively, under the overarching framework of the National Brand, the author posits the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 7: The affective country image (ACI) has no impact on the emotional category image (ECI).

Yiweng Yang's (2017) study examined the purchasing decisions of Chinese customers regarding Japanese automotive products and established that the "Made In" image positively influences the emotional perception of the brand image. The author posits that the "Made In" perception of the United States among Chinese customers favourably influences their emotional perception of mobile phone categories produced in the United States.

Hypothesis 8: The "Made In" image (MII) exerts a beneficial influence on the emotional category image (ECI).

Laroche et al. (2005) posited that the national image is a multi-faceted construct, encompassing emotive elements primarily associated with consumers' emotional responses to the populace of the nation. Wang et al. (2012) delineated the concept of emotional national image. Specifically addressing individuals' emotional assessments of their nation and populace (affectionate or disdainful, favourable or unfavourable). Ruijuan Wu's (2015) study established that the emotional national image of Japan among Chinese customers significantly enhances their purchase intentions. Consequently, the author presents the subsequent assumption.

Hypothesis 9: The affective country image (ACI) positively affects consumers' purchase intentions (PI).

How does the product category image affect the purchase intention? Does the cognitive category image directly affect purchase intention, or does the emotional category image affect purchase intention? Yiweng Yang's (2017) research confirmed that when Chinese consumers buy Japanese high-intervention products, the emotional category image plays an intermediary role in the relationship between the cognitive category image and purchase intention. In other words, cognitive category image affects emotional category image, while emotional category image affects purchase intentions. Therefore, the author makes the following assumption.

Hypothesis 10: Emotional category image (ECI) plays a mediating role in the relationship between cognitive category image (CCI) and purchase intention (PI).

2.2.2. Theoretical model construction

In accordance with the aforementioned hypotheses, the author develops the subsequent theoretical model (Figure 5).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research Scope

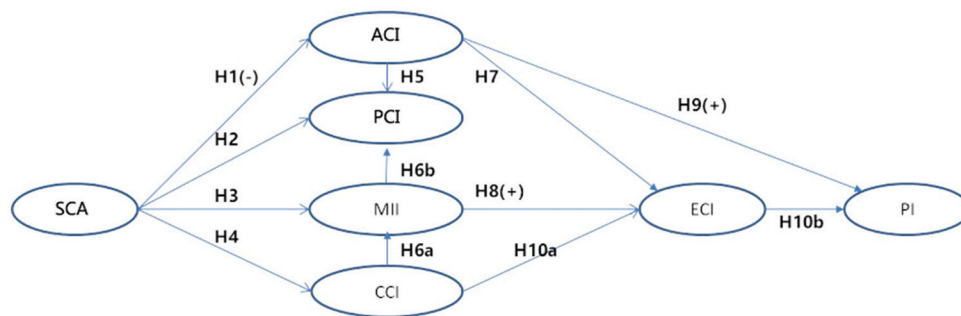
The focus of this study is on the impact of consumer animosity on the national brand image of the United States in the context of the US-China trade war. Therefore, choosing the United States as the focus country is an inevitable choice. Klein et al. (1998) asserted that China serves as an ideal case for examining consumer antagonism. Ishii's (2009) study revealed that Japan and the United States are two ideal nations for conducting consumer animosity research in China. This study selects smartphones, a product category characterised by a high degree of consumer interaction (Lu Shen et al., 2015; Jie Yao et al., 2008). Furthermore, China sells U.S. smartphone devices, with which users are well acquainted. Furthermore, smartphones from the United States, especially the Apple iPhone, epitomise fashion and trends, and as a hallmark of innovation, they effectively embody and signify the manufacturing standards and attributes of the United States.

3.2. Scales and Measurement

The decision to purchase a smartphone is often a high-involvement product choice for most consumers (Lu Shen et al., 2015). The author selects US national brands, US-made brands, and US smartphone items to investigate the impact of consumer animosity on national brand and product category image. The dimensions of category product photos must be modified according to various product categories (Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994; Li et al., 2008). Furthermore, China sells U.S. smartphones, with which users are well acquainted. Furthermore, American smartphones, especially Apple iPhones, epitomise fashion and trends, and as a hallmark of innovation, they effectively embody and signify the manufacturing standards and attributes of the United States. Consequently, the author employs the "cognitive smartphone image" to signify the "cognitive category image" and the "emotional smartphone image" to denote the "emotional category image."

The measurement items for each construct are predominantly derived from existing research; all items employ preexisting scales that have been adapted to align with the actual environment. "Situational Consumer Animosity" encompasses four primary dimensions: economic animosity, military animosity, political animosity, and cultural animosity (Klein, 2002; Morris Kalliny, 2017). "Perceived Country Image" is a second-order structure of facet, including four first-order structures of politics, economy, history/culture and technology (Fetscherin, 2010; Martin & Eroglu, 1993); "Affective Country Image" constitutes a first-order facet (Wang et al., 2012); "Made In" image represents a second-order facet comprising four first-order facets (Narayana, 1981; Roth & Romeo, 1992); "Cognitive Category Image" is classified as a first-order structural facet (Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 1994; Li et al., 2008); "Emotional Category Image" is identified as a first-order facet (Qu et al., 2011); "Purchase Intention" is categorised as a first-order facet (Granzin & Olsen, 1998; Guoqun Fu and Ziyi Su, 2014).

The concluding component of the questionnaire addresses "personal information," with five inquiries related to gender, age,

Figure 5: Impact of situational consumer animosity on national brand and purchase intentions

educational qualifications, location, and preferred smartphone brands for future acquisitions. All inquiries, save from demographic data, employ a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 signifies “strongly disagree” and 7 denotes “strongly agree”.

The questionnaire has been revised four times. First developed in English, then translated into Chinese, and subsequently retranslated into English for assessment by Chinese professors and doctoral candidates in business administration to ensure translation accuracy (Kim et al., 2017). In the second round, we enhanced the original questions through discussion, discarded inappropriate ones, and integrated crucial ones. During the third round of modification, we conducted a pre-survey with 20 users and potential smartphone buyers in Shanghai. We removed superfluous and complex questions and improved the questionnaire’s phrasing for clarity and understanding. Three professors from three prestigious universities in Shanghai received the questionnaire for evaluation in the third round. A formal questionnaire was created following the four rounds of revision previously stated.

3.3. Sample and Data Collection

In the formal study, five cities in China—Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou, Wuxi, and Zhengzhou—were selected as test cities. They are well-developed and have a deeper understanding of American brand products, which enhances customers’ understanding of the situational consumer animosity and purchase intention investigated in this study. The author administered a survey to potential buyers and existing smartphone users by disseminating questionnaires through the mail. The survey primarily targeted employees from manufacturing, service, and import-export trading companies. The poll began in early September 2024 and will conclude by the end of November 2024, lasting 3 months. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, 320 were collected, and 10 invalid questionnaires were discarded, yielding 310 valid replies suitable for analysis, which represents an efficient response rate of 88.5% (Table 1).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Reliability and Validity

4.1.1. Reliability

Concerning the criteria for reliability acceptance values, most researchers conform to the subsequent classification system (Kline, 1998): A reliability coefficient greater than 0.90 is regarded as exceptional; a number near 0.80 is viewed as very good;

Table 1: Respondents’ portfolio

Variables	Sub-descriptors	Number (n=310)	Percentage
Gender	Male	182	58.7
	Female	128	41.3
Age	18~25	44	14.2
	26~35	121	39
	36~45	84	27.1
	46~55	50	16.1
	56~65	11	3.5
Education	Below junior high school	18	5.8
	High School	31	10
	Vestibule School	27	8.7
	Junior college	97	31.3
	University	113	36.5
	Master	20	6.5
	Doctor	4	1.3
Location	Shanghai	104	33.5
	Hangzhou	44	14.2
	Wuxi	98	31.6
	Zhengzhou	41	13.2
	Beijing	23	7.4
Brand Choice for Future Smartphone Purchase	Apple	70	22.6
	Samsung	4	1.3
	Nokia	4	1.3
	Huawei	166	53.5
	OPPO	17	5.5
	VIVO	16	5.2
	Mi	30	9.7
	Others	3	1

roughly 0.70 is categorised as moderate; and a coefficient above 0.50 signifies the minimum acceptable standard. The reliability acceptance threshold for individual dominant variables is 0.5, signifying that the factor loading of the measurement index surpasses 0.71.

This study conducted a reliability analysis of the acquired data using SPSS28, testing the reliability of each latent variable in the questionnaire. The results, presented in Table 2, indicate that the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for each component exceeded 0.7. The scale and questionnaire utilised in this study fulfill the study’s requirements.

4.1.2. Validity

The validation factor analysis conducted in this study utilising AMOS28 produced the subsequent results: $\chi^2 = 2883.082$, $df = 1482$, $\chi^2/df = 1.945$. The χ^2/df ratio must range from 2 to 5, as per Carmines and McIver (1981); the chi-square to degrees of

Table 2: Reliability test of latent variables

Variables	Items	Cronbach's α
SCA	EA1	0.861
	EA2	
	EA3	
	EA4	
	EA5	
	EA6	
	WA1	
	WA2	
	WA3	
	WA4	
	WA5	
	WA6	
	PA1	
	PA2	
	PA3	
	PA4	
PCI	CA1	0.865
	CA2	
	CA3	
	CA4	
	PCP1	
	PCP2	
	PCP3	
	PCP4	
	PCE1	
	PCE2	
	PCE3	
	PCC1	
	PCC2	
	PCC3	
	PCT1	
	PCT2	
ACI	PCT3	0.852
	ACI1	
	ACI2	
	ACI3	
MII	ACI4	0.938
	MIC1	
	MIC2	
	MIC3	
	MID1	
	MID2	
	MID3	
	MIP1	
	MIP2	
	MIP3	
CCI	MIW1	0.911
	MIW2	
	MIW3	
	CMI1	
	CMI2	
	CMI3	
ECI	CMI4	0.960
	CMI5	
	CMI6	
	AMI1	
PI	AMI2	0.888
	AMI3	
	AMI4	
	PIA1	
	PIA2	
	PIA3	
	PIA4	
	PIA5	

freedom ratio should not exceed 3. In this study, $\chi^2/df = 1.945$, which is less than 2, signifying excellent model fit. RMSEA = 0.055 (an RMSEA value between 0.05 and 0.08 signifies a reasonable fit between the data and the model); AGFI = 0.739; GFI = 0.766; CFI = 0.900; these metrics indicate that the fit of the research data and the validation factor analysis model is adequate. Table 3 presents the adaptation index of this model.

4.1.2.1. Convergence validity test

This study involved the removal of EA4, EA5, and EA6 from the economic animosity (EA) facet, as well as WA1 and WA6 from the war animosity (WA) facet. The remaining items were subsequently reordered, and the facet and title items utilised in the data analysis were compiled.

The AMOS 28 software does the convergence validity test, resulting in Table 4. A composition reliability of 0.7 is deemed satisfactory (Hair, 1977); Fornell and Larcker (1981) propose values exceeding 0.6; they also assert that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should surpass 0.5.

4.1.2.2. Determinant validity test

Hair et al. (2006) and Hair et al. (2014) assert that the validity of discrimination is evaluated by ascertaining whether the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of the relevant component surpasses the correlation coefficient between that factor and other factors. Table 5 indicates that the arithmetic square root of the AVE value for each item surpasses the correlation coefficient with other variables, implying enhanced discriminant validity of the scale.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

Chinese consumers' comprehensive perception and emotional representation of Chinese customers regarding the United States' National Brand is as follows (Figure 6). The mean values of the perceived country image, "Made In" image, and perceived category image are 4.13, 4.25, and 4.24, respectively, all exceeding the median value of 4. This suggests that Chinese consumers' perceptions of the country image, "Made In" image, and perceived category image of the United States are marginally above average and remain in a positive state. The average values for the affected country image and emotional category image are 2.57 and 3.23, respectively, both below the median value of 4, indicating that Chinese consumers' perceptions of the affected country image and emotional category image concerning the United States are inadequate and unfavourable. The impacted country's assessment of the US's country image is significantly low, at 2.57, well below the average, indicating that Chinese consumers possess a predominantly negative view of the United States.

The mean scores of Chinese consumers' perceived country image of the US National Brand across four dimensions—politics, economy, history/culture, and technology—are 3.87, 4.49, 3.55, and 4.68, respectively. This suggests that Chinese consumers' perception of the United States' National Brand is above the median in the economy and technology dimensions, yet below the median in the politics and history/culture dimensions (Figure 7).

Table 3: Model adaptation index

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
Second-order factor model	2883.082	1482	1.945	0.766	0.739	0.900	0.049
Recommended value	The smaller the better	The bigger the better	<5	>0.80	>0.80	>0.9	<0.08

Table 4: Scale convergence validity analysis table

Facets	Items	Standard-factor loading	SMC	1-SMC	CR	AVE
EA	EA1	0.611	0.373	0.627	0.779	0.549
	EA2	0.654	0.428	0.572		
	EA3	0.919	0.845	0.155		
WA	WA2	0.685	0.469	0.531	0.886	0.569
	WA3	0.921	0.848	0.152		
	WA4	0.851	0.724	0.276		
	WA5	0.765	0.585	0.415		
PA	PA1	0.735	0.540	0.460	0.884	0.657
	PA2	0.853	0.728	0.272		
	PA3	0.866	0.750	0.250		
	PA4	0.781	0.610	0.390		
CRA	CRA1	0.889	0.790	0.210	0.863	0.614
	CRA2	0.777	0.604	0.396		
	CRA3	0.777	0.604	0.396		
	CRA4	0.675	0.456	0.544		
ACI	ACI1	0.755	0.570	0.430	0.870	0.692
	ACI2	0.921	0.848	0.152		
	ACI3	0.812	0.659	0.341		
PCP	PCP1	0.656	0.430	0.570	0.809	0.517
	PCP2	0.799	0.638	0.362		
	PCP3	0.758	0.575	0.425		
	PCP4	0.65	0.423	0.578		
PCE	PCE1	0.843	0.711	0.289	0.788	0.556
	PCE2	0.645	0.416	0.584		
	PCE3	0.736	0.542	0.458		
PCC	PCC1	0.821	0.674	0.326	0.851	0.657
	PCC2	0.866	0.750	0.250		
	PCC3	0.739	0.546	0.454		
PCT	PCT1	0.812	0.659	0.341	0.876	0.703
	PCT2	0.901	0.812	0.188		
	PCT3	0.799	0.638	0.362		
MIC	MIC1	0.894	0.799	0.201	0.927	0.809
	MIC2	0.921	0.848	0.152		
MID	MIC3	0.883	0.780	0.220	0.840	0.641
	MID1	0.844	0.712	0.288		
	MID2	0.888	0.789	0.211		
MIP	MID3	0.649	0.421	0.579	0.917	0.787
	MIP1	0.823	0.677	0.323		
	MIP2	0.923	0.852	0.148		
MIW	MIP3	0.912	0.832	0.168	0.883	0.715
	MIW1	0.857	0.734	0.266		
	MIW2	0.879	0.773	0.227		
CCI	MIW3	0.799	0.638	0.362	0.925	0.713
	CMI1	0.719	0.517	0.483		
	CMI2	0.855	0.731	0.269		
	CMI3	0.913	0.834	0.166		
	CMI4	0.891	0.794	0.206		
ECI	CMI5	0.831	0.691	0.309	0.955	0.841
	AMI1	0.929	0.863	0.137		
	AMI2	0.981	0.962	0.038		
	AMI3	0.902	0.814	0.186		
	AMI4	0.852	0.726	0.274		
PI	PIA1	0.607	0.368	0.632	0.885	0.609
	PIA2	0.741	0.549	0.451		
	PIA3	0.864	0.746	0.254		
	PIA4	0.86	0.740	0.260		
	PIA5	0.8	0.640	0.360		

Table 5: Scale determination validity

	SCA	CCI	MII	ACI	PCI	ECI	PI
SCA	0.776						
CCI	-0.009	0.844					
MII	-0.003	0.054***	0.924				
ACI	-0.055***	0.248	0.156	0.832			
PCI	0.002**	0.153	0.071	0.198**	0.857		
ECI	-0.251	0.138**	0.473	0.194	0.423	0.917	
PI	-0.392	0.062	0.354	0.143	0.223	0.152***	0.780

Chinese consumers assign average scores of 4.55 for innovation, 4.27 for design, 4.02 for reputation, and 4.17 for technology to the “Made In” image of the United States’s National Brand. This indicates that the perception of the United States National Brand among Chinese customers is superior to the median across all four dimensions: innovation, design, reputation, and technology. The innovation level is at its peak, while the reputation level is at its nadir (Figure 8).

4.3. Path Analysis and Hypotheses

The author performs bootstrapping by sampling 5000 times to obtain the path analysis and hypothesis test results of the structural model, as cited in Hair et al. (2014), with the results displayed in Table 6.

As can be seen from the above table, under the significance level of Alpha = 0.05, SCA negatively affects ACI, H1 confirmed; SCA has no effect on PCI, H2 confirmed; SCA has no significant impact on MII, H3 confirmed; SCA has no significant effect on CCI, H4 is confirmed. ACI has a significant impact on PCI, which is inconsistent with H5; CCI has a significant impact on MII, MII has a significant positive impact on PCI, and H6 is partly confirmed. The influence of ACI on ECI is not significant, H7 confirmed; MII has no significant influence on ECI, which is inconsistent with H8; MII has no significant influence on PI; PCI has no significant effect on PI, ACI has a significant impact on PI, H9 confirmed; CCI has a significant influence on ECI; ECI has a significant impact on PI; CCI has a significant impact on PI, then hypothesis H10 is partially confirmed.

4.4. Mediation Effect

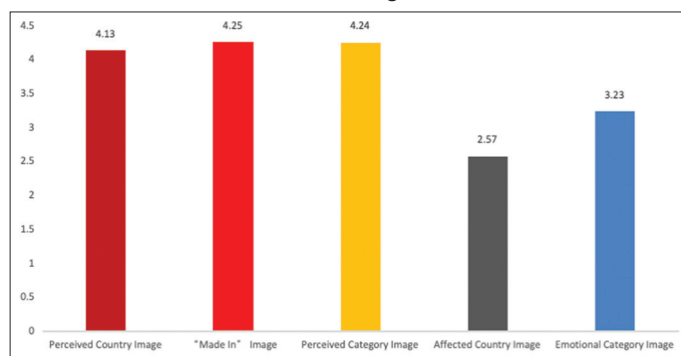
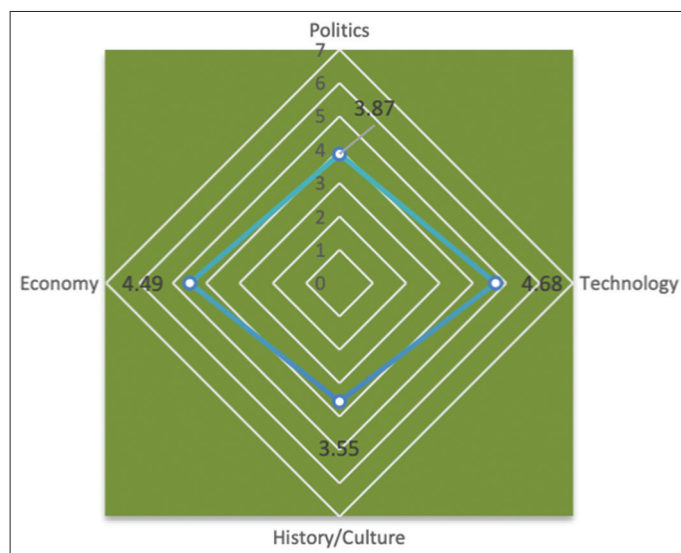
4.4.1. The mediating effect of MII on the connection between CCI and PCI

The author uses AMOS28 software to rebuild the two-factor causal effect model, bootstrapping sampling 5000 times, and path analysis with an alpha level of 0.05 to look at the direct and indirect effects of the Cognitive Category Image (CCI) on the Perceived Country Image (PCI) to test the idea that the “Made In” Image (MII) plays a big role in the relationship between the Cognitive Category Image (CCI) and the Perceived Country Image (PCI) (Figure 9).

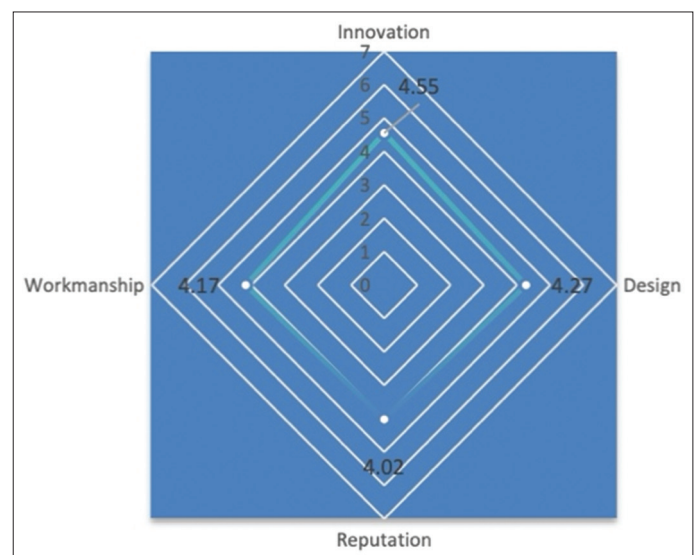
Table 6: Significance test of path coefficient of structural model

Structural model path	Path coefficients	S.E.	C.R.	P-value	Hypothetical test results
SCA \rightarrow ACI	-1.38	0.323	-4.293	***	Significant
SCA \rightarrow PCI	0.464	0.285	1.629	0.103	Not significant
SCA \rightarrow MII	0.11	0.311	0.352	0.725	Not significant
CCI \rightarrow MII	0.653	0.055	11.928	***	Significant
SCA \rightarrow CCI	-0.326	0.513	-0.635	0.526	Not significant
ACI \rightarrow PCI	0.171	0.065	2.654	0.008	Significant
MII \rightarrow PCI	0.561	0.071	7.89	***	Significant
ACI \rightarrow ECI	0.109	0.139	0.786	0.432	Not significant
PCI \rightarrow ECI	0.419	0.939	0.446	0.656	Not significant
CCI \rightarrow ECI	0.23	0.096	2.383	0.017	Significant
MII \rightarrow ECI	0.116	0.569	0.205	0.838	Not significant
ECI \rightarrow PI	0.151	0.039	3.878	***	Significant
CCI \rightarrow PI	0.225	0.043	5.284	***	Significant
MII \rightarrow PI	0.941	0.531	1.773	0.076	Not significant
PCI \rightarrow PI	-1.225	0.898	-1.364	0.172	Not significant
ACI \rightarrow PI	0.349	0.134	2.604	0.009	Significant

Bootstrapping sampling 5000 times, the test type is a double-tailed test, and the significance level Alpha=0.05

Figure 6: Chinese consumers' overall perception of the US national brand image**Figure 7:** Chinese consumers' perceived country image of United States's national brand

The results of AMOS's path analysis and hypothesis testing are presented in Table 7. It indicates that the cognitive category image (CCI) exerts a substantial positive influence on the "Made In" image (MII) at an alpha level of 0.05. The effect size is 0.055, the confidence interval is 11.980, and the P-value is 0.001.

Figure 8: Chinese consumers' "Made In" image of the United States's national brand

MII significantly influences the PCI (S.E.=0.097, C.R.=6.179, $P<0.001$). No correlation exists between CCI and PCI (S.E.=0.053, C.R.=-0.20, $P=0.842$). The "Made In" image (MII) serves as a comprehensive link between the Cognitive Category Image (CCI) and the Perceived Country Image (PCI). Moreover, the total effect, direct effect, and indirect effect derived from the analysis are utilized for evaluation, with the total effect quantified at 0.384, suggesting the potential presence of an indirect effect. The indirect effect is 0.393, signifying the presence of an intermediary influence. The direct effect $p = .839$, which exceeds 0.005, is not significant, showing a complete mediating effect. From the above, we can see that the Cognitive Category Image (CCI) indirectly affects the Perceived Country Image (PCI) through the mediator variable of "Made In" Image (MII), and the mediating effect exists and is a complete mediating effect.

4.4.2. The mediating effect of ECI on the connection between CCI and PI

The authors examine whether Emotional Category Image (ECI) mediates the relationship between Cognitive Category Image

(CCI) and Purchase Intention (PI). They employ AMOS28 software to construct a two-factor causal mediation model, conduct bootstrapping sampling 5000 times, and perform path analysis at a significance level of Alpha = 0.05 to examine the direct and indirect effects of Cognitive Category Image (CCI) on PI (refer to Figure 10).

Table 8 indicates that the cognitive category image (CCI) exerts a substantial positive effect on the emotional category image (ECI) at the 0.05 level (S.E.=0.063, C.R.=8.393, $P<0.001$). ECI had a beneficial impact on PI (S.E.=0.037, C.R.=4.663, $P<0.001$),

indicating a substantial effect. CCI exerts a beneficial influence on PI (S.E.=0.046, C.R.=5.586, $P<0.001$).

Moreover, the total effect, direct effect, and indirect impact derived from the analysis are utilised for evaluation, with the total effect quantified at 0.346, suggesting the potential presence of an indirect effect. The indirect effect is 0.091, signifying the presence of an intermediary influence. The direct effect, with a P-value below 0.001, is significant, indicating it is a constituent of the mediating effect. The evidence indicates that the CCI exerts an indirect influence on the PI via the ECI variable. A mediating

Table 7: Single factor mediating effect test 1

Structural model paths	Path coefficients	S.E.	C.R.	P-value	Hypothetical test results
CCI \rightarrow MIIw	0.658	0.055	11.980	***	Significant
MII \rightarrow PCI	0.598	0.097	6.179	***	Significant
CCI \rightarrow PCI	-0.011	0.053	-0.20	0.842	Not significant

Table 8: Single factor mediating effect test 2

Structural model paths	Path coefficients	S.E.	C.R.	P-value	Hypothetical test results
CCI \rightarrow ECI	0.528	0.063	8.393	***	Significant
ECI \rightarrow PI	0.172	0.037	4.663	***	Significant
CCI \rightarrow PI	0.256	0.046	5.586	***	Significant

Figure 9: Single factor mediation model 1

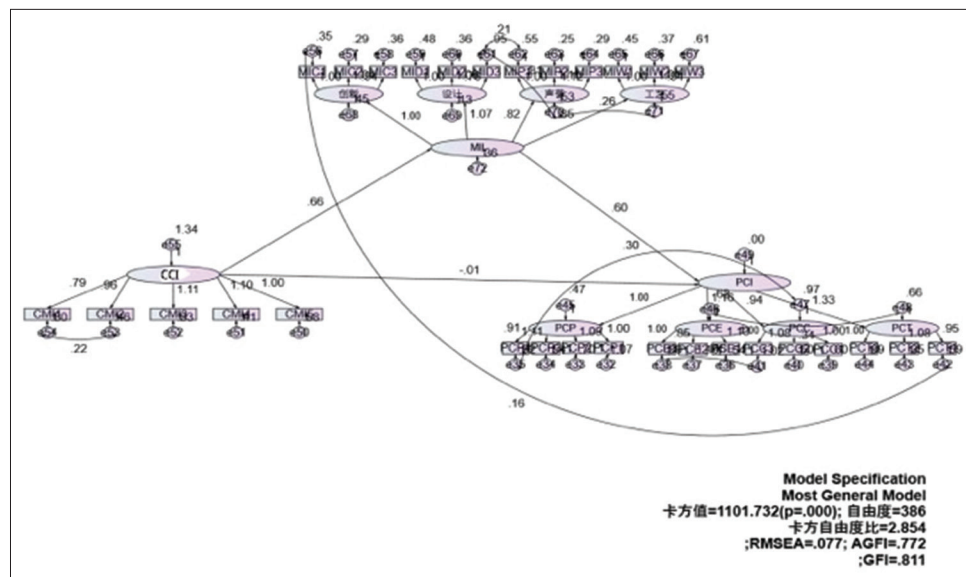


Figure 10: Single factor mediation model 2

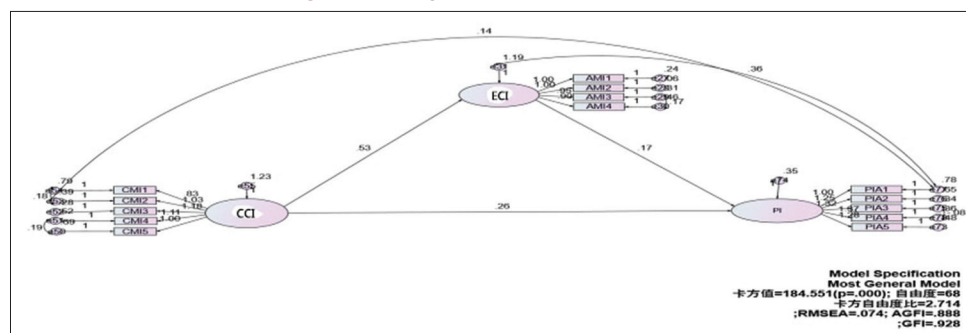


Table 9: Summary of hypotheses testing results

Hypotheses	Hypothetical contents	Hypothetical test results
H ₁	Situational consumer animosity negatively affects the image of effective country image.	Support
H ₂	Situational consumer animosity (SCA) does not influence the perceived country image (PCI).	Support
H ₃	Situational consumer animosity (SCA) does not influence the “Made In” image (MII).	Support
H ₄	Situational consumer animosity (SCA) exerts no influence on cognitive category image (CCI).	Support
H ₅	The affective country image (ACI) does not affect the perceived country image (PCI).	Not Support
H ₆	The “Made In” image (MII) serves as a mediator between the cognitive category image (CCI) and the perceived country image (PCI).	Support
H ₇	The affective country image (ACI) has no impact on the emotional category image (ECI).	Support
H ₈	The “Made In” image (MII) exerts a beneficial influence on the emotional category image (ECI).	Not Support
H ₉	The affective country image (ACI) positively affects consumers’ purchase intention (PI).	Support
H ₁₀	Emotional category image (ECI) plays a mediating role in the relationship between cognitive category image (CCI) and purchase intention (PI).	Support

effect exists, and it constitutes a component of the mediating effect.

4.5. Conclusions

The findings of the data analysis indicate that the conclusions of hypotheses testing are presented in Table 9.

5. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study uniquely integrates the effects of situational consumer animosity on national brand image (including three tiers and two aspects) and consumer purchase intentions within the context of the US-China trade war. This research primarily offers two contributions to the theoretical community:

5.1.1. Expanded the ABC attitude model and the application of attitude theory in the research field of national brand

This study confirms that the “Made In” image serves as a mediating factor between the cognitive category image and the perceived nation image within the smartphone product category. The results substantiate the Revised Halo-Summary Construct Effect Model posited by Yiweng Yang (2017). This indicates that in the context of smartphone purchases, a product category with significant consumer involvement, the national brand has a comprehensive impact; specifically, the interrelation among the three tiers of the

national brand is as follows: Cognitive Category Image → “Made In” Image → Perceived Country Image.

This investigation also finds that the affective country image significantly influences the perceived country image. This finding does not substantially correspond with the research conducted by Ruijuan Wu (2015). This suggests that Chinese consumers adversely affect their nation’s political democracy, stability, history, and culture due to the hostility towards the United States stemming from the US-China trade war. Their cognitive assessment is minimal or even detrimental. The affective country image influences the perceived country image, serving as a significant enhancement and expansion of the Revised Halo-Summary Construct Effect Model.

In conclusion, amidst the US-China trade war, a unique economic phenomenon between the nations, the primary level of National Brand image, Affective Country Image, and Perceived Country Image are not entirely independent or unrelated. Consumers diminished their Perceived Country Image of the US via Affective Country Image, which will influence the National Brand image at the aggregate national level.

5.1.2. Extended the revised Halo-Summary effect of theoretical deepening and practical application in the field of national brand research

This study advanced and refined the Revised Halo-Summary Construct Effect Model by Yiweng Yang (2017), incorporated Affective Country Image into the overall national brand, enhanced the national brand into three levels and two dimensions as a cohesive framework, and established a new theoretical model.

This model, based on Ruijuan Wu’s (2015) research, incorporates the “Made In” image into the National Brand Image, conducting a thorough investigation of consumer animosity’s impact on the national brand image across three tiers and two dimensions. This model represents a significant theoretical advancement in the examination of consumer animosity towards National Brand Image, hence enhancing and deepening the analysis of National Brand Image and Purchase Intention in contexts characterised by unique circumstances and backgrounds.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The managerial and practical contributions of this study also have two levels, macro level, and micro level, as follows:

5.2.1. At the macro level, nations and governments must employ trade wars prudently to cultivate and sustain the national brand and its reputation

A trade war is a ‘double-edged sword’ that will adversely affect the reputation of established national brands and significantly hinder the promotion of these brands and products in foreign markets. Product category images significantly contribute to national branding, necessitating government support for categories that embody the nation’s brand identity. This support is essential for entering foreign markets and for fostering, managing, and sustaining both the cognitive and emotional perceptions of consumers abroad regarding that specific category. A trade war is

a ‘double-edged sword’ that will not only damage the reputation of established national brands but also adversely affect the promotion of these brands and products in foreign markets.

5.2.2. At the micro level, industries and organisations should implement effective strategies and marketing to enhance cognitive and emotional category images

During the Trump administration, it is inevitable that temporary and intense macro-level economic, military, political, and cultural events will occur between nations. However, specific industries and enterprises can analyse and comprehend the dynamics of situational consumer animosity to gain insights into developmental trends. By implementing effective strategies and marketing tactics, they can engage consumers appropriately and foster profound trust and emotional connections between brands, products, and consumers, thereby mitigating significant impacts on brand reputation, credibility, and sales. Effective communication at the consumer level, utilising strategic marketing approaches, can foster profound trust and emotional connections between brands, products, and consumers, thereby enhancing the cognitive and emotional perception of the category and mitigating significant repercussions on brand reputation, prestige, and sales.

6. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has some limitations, and the authors propose recommendations for further research to mitigate them as follows:

This paper has analysed non-student samples from Shanghai, Hangzhou, Wuxi, Beijing, and Zhengzhou; nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that these samples include inherent limitations, despite their origin in mainland China and representation of diverse consumer demographics across the country. In the future, samples should be collected from other regions of China, including Guangdong, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, to ascertain whether their perspectives align with this paper. This study also examined the categories of high-intervention products. Future studies may focus on constrained product purchase decisions and experiential product purchase decisions.

This study exclusively examines Chinese customers’ animosity towards the U.S. and their evaluation of the brand’s image. In the future, we can investigate the cognition and emotions of American customers regarding their animosity towards China and their perception of China’s national brand. Subsequently, the research findings will be compared, integrated, and summarised. This will ensure that research on situational consumer animosity and national brand image theory remains pertinent.

Currently, following nine rounds of negotiations, the trade conflict between China and the United States is exhibiting indications of abatement. The animosity of Chinese consumers towards the United States is not severe. A questionnaire survey was employed to gather data for this investigation. In the future, an experimental design methodology may be employed to investigate the influence of positive and negative emotions of Chinese consumers on

consumer animosity and national brand image, as well as the impact of these emotions on consumer decision-making when both factors peak simultaneously.

This study only examines the adverse effects of consumers’ negative emotions (consumer hostility) on national brand image and purchase intentions and behaviours. Future research may examine consumer affinity, which pertains to how consumers make decisions when good sentiments towards a specific country coexist with consumer hostility, resulting in a contradictory state of “rolling in the deep.” This issue warrants additional investigation in a subsequent study.

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