

## How Do Controversial Foreign Country Images Affect Consumers?

### Abstract

Research shows that controversial political-economic, social, and environmental country images (COIs) affect consumer responses to foreign products. This study adds to the existing evidence by examining the contingent role of subjective country knowledge and (domestic vs. foreign) COI congruence in foreign COI relationships with two major determinants of country-driven (anti-)consumption: foreign product judgments and consumer animosity. The findings draw on survey data (N = 400) on Spanish consumers' views of China and Chinese apparel products. The results indicate that higher subjective knowledge about social and environmental issues (negatively) affecting the foreign country lead to attenuated (positive) relationships between such COIs and foreign product judgments. Further, more negative foreign product judgments result from incongruent COIs—that is, when consumers are more critical of the foreign than of their home country in political-economic, social, and environmental areas. Instead, there is limited support for the hypotheses involving consumer animosity as an outcome. Implications for theory, policy, and practice are discussed.

**Keywords:** country images, foreign product judgments, consumer animosity, subjective knowledge, congruence.

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## 1. Introduction

Country-of-origin (COO) research has contributed greatly to clarifying how different country cues affect consumers in domestic and overseas markets (Barbarossa et al., 2018; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). There is consensus that COO information affects people's consumption (Josiassen & Harzing, 2008) and anti-consumption of foreign products (Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos, 2021). However, COO effects have not been fully elucidated yet; important questions remain regarding “how, when, and why” COO information becomes (more) influential (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Insch et al., 2017; Liefeld 2004), particularly in relation to negative or controversial issues affecting consumer views of foreign countries and products. The latter is important in open Western economies, where emerging manufacturing countries and industries have been the subject of much public criticism regarding questionable policies and practices (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Dekhili et al., 2021; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

The literature differentiates, at least, three mechanisms by which COO cues can affect an individual's (anti-)consumption decisions (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999): cognitions (i.e., beliefs or images) (Diamantopoulos et al., 2020; Kock et al., 2019), affect (i.e., feelings or emotions) (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007), and norms (i.e., rules regarding how to behave) (Cilingir & Basfirinci, 2014; Fernández-Ferrín et al., 2015). The salience and expected outcomes of cognitive, affective, and/or normative COO constructs (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009) should vary across consumption vs. anti-consumption decisions, consumer-product country pairs (e.g., Western consumers-controversial Eastern countries), and specific product categories (e.g., apparel products) (Gürhan-Canli et al., 2018; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007).

Recent research at the intersection of the country-of-origin (COO) and anti-consumption fields has shown that macro COO cognitions, such as political-economic, social, and environmental country images (COIs), have differentiated effects on consumer responses to products from a controversial foreign country—that is, on “micro” foreign product judgments and “macro” consumer animosity (García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015). Micro foreign product judgments—i.e., consumer beliefs/images of specific foreign-made products such as China-made apparel (Josiassen et al., 2013; Orbaiz & Papadopoulos, 2003)—and consumer animosity—i.e., feelings of antipathy and enmity toward a controversial foreign country (Klein et al., 1998; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007)—have been shown to be, respectively, two major cognitive and affective influencers of country-driven (anti-)consumption (Diamantopoulos et al., 2020; Nijssen, & Douglas, 2004). Our study extends this stream of research by shedding light on two research questions: First, does consumers’ knowledge of controversial issues affecting a foreign country (i.e., political-economic, social, and environmental ones) alter the micro and macro effects of COIs on consumer responses to the COO and its products and, if so, how? And second, can the congruence (i.e., perceived similarity or difference) between foreign and domestic COIs help refine understanding of COI effects on (anti-)consumption of foreign products?

By addressing these questions, we contribute to ongoing debates that seek to push the boundaries of COI research (e.g., Diamantopoulos et al., 2020; Gürhan-Canli et al., 2018; Kock et al., 2019). First, our work provides important insights into the conceptualization of (macro, cognition-based) COIs along horizontal and vertical axes (Lascu et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2019; Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). Horizontally, we argue for an encompassing delineation of COI in terms of (more researched) political-economic and (less researched) social and environmental dimensions (Dekhili et al., 2021; García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015; Lala et al., 2008), and add knowledge by considering their differential role as (macro) antecedents

of consumer responses to foreign products. Vertically, our findings offer novel insights into the differential consequences of macro COIs at the micro, cognitive level (foreign product judgments) and at the macro, affective level (three types of consumer animosity) (Gürhan-Canli et al., 2018; Kock et al., 2019). Second, this study advances understanding of consumer knowledge as a key cognitive condition that may modulate the effects of the various COI dimensions (Ha-Brookshire & Yoon, 2012; Lopez & Balabanis, 2020). Consistent with the nature of the COI dimensions considered, we delineate the role of consumer knowledge at the macro level (i.e., subjective knowledge of political-economic, social, and environmental country issues). This allows us to provide new evidence of the interactive effects (i.e., moderating and non-linear) of consumer knowledge of different country issues and the corresponding types of COIs on foreign product judgments and consumer animosity dimensions. Third, the relativization of foreign to domestic COIs sheds light on a new contextual/situational boundary condition for the effects of different COI dimensions (Lascu et al., 2020; Thøgersen et al., 2021). A novel analytical approach is adopted here that revises the evidence from congruence COO research (e.g., Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Insch et al., 2017; Josiassen, 2010) at the macro, country level. That is, we provide first evidence on the (in)congruence between domestic and foreign COIs for consumer responses to a controversial COO and its products. In a practical way, this research offers guidance for marketers and policy makers to fine-tune their marketing efforts to influence consumers through ‘macro’ (image and knowledge) extrinsic cues that pertain to the political-economic, social, and/or environmental conditions of foreign (origin) and domestic (importing) countries.

China and apparel are, respectively, the COO and product category of interest in this study. These have been controversial in Western markets, with criticism rooted in the offshoring of apparel manufacturing to China (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009) and the public visibility of poor working and environmental conditions in the Chinese apparel sector

(Dekhili et al., 2021; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Such criticism is also present in the Spanish market, where the prominence of Chinese textile stores coupled with increased consumer attention to the origin and manufacturing conditions of products, has turned China into a controversial COO of apparel (Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos, 2021).

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Table 1 presents a review of selected academic studies on COO effects, focusing on research that is most relevant to the three main contributions of our study (also included). The first group of listed studies analyze the effects of sustainability-related COIs, such as a country's environmental image. The second group examines the role of subjective knowledge, mostly at the micro product level. The third group addresses the role of congruence at different levels (e.g., product-country congruence). However, only our study offers an integrated account of (sustainability-related) macro COIs, subjective knowledge, and congruence.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

### **2.1 COO Influences: COI**

COI is one of the primary sources of COO influence on consumers, to the point that some authors use both terms interchangeably (Lu et al., 2016). Yet, the literature has identified different types of COO influences on consumer decision-making. Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) proposed a useful classification of COO constructs according to their underlying influence mechanism, thus differentiating between cognitive, affective, and normative COO factors and effects.

Normative COO influences are rooted in the perceived (im)morality of purchasing foreign-made products (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Consumers' personal norms regarding the avoidance of foreign products and preference for domestic ones have been largely studied under the concept of consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1989). More recently,

attention has also been directed to consumer preference for foreign over domestic products, framed in the form of consumer xenocentrism (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016). Both consumer ethnocentrism and xenocentrism reflect general (normative) consumer predispositions towards foreign and domestic products (Barbarossa et al., 2018), which are activated by specific COO cues (Cilingir & Basfirinci, 2014).

Affective COO influences derive from consumer feelings and emotions toward foreign countries (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). The COO literature identifies two contrasting (country-specific) affective states and responses: consumer animosity capturing negative/unfavorable feelings (Klein et al., 1998) and consumer affinity capturing positive/favorable feelings toward a specific foreign country (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Other researchers have taken a broader approach to country affect that encompasses both positive and negative consumer feelings towards a foreign country (e.g., Kock et al., 2019). In addition to country-specific responses, consumers may exhibit more general attitudes toward other foreign countries and products, such as the open-mindedness, appreciation, and positive disposition towards foreign countries, cultures, and products represented by the construct of consumer cosmopolitanism (Zeugner-Roth et al., 2015).

Cognitive COO influences originate from consumer beliefs or images about specific countries (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). As mentioned earlier, cognitive COI is arguably the most representative and widely studied source of COO influence on consumers (Dekhili et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2016). COI can be considered a holistic concept composed of “the total of all descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs one has about a particular country” (Martin & Eroglu, 1993: p. 193). Consumers may hold differentiated beliefs or images of specific foreign countries (i.e., foreign COIs), as well as of their home country (i.e., domestic COIs). Despite broad agreement on the cognitive nature of COI (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Kock et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2019), some researchers have argued for the consideration of both cognitive

and affective facets (Ma et al., 2022; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), thus thinking of COI more as a consumer's "attitude toward a country" (Heslop et al., 2004). Such different conceptualizations have been blamed for the lack of consensus on COI and its effects on consumers (Carneiro & Faria, 2016; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Yang et al., 2018). Macro COO cognitions and attitudes (i.e., country images and affect) may exert their influence via different paths, and be subject to different contingencies, in consumer evaluations of foreign products (Diamantopoulos et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2022).

Another source of fragmentation in the COI literature results from inter-study variation in the dimension(s) under study (Costa et al., 2016) and the level(s) of abstraction and measurement (Josiassen et al., 2013). A scheme has been proposed to organize the variety of COI measures/constructs along the "horizontal" and "vertical" axes of dimensions and levels, respectively (Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). The vertical distinction between COIs at different levels of abstraction ranges from general COI constructs (i.e., beliefs/images about the COO), through mixed product-country images (i.e., regarding all or different products from the COO) to more specific product images (i.e., a specific product or product category from the COO) (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009; Yang et al., 2018). Some authors explicitly differentiate between "macro" and "micro" COIs (Pappu et al., 2007; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011), respectively to represent general COI and product-country image constructs. The differentiation between macro and micro COIs is important, considering that consumers may hold separate, and potentially conflicting, beliefs about a foreign country and its products (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Given the specialization of some countries in certain industries or products, consumers may even form distinct (positive or negative) images about different product categories from the same COO (Carneiro & Faria, 2016; Costa et al., 2016). An illustrative example of the asymmetries between COI constructs at different or similar levels of generality is European and North American consumers' images of Colombia as a

country (poor), its coffee (excellent), and other product types (unknown or less desirable) (Andéhn et al., 2016; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Research shows that individuals may differently use country, product-country, and category-country COIs to form their product-related attitudes (Thøgersen et al., 2021). Overall, macro COIs help explain other micro image constructs that, in turn, predict (anti-)consumption intentions and behavior (Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). Considering the above, macro and micro COIs can be expected to have a distinct bearing on consumer responses to foreign products, thus representing different pieces of the ‘COO effects puzzle’.

With regard to the horizontal differentiation of dimensions of a country’s image, a great deal of attention has been directed at (macro) political and economic COIs (Costa et al., 2016; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Political-economic COIs are beliefs about the foreign country’s political and economic development, which can be used by consumers to infer the country’s ability to produce high- or low-quality products (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002). Further, studies that conceptualize COIs as cognitive-affective constructs typically incorporate ‘people’ or ‘social’ COI dimensions; that is, affective consumer evaluations of the COO and its people—e.g., likeability or friendliness traits (e.g., Heslop et al., 2004). The horizontal scope of macro COIs is thus broad and potentially encompasses political, economic, technological, cultural, social, natural, and environmental dimensions, among others (Lala et al., 2008; Lu et al., 2019). There is growing evidence that consumers’ social and environmental COIs—along with political-economic ones—can form their overall, macro COI evaluation of a foreign country and affect their (anti-)consumption decisions (Dekhili et al., 2021; García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015; Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). Importantly, people may have similar, different, or even opposite—and potentially conflicting—views of a foreign country depending on the specific COI dimension under consideration. For example, an individual may believe that a specific COO has a strong economy and stable political system, but that it suffers from poor



working conditions and environmental degradation. If treated in aggregate, the likely different outcomes of the various macro country judgments (e.g., political-economic, social, or environmental country perceptions) that make up a consumer's general COI would remain uncovered. All this requires a careful selection of the COI factors most likely to affect the outcomes and product categories under analysis (Carneiro & Faria, 2016; Thøgersen, et al., 2021).

In this study, COIs are viewed as cognitive constructs reflecting consumer beliefs (positive or negative) regarding foreign countries, not only in terms of affluence or political stability, but also on social and environmental grounds. This approach responds to recent calls for a broader understanding of COIs (Lu et al., 2019) to include a country's sustainability-related social and environmental images (Dekhili et al., 2021; Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). Importantly, macro (country-focused) COIs are clearly differentiated from micro (product-category) cognitions—the former as antecedents and the latter as an outcome.

## **2.2 COI Outcomes**

There is enough evidence in the COI literature to suggest that macro (general) COIs affect both consumption (Laroche et al., 2005) and anti-consumption behaviors (García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015), but indirectly through other COO mechanisms (e.g., Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011; Thøgersen et al., 2021). This study focuses on two important outcomes of macro COIs and close antecedents of consumer (anti-)consumption of foreign products: foreign product judgments (micro, cognitive image) and consumer animosity (macro, affective response).

### *2.2.1 Cognitive (Micro) COI Outcomes: Foreign Product Judgments*

Foreign product judgments address consumers' cognitive (micro) beliefs/images of the characteristics of specific foreign-made products, such as quality, reliability, craftsmanship,

and design (Orbaiz & Papadopoulos, 2003), and have a long tradition in the COO literature (see, e.g., Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). There is consensus that macro COI influences on (anti-)consumption are mediated by micro, foreign product judgments (Heslop et al., 2008; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Each type of macro COI, understood as a multifaceted concept (Pappu et al., 2007), can have an independent and different influence on (micro) foreign product judgments. Arguably, the most influential macro COI dimensions are those which can readily be associated with the manufacturing conditions (Roth & Romeo, 1992) and differentiating product characteristics (Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). Consumers' cognitive judgments of foreign-made textile products (the product category under analysis here), therefore, can be influenced by their political-economic, social, and environmental views of the COO (García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015).

### *2.2.2. Affective (Macro) COI Outcomes: Consumer Animosity*

Consumer animosity is an affective (macro) construct comprising feelings of antipathy and enmity toward a specific foreign country (Klein et al., 1998). An important taxonomy of consumer animosity is based on the 'stable vs. situational' and 'personal vs. national' dimensions (Jung et al., 2002). On the one hand, "stable animosity" is a consequence of historical conflicts (e.g., war, political, or economic tensions) and can be passed down from one generation to another; by contrast, "situational animosity" arises from a specific circumstance or event (Leong et al., 2008). On the other hand, "personal animosity" is thought to arise from personal experiences, whereas "national animosity" is based upon the perceived relationship between the home and the foreign country (Jung et al., 2002).

Consumer animosity is a country-specific construct (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007). Hence, its antecedents and consequences will vary for each specific pair of nations (Jung et al., 2002). This may be the reason why, compared to other COO constructs, relatively little research effort has been directed at the antecedents of consumer animosity (Fernández-Ferrín et al., 2015). A

review of published evidence reveals a variety of potential antecedents for consumer animosity: personal traits, such as nationalism (Mrad et al., 2013; Shoham et al., 2006), internationalism (Maher et al., 2010; Shoham et al., 2006), patriotism (Ettenson & Klein, 1999; Fernández-Ferrín et al., 2015), or dogmatism (Shoham et al., 2006); domestic country attitudes, such as concern about the national economy (Fernández-Ferrín et al., 2015); attitudes toward companies from the target country of animosity, such as firm reputation (Jiménez & San Martín, 2010); subjective perceptions of control (Leong et al., 2008); normative influences (Huang et al., 2010); group responsibility (Maher & Mady, 2010); demographics (Ettenson & Klein, 1999; Fernández-Ferrín et al., 2015); or external effects, such as economic hardship (Huang et al., 2010). The research reported here is interested in macro-macro effects between cognitive (country-focused) COIs and affective consumer animosity (García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015).

### **2.3. COI Contingencies**

Importantly, the authors examine the contingent role of subjective country knowledge and (domestic vs. foreign) COI congruence in foreign COI relationships with (micro) foreign product judgments and (macro) consumer animosity. Figure 1 provides the conceptual diagram of the tested associations.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

#### *2.3.1 Subjective Country Knowledge*

A plethora of consumer behavior research supports the view that knowledge is a major influencing factor at various steps of consumers' decision-making process (Oh & Abraham, 2016; Utkarsh & Agarwal, 2019). Different classifications of knowledge have been described, the most prominent being the distinction between perceived (subjective) knowledge and actual (objective) knowledge (Dursun et al., 2019; Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999). Usage or familiarity

with the knowledge domain can be considered a third knowledge type (Raju et al., 1995). The present study explores the contingent role of perceived (subjective) knowledge, which has been formally defined as “a consumer’s perception of the amount of information they have stored in their memory” (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999: p.59). Per this definition, subjective knowledge can refer to a variety of objects, such as brands, products, countries, or even specific country issues. Subjective knowledge has been shown to directly and indirectly influence consumer behavior (Raju et al., 1995; Utkarsh & Agarwal, 2019). Also, subjective knowledge tends to negatively correlate with the amount of external information search performed by the individual (Park et al., 1994; Raju et al., 1995). Therefore, individuals feeling themselves more knowledgeable about a certain issue may feel more confident in using the information they have already stored in their memory to make decisions (Schaefer, 1997).

Subjective knowledge in COO research has mostly referred to product or mixed product-country issues; such findings indicate that consumers with higher levels of product knowledge are less affected by COIs (Cilingir & Basfirinci, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2009). Yet, limited evidence exists about the role of subjective knowledge of (macro) country issues in consumer behavior (Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos, 2021). In contrast to most COO studies examining the effects of subjective knowledge, this study explores the role of subjective knowledge of (macro) country issues in political-economic, social, and environmental areas. These three areas are major sources of criticism against China and its apparel industry—the context of this study (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Kwon et al., 2020). Following the notion that knowledgeable individuals are more likely to use their stored information, higher knowledge levels are expected to strengthen the linkages from political-economic, social, and environmental COI factors to foreign product judgments. Such a horizontal distinction of COI factors is consistent with past research finding differentiated COI effects on cognitive foreign-product evaluations (García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015; Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021):

H1a: The effects of political-economic COI on foreign product judgments will be strengthened by the level of subjective knowledge of COI issues.

H1b: The effects of social COI on foreign product judgments will be strengthened by the level of subjective knowledge of COI issues.

H1c: The effects of environmental COI on foreign product judgments will be strengthened by the level of subjective knowledge of COI issues.

The literature provides little guidance on how subjective country knowledge can intervene in the relationships between COIs and consumer animosity. However, recent evidence shows that macro country cognitions can affect (overall) consumer animosity (Kock et al., 2019), which supports the existence of a country-level cognitive-affective hierarchy of effects (Diamantopoulos et al., 2020). Arguably then, consumers' level of perceived knowledge about macro country issues could affect the four subtypes of consumer animosity depicted by Jung et al. (2002)—i.e., stable, situational, personal, and national animosity. Situational animosity requires knowledge of the ongoing controversies affecting a foreign country, whereas stable animosity likely demands knowledge of historical conflicts and events (Lee et al., 2021). Also, situational animosity may evolve into stable animosity over time (Leong et al. 2008). On the 'personal vs. national' dimension, macro COI knowledge can be expected to affect national animosity owing to their alignment in measurement generality (Jung et al., 2002). Personal animosity may be also triggered by controversial country knowledge that consumers link to their direct personal experiences (Hoffmann et al., 2011).

Empirical research has identified conflicting results on how different COI dimensions affect consumer animosity (García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015). Hence, this study examines political-economic, social, and environmental 'COI x knowledge' effects on three of the four

possible subtypes of consumer animosity identified by Jung et al. (2002): national stable, national situational, and personal stable animosity.

H2a: The effects of political-economic COI on [(i) national stable, (ii) national situational, and (iii) personal stable] consumer animosity will be strengthened by the level of subjective knowledge of COI issues.

H2b: The effects of social COI on [(i) national stable, (ii) national situational, and (iii) personal stable] consumer animosity will be strengthened by the level of subjective knowledge of COI issues.

H2c: The effects of environmental COI on [(i) national stable, (ii) national situational, and (iii) personal stable] consumer animosity will be strengthened by the level of subjective knowledge of COI issues.

### 2.3.2. *COI (in)congruence*

COI research has almost exclusively focused on consumers' images of the foreign COO and their impacts on subsequent consumption decisions (Laroche et al., 2005; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). A plausible and unexplored underlying mechanism operating in COI effects is the dependency of consumers' evaluations of foreign COI issues on their own home country views; that is, the degree of congruence between domestic and foreign COIs. According to Maille and Fleck (2011, p. 79), congruence generally refers to two (or more) objects' matching, agreeing, being appropriate to, and being consistent with each other. These authors argue that congruence can be understood in two main ways: one based on the semantic link between entities (a relevancy approach), and the other based on the idea of one entity matching the expectations generated by another (an expectancy approach). COIs are often considered schemas synthesizing a person's knowledge about a country (Lascu et al., 2020).

Arguably then, we tap mainly the relevancy dimension of congruence, by examining the correspondence of foreign COIs to the domestic COI schemas of knowledge.

Congruence theory (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955) suggests that alignment of different information cues would lead to congruence perceptions, preference, attitude change, and behavior. The postulates of congruence theory have been supported by COO studies, in addition to other well-known applications in the consumer behavior domain (see, e.g., Sirgy, 1982). Country-product (Chao, 2001; Josiassen, 2010) or country-brand matches (Chao et al., 2005; Essoussi & Merunka, 2007) have been considered to explore whether or not consumers perceive the COO to be congruent with the product (category)/brand under analysis (Insch et al., 2017; Josiassen, 2010). Overall, these findings support the notion that consumers judge foreign-made products more positively when congruency exists between the product/brand image and the COI (Chao, 2001; Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Inch et al., 2017).

The approach adopted here is somewhat different in that the focus is on congruence between two macro, country-level objects of similar nature (i.e., domestic vs. foreign COIs). Following congruency theory, congruence or matching levels of domestic and foreign COIs may be indicative of perceived closeness between countries, which should positively affect consumers' cognitive (micro) evaluation of foreign products (foreign product judgments). Conversely, low perceived congruency might promote 'outgroup' or 'other' views of the foreign country which, consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), would fuel consumer criticism against the COO and its products. We allow for differential (in)congruence effects on foreign product judgments across the three considered COI dimensions (i.e., political-economic, social, environmental COIs).

H3a: When foreign vs. domestic political-economic COIs are perceived as incongruent, foreign products will be judged worse.

H3b: When foreign vs. domestic social COIs are perceived as incongruent, foreign products will be judged worse.

H3c: When foreign vs. domestic environmental COIs are perceived as incongruent, foreign products will be judged worse.

Macro COIs depict country beliefs that could trigger consumer animosity (Jung et al., 2002). For example, consumers may conclude that incongruent COIs (e.g., foreign COIs falling short of domestic ones) are the result of unethical policies and practices, which is a triggering mechanism for consumer animosity (Hoffmann et al., 2011). COI (in)congruence can be expected to elicit situational animosity, which may evolve into stable animosity (Leong et al., 2008). It can also trigger national animosity, particularly when consumers perceive that the foreign country broadly threatens their homeland (e.g., the home country's international power) (Hoffmann et al., 2011). Instead, personal animosity can emerge from COI (in)congruences that generate foreign-country threats of personal or social importance to consumers (e.g., loss of manufacturing jobs) (Jung et al. 2002). Hence, we acknowledge the potential differential effects of (in)congruent (domestic vs. foreign) COIs across the 3x3 types of COI and consumer animosity dimensions under consideration.

H4a: When foreign vs. domestic political-economic COIs are perceived as incongruent, [(i) national stable, (ii) national situational, and (iii) personal stable] consumer animosity will be intensified.

H4b: When foreign vs. domestic social COIs are perceived as incongruent, [(i) national stable, (ii) national situational, and (iii) personal stable] consumer animosity will be intensified.

H4c: When foreign vs. domestic environmental COIs are perceived as incongruent, [(i) national stable, (ii) national situational, and (iii) personal stable] consumer animosity will be intensified.



### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Study Context and Sample**

The study context is important because COO effects are sensitive to the specific pair of “domestic-foreign” countries being considered (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007). Spain and China were respectively selected as the domestic (import) and foreign (origin) countries of interest, as a result of a preliminary qualitative study among 21 Spanish individuals. Participants for the qualitative part of the study were recruited using a snowball method initiated through the authors’ social connections. Potential interviewees were asked (1) if they would be willing to take part in a short interview on their consumption experiences of clothing products, and (2) if they would like to refer other people to the study. Actual interviewees had to meet a single criterion: being responsible for their own consumption decisions. They were asked about their most disliked COOs and their reasons for refusing to buy from such countries—both overall and specifically for apparel products. The majority identified China as the main target COO for the avoidance of textile products, which can be explained by the prominence of Chinese textile products in the Spanish market (Spanish Ministry of Industry and Competitiveness, 2016). Apparel stores are, in fact, one of the most frequent businesses started by Chinese immigrants in Spain. When asked about their motives for the avoidance of Chinese apparel products (sold in Chinese-owned stores), Spanish participants expressed negative affect toward this COO, as well as economic and (social and environmental) sustainability-related concerns. The latter is totally consistent with recent qualitative evidence of the unfavorable reputation and images of China in sustainability (Dekhili et al., 2021). All relevant topics from the qualitative interviews were considered in the questionnaire used to collect quantitative data.

The main survey sample consists of 400 adult respondents. Stratified sampling was performed to obtain representative data of the Spanish population in terms of age, gender, and

geographical distribution (i.e., proportional number of surveys from each Spanish province, relative to their population) (see Table 2). Participants were randomly selected, contacted, and interviewed by telephone until the target number of 400 completed questionnaires was achieved.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

### **3.2. Measures**

The questionnaire included self-report assessments of three COI dimensions (i.e., political-economic, social, and environmental COIs) about China and Spain, perceived knowledge levels about China in political-economic, social, and environmental areas, consumer animosity toward China, and foreign product judgments of Chinese apparel products (sold in Chinese-owned stores). All variables were measured on 11-point scales (from 0 to 10)—indicative of respondent's level of agreement and disagreement with the different statements.

Fourteen items were used to measure political-economic, social, and environmental COIs (five, four, and five items, respectively). Most measures were adapted from existing COI scales (i.e., Heslop et al., 2008; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Other COI items were derived from related theory bases, such as corporate environmental image (Chang & Fong, 2010; Chen, 2008), to capture consumers' social and environmental country views. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis on the different COI items showed that, for both the foreign and domestic COI scales, the political and economic items merge into the same factor, as observed in prior research (e.g., Diamantopoulos et al. 2020; Laroche et al., 2005; Pappu et al., 2007). Also, the analyses confirmed the separate dimensionality of social and environmental COIs. Subjective knowledge was measured using three items reflective of respondents' self-rated level of knowledge about China in politic-economic, social, and environmental social matters. The foreign product judgments scale comprises six items reflecting consumer perceptions of

workmanship, quality, technological advancement, design, durability, and value for money. These items were adapted from Klein et al. (1998) to focus on “Chinese apparel sold in Chinese-owned stores”; this helped to ensure the salience of the COO in respondents’ minds. The consumer animosity scale has eight items—six from Jung et al.’s (2002) scale to measure both national stable and personal stable animosity (three items each). Following Riefler and Diamantopoulos’s (2007) recommendations, two new context-specific items were derived from the qualitative analyses to measure national situational animosity. A detailed description of the measurement scales and items can be found in Appendix 1.

#### **4. Results**

Prior to analysis, we checked the reliability of the scales representing latent constructs (i.e., the three COI dimensions on both the foreign and domestic countries considered, three consumer animosity dimensions and foreign product judgments). All Cronbach’s alpha values were above 0.80, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability of multi-item scales (see Table 3).

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

##### **4.1 Subjective Knowledge Effects**

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to test the potential moderating role of subjective knowledge on the relationships of political-economic, social, and environmental COIs with foreign product judgments and consumer animosity. A SEM-based approach allows accounting for measurement error when testing moderation hypotheses (Kelava et al., 2008). To avoid misspecification problems, potentially resulting in spurious moderation effects (Ganzach, 1997), we consider both interaction and nonlinear quadratic terms of macro COIs and subjective knowledge in the analyzed SEMs. Centering is a recommended step to alleviate the risk of multicollinearity (e.g., Aiken & West, 1991), particularly important when accounting

for interaction and quadratic terms in SEM (Kelava et al. 2008). In this study, we mean-centered all predictor and moderating variables that constitute the interaction and quadratic terms (Aiken & West, 1991).

Equation (1) illustrates the proposed SEMs with one interaction and two quadratic effects:

$$\eta = \alpha + \gamma_1\xi_1 + \gamma_2\xi_2 + \omega_{12}\xi_1\xi_2 + \omega_{11}\xi_1^2 + \omega_{22}\xi_2^2 + \zeta, \quad (1)$$

where  $\eta$  stands for the latent outcomes of interest (foreign product judgments and three consumer animosity dimensions);  $\xi_1$  denotes the three latent constructs of political-economic, social, and environmental COIs (predictors), and  $\xi_2$  denotes the three corresponding constructs of subjective knowledge (moderators);  $\xi_1\xi_2$  represents the latent interaction term (i.e., the cross-product between COI and knowledge constructs); and  $\xi_1^2$  and  $\xi_2^2$  are respectively the latent quadratic COI and knowledge terms. Finally,  $\alpha$  is the latent intercept;  $\gamma_1$ ,  $\gamma_2$ ,  $\omega_{12}$ ,  $\omega_{11}$ ,  $\omega_{22}$  are the latent regression coefficients; and  $\zeta$  is the disturbance term.

Separate SEM models were specified for each latent outcome ( $\eta$ ) and specific type of COI and knowledge constructs ( $\xi_1$ ,  $\xi_2$ ,  $\xi_1\xi_2$ ,  $\xi_1^2$ , and  $\xi_2^2$ ). In accordance with the notation of hypotheses, Models 1a to 1c examine the independent, interactive, and quadratic effects of political-economic, social, and environmental COI and knowledge constructs on foreign product judgments. Models 2a(i) to 2c(i) examine such ‘COI and knowledge’ effects on national stable animosity; Models 2a(ii) to 2c(ii) on national situational animosity; and Models 2a(iii) to 2c(iii) on personal stable animosity. All these SEM models demonstrated an excellent level of fit to the data [scaled chi-square: S-B  $\chi^2$  significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; comparative fit index: CFI  $> 0.99$ ; root mean square of sample approximation: RMSEA  $< 0.07$ ]. The results of the twelve SEM models tested are shown in Table 4.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

The theory suggests that subjective knowledge and COIs (i.e., political-economic, social, and environmental ones) interact to predict foreign product judgments. However, contrary to our expectations, ‘COI x knowledge’ interactions were not statistically significant in Models 1a to 1c (see Table 4), which also include the quadratic terms of subjective knowledge and COI. These findings are not supportive of H1 (a to c). Interestingly though, the quadratic terms of both COI and knowledge were significant and negative in Models 1b and 1c (social and environmental issues), whereas only the quadratic term of COI was significant and negative in Model 1a (political-economic issues). For illustration purposes, Appendix 2 shows two-way interaction plots for models with significant curvilinear terms of COI and knowledge. Overall, the results indicate a concave (negatively attenuated) association of social and environmental ‘macro’ COIs and knowledge with foreign product judgments.

A separate set of models were run to address H2, that is, to assess if the level of subjective knowledge of COI issues affects the influence of (a) political-economic, (b) social, and (c) environmental COIs on (i) national stable, (ii) national situational, and (iii) personal stable consumer animosity. In line with H2b(i), a significant negative interaction is observed between social COI and knowledge, which reinforces the negative main effect of social COI on national stable animosity (see Table 4). The quadratic term of social COI was also significant and positive for the three types of consumer animosity examined here, which hints a slightly convex (positively oriented) association between social COI and consumer animosity. Finally, we detected a positive interaction between political-economic COI and knowledge on personal stable animosity. This finding supports H2a(iii) that political-economic COI and knowledge would synergistically influence consumer animosity. Overall, the evidence regarding H2 is limited and mixed, depending on the consumer animosity dimensions being examined and the types of COI and knowledge being used (see Table 5 for a summary of hypothesis testing results).

## 4.2 Congruence Effects

Cheung's (2009) Latent Congruence Model (LCM) was adopted to examine the potential role of the congruence between domestic and foreign COIs for foreign product judgments and consumer animosity. A major advantage of the SEM-based LCM approach over alternative methods for studying congruence (e.g., difference scores or polynomial regression) is that measurement error is partialled out (Cheung, 2009). Following the logic of LCM, our models examine the effects of congruence (difference) and control for the absolute (mean) level of political-economic, social, and environmental pairs of foreign and domestic COI constructs.

The measurement structure of our LCM models can be expressed as follows (Eqs. 2 and 3):

$$\eta_1 = \alpha_1 + \xi_1 + 0.5\xi_2 + \zeta_1, \text{ and} \quad (2)$$

$$\eta_2 = \alpha_2 + \xi_1 - 0.5\xi_2 + \zeta_2 \quad (3)$$

where  $\eta_1$  and  $\eta_2$  respectively represent the three types of domestic and foreign COIs (i.e., the first-order latent components of congruence);  $\xi_1$  denotes the Level (mean) of domestic COI and foreign COIs and is operationalized as a second-order latent factor that has fixed factor loadings of 1 on both  $\eta_1$  (domestic COI) and  $\eta_2$  (foreign COI);  $\xi_2$  denotes the Congruence (difference) between domestic COI and foreign COIs and is modeled as a second-order latent factor that has fixed factor loadings of 0.5 on  $\eta_1$  (domestic COI) and  $-0.5$  on  $\eta_2$  (foreign COI);  $\alpha_1$  and  $\alpha_2$  are the latent intercepts and  $\zeta_1$  and  $\zeta_2$  are the disturbance terms.

We extend the measurement LCM model to include four potential outcomes of level and congruence, as shown in Equation (4):

$$\eta_3 = \alpha_3 + \gamma_1\xi_1 + \gamma_2\xi_2 + \zeta_3 \quad (4)$$

where  $\eta_3$  stands for foreign product judgments and three consumer animosity dimensions as outcomes of level and congruence;  $\xi_1$  and  $\xi_2$  respectively denote the Level (mean) and

Congruence (difference) between domestic COI and foreign COIs;  $\alpha_3$  is the latent intercept and  $\zeta_3$  is the disturbance term.

Separate LCM models were specified depending on the specific type of latent outcome and type of domestic and foreign COIs (i.e., political-economic, social, and environmental ones). These twelve LCM models displayed good to excellent levels fit to the data [scaled chi-square: S-B  $\chi^2$  significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; comparative fit index: CFI between 0.905 and 0.982; root mean square of sample approximation: RMSEA  $< 0.07$ ]. Level and congruence constructs are thus modeled as correlated factors directly influencing foreign product judgments (Figure 2), and national stable, national situational, and personal stable consumer animosity (Figures 3 to 5).

The path coefficients reported in Figure 2 show that the absolute (mean) levels of domestic and foreign COI have significant positive effects on foreign product judgments in all three models of political-economic, social, and environmental COIs. As hypothesized, different (incongruent) levels of domestic and foreign COI were significantly, and negatively, associated with foreign product judgments in the three separate LCM models tested. That is, the greater the difference between domestic and foreign COIs (i.e., in favor of the domestic (importing) country), the worse the evaluation of products coming from the specific foreign (origin) country. These findings are considered to support H3 (a to c).

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Congruence findings for consumer animosity dimensions as outcomes are more complex. Contrary to our expectations, the levels of personal stable and national situational animosity were not significantly affected by (in)congruence, but by the mean (absolute level) of domestic and foreign COIs—a mixed, synergistic effect which is hard to disentangle (see Figures 3 to 5). However, in line with H4b(i), national stable animosity was found to be influenced by the level of incongruence between domestic and foreign social COIs. Thus, the evidence in support

for H4 is confined to the specific (antecedent-outcome) mix of social COIs and national stable consumer animosity (see Table 5 for detailed hypothesis testing results).

[INSERT FIGURES 3, 4 AND, 5 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

## 5. Discussion

After 40+ years of COO research, important questions remain regarding “how, when, and why” COI becomes an influencing factor for (anti-)consumption decisions (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Insch et al., 2017). Overall, the findings of this study shed light on potential mechanisms that underlie (macro) COI influences on two major cognitive and affective determinants of consumer responses to foreign products: (micro) foreign product judgments and (macro) consumer animosity (Diamantopoulos et al., 2020; Kock et al., 2019). More specifically, COI effects are found to vary according to the type of COI under study (i.e., political-economic, social, and environmental ones), and to be partially contingent on: (1) the level of subjective knowledge about country issues (mostly for foreign product judgments); and (2) the level of (in)congruence between domestic vs. foreign COI dimensions (for both foreign product judgments and consumer animosity). The models were tested with a sample of Spanish consumers and using China and apparel products respectively as the COO and product category targets (Dekhili et al., 2021; Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos, 2021).

### 5.1 Theoretical Implications

By concurrently examining three COI facets (i.e., political-economic, social, and environmental COIs) and two catalyst mechanisms (subjective country knowledge and domestic vs. foreign COI congruence), this study contributes to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of COI influences (Lu et al., 2019; Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). Theoretically, we contribute to COI research through conceptual delineation and differentiation of COI



components and their effects (MacInnis, 2011). Methodologically, it contributes to knowledge through refined SEM-based approaches for: (1) detection of moderation and/or non-linear effects of subjective country knowledge; and (2) modeling of (in)congruence effects between domestic and foreign COIs. Empirically, this article improves understanding of consumer responses to products from a controversial foreign country.

First, this study provides important insights into the conceptual understanding of COIs along horizontal and vertical axes (Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). Horizontally, our delineation of three COI types adds to the nascent but growing literature on the role of a country's sustainability-related social and environmental images as (macro) antecedents of consumer responses to foreign products (Dekhili & Achabou, 2015; García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015; Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). The findings confirmed that consumers hold differentiated social and environmental images of a controversial foreign country, but that political and economic images are highly intertwined—that is, they form a common COI construct (Lala et al., 2008; Lu et al., 2019). Vertically, the macro/micro differentiation adds to our understanding of relationships involved in the mediation of COI effects on country-driven (anti-)consumption (Insch et al., 2017; Thøgersen et al., 2021); that is, the study shed additional light on “macro” COI effects on “micro” foreign product judgments and “macro” consumer animosity (García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015). Overall, the findings demonstrate the importance of taking a differentiated look at COI effects both horizontally and vertically (Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021).

Second, this paper responds to recent calls for more research on cognitive factors affecting the effects of differentiated COIs (Hao et al., 2019; Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021) by delineating whether and how consumers' knowledge of different country issues alters the macro and micro effects of the corresponding types of COIs. Our findings support the idea that increasing consumer knowledge about issues (negatively) affecting a controversial foreign country would

attenuate the (positive) relationships between such COI types and “micro” foreign product judgments. The analyses substantiated the tentative assumptions of nonlinear (inverted U) associations of social and environmental types of subjective knowledge and COIs with foreign product judgments. The possibility of such nonlinear effects has been alluded to but not sufficiently researched in consumer knowledge and COI studies (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022; Hastak & Hong, 1991). In contrast, our findings suggest that subjective knowledge plays less of an intervening role between COIs and “macro” consumer animosity. As mentioned, the disaggregated analysis of macro constructs (i.e., subjective macro knowledge, COI, and consumer animosity) extends the extant literature by showing the dependence of [COI → foreign product judgments] and [COI → consumer animosity] links on the specific subdimensions under consideration.

Third, we shed light on congruence as a new contextual/situational condition for the effects of different COI dimensions (Lascu et al., 2020; Thøgersen et al., 2021). In doing so, this research investigated whether the relativization of foreign to domestic COIs helps refine understanding of COI effects on consumer responses to a controversial COO and its products. A novel analytical approach is adopted here that extends the evidence from congruence COO research (e.g., Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Josiassen, 2010; Insch et al., 2017) to the macro, country level; that is, the analysis of congruence effects between (macro) foreign and domestic COIs. Overall, the findings were consistent with congruence theory on “micro” foreign product judgments—i.e., more negative foreign product judgments can be expected from incongruent domestic vs. foreign COI comparisons across the three specific types of COIs examined here (Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Insch et al., 2017). Congruence findings on “macro” consumer animosity were less clear. Domestic vs. foreign COI congruence was expected to affect all types of consumer animosity, but this effect was not consistently found for any of the ‘COI-consumer animosity’ linkages. Again, this may be indicative of differences among the factors

influencing the emergence of different types of consumer animosity and of the need of disaggregated analyses.

Fourth, although the focus is on the nuances of COI influences, this study advances the COO literature by shedding light on two major cognitive and affective factors (i.e., foreign product judgments and consumer animosity) that have been shown to affect consumers' (anti-)consumption of foreign products (Diamantopoulos et al., 2020; García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015; Kock et al., 2019). As expected, our models accounted for a moderate to low proportion of the variation (20% or lower in most models) in foreign product judgments and consumer animosity dimensions. Such a modest prediction is consistent with the variety of known cognitive (e.g., meso-level country images), affective (e.g., emotions or risk), and normative (e.g., ethnocentrism or xenocentrism) antecedents of the two outcome variables in this study (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2011; Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos, 2021; Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). In sum, the findings reported here support the contention that macro COO cognitions moderately elicit (cognitive and affective) consumer responses to foreign countries and products.

## **5.2. Managerial and policy implications**

The current study aimed to extend the existing 'COO / (anti-)consumption' evidence in ways that maximize the usefulness of the findings as managerial and policy tools. First, the study focuses on sustainability-related COIs (i.e., social and environmental COIs) that have been largely neglected so far (see Lu et al., 2019). This is important considering the myriad of Western companies outsourcing their manufacturing to controversial Asian countries, coupled with increasing visibility and societal concern for sustainability in the West (Dekhili et al., 2021; Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos, 2021). The findings provided support for the expectation that consumers use a country's social and environmental images, along with

political-economic ones, as cues to their (anti-)consumption of foreign-made products. Hence, international producers and exporters from countries with unfavorable images (e.g., China) should disregard, de-emphasize, or develop measures to offset such competitive disadvantages in their target markets (Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021). Conversely, companies from countries with favorable images (e.g., Germany) could actively use such COO cues in marketing their products internationally (Hao et al., 2019).

Although past COO research has focused mainly on micro, product-related consumer knowledge, this work offers insights that extend the role of consumers' knowledge to the macro level (i.e., knowledge of different country issues). Globalization and information technologies make information about environmental and social policies available worldwide. Even people who are not the direct targets of country policies may be interested and knowledgeable about such sustainability issues. A knowledge enhancement strategy can be applied by different profit and non-profit organizations to moderately affect country-based (anti-)consumption through micro, cognitive influences—at least with respect to the provision of information on social and environmental matters affecting the foreign country. The findings warn that, when it comes to controversial COOs (e.g., China), increasing consumer knowledge of sustainability-related issues affecting the foreign country can attenuate the general positive association between COIs and foreign product judgments. Instead, an information provision strategy would be of limited use in alleviating or enhancing macro country animosity. In that case, the focus should be on questionable political and/or economic issues affecting consumer views of the foreign country (e.g., China's hunger for economic power and control), rather than on social and environmental country issues.

In a related vein, the analysis of (in)congruence effects between domestic and foreign COI issues draws marketers' and policy makers' attention to the contextualization of their information/knowledge provision efforts (about foreign COI issues) to domestic conditions—

namely, to the targeted consumers' domestic COI views. Domestic vs. foreign COI congruences have been an important contingency for COI effects on foreign product judgements, with a consistent impact across political-economic, social, and environmental COI dimensions. The positive contribution of absolute mean levels of (domestic and foreign) political-economic COIs to country animosity make it more complex to recommend how to manage such macro information. By contrast, incongruence between the domestic vs. foreign social COI led, as expected, to (national stable) country animosity. Such conflicting evidence is to be expected in the early stages of testing COI congruence effects but reveals how countries can suffer from tensions between the different sustainability goals (Ozanne et al., 2016), and between sustainability goals and political-economic ones. Further, the findings suggest the importance of treating each one of the specific COIs differently in policy communication affecting foreign-made products and domestic ones.

Overall, organizations should be interested in reducing incongruence effects when aiming to export their products and wanting them to be favorably evaluated (cognitively). They could do so by convincing potential consumers that as much care is put into political-economic, social, and environmental matters as the consumers' domestic country does. As for Chinese interests, the findings suggest the need to improve the country's social and environmental COI among Spanish consumers, rather than focusing on political-economic issues. As for Spanish interests, the country might want to prevent Spanish consumers from buying foreign products and prioritize "buying local". Two strategies are possible for influencing the cognitive and affective antecedents of country-based (anti-)consumption: improving the domestic COI and/or worsening the foreign COI. Considering that COIs are individually held beliefs, the literature suggests ways in which such images can be influenced, such as country branding and exports promotion (Gilmore, 2002; Hao et al., 2019). But, in fact, consumers' COIs and knowledge about macro COIs can be quite difficult to change and control (Samiee & Chabowski, 2021);

they are contingent on different messages and unexpected events, which makes them subjective rather than accurate representations (Gilmore, 2002). Arguably, a strategy involving actions to change a country's image may be viable, but not in the short to medium term (Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021).

### **5.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research**

This research suffers from some limitations that deserve attention. First, the cross-sectional survey design and single country-dyad nature of the data may have partly accounted for the observed findings. Longitudinal studies are called for in light of the turbulent political climate globally as of the year 2022 (e.g., Russia's war on Ukraine) that may increase the relative importance of political, war, or economic country reasons and images for consumer (anti-)consumption of foreign products. Also, rising geopolitical tensions on local, regional, and global scales (e.g., war, migration, or climate change) likely affects the levels of ethnocentrism and xenocentrism of consumers in Western markets, which warrants ongoing research into their role for consumer (anti-)consumption of foreign and domestic products (Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos, 2015; Nijssen & Douglas, 2004). Although our study sample is nationally representative and, thus, the results could be generalized to the Spanish population, only one country pair has been examined (i.e., Spanish consumers and China as the COO). The findings need to be confirmed by further evidence from other, developed and/or emerging, foreign (origin) and domestic (importing) country mixes. Overall, participants in the present study held better images of their home country, compared to the foreign COO. Therefore, it would be particularly interesting to test the hypotheses in the opposite 'country scenario' (i.e., where participants can be expected to hold more positive images of the foreign than of the domestic country). Also, future research extending the present findings to alternative country settings would shed further light on how geographical and cultural distance between the origin and importing country alters COI effects.

Second, the findings are restricted by the ‘product scenario’ of the present study; that is, only one product category has been considered (i.e., apparel products). Hence, this work needs to be replicated across other product categories, as well as focusing on specific products and brands—thus helping to validate and/or reconcile possible inconsistencies in the findings, and to discover further contingencies in the links between COIs and their outcomes. This is consistent with calls to consider the subset of COI factors most likely to affect consumer responses to the specific product category of interest, based on the assumption of important differences across product categories and specific products/brands from the same country (Lala et al., 2008; Carneiro & Faria, 2016; Thøgersen et al., 2021). For example, the foreign country’s technological development is probably particularly relevant for product categories such as cars or home appliances, whereas the COO’s environmental sustainability may be more important for product categories such as food or tourism products/services. Additional factors that may lead to higher levels of prediction from specific COI factors (e.g., social or environmental COIs) is the level of criticism about the COO (e.g., a social or environmental scandal) or the level of correspondence of image dimensions with important, differentiating product characteristics (e.g., socially or environmentally differentiated products) (Thøgersen et al., 2021).

A third and final limitation concerns the contingent/boundary conditions for COI effects proposed and tested in the present study. Arguably, the novelty of the hypothesized effects may have contributed to some non-significant or surprising findings that call for verification. For instance, the hypotheses that COIs and subjective macro knowledge would interactively affect foreign product judgments were not fully supported here. Also, congruence findings might suggest that Spanish consumers develop animosity feelings as a result of a congruent (similar) evaluation of China to Spain in political-economic terms. Additional replication and extension studies are needed to validate or rule out the existing research questions and hypotheses.

Researchers should examine the interactive effects of COIs and knowledge not only at the macro (country) level, but also at the meso (industry, firm) and micro (product, brand) levels. Alternative methods would also help clarify and refine understanding of congruence effects between domestic and foreign COIs. In sum, further research is warranted to enrich our understanding of different consumer images and knowledge of foreign (and domestic) countries and products, and their effects on consumer responses to and (anti-)consumption of foreign products.

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## Tables

**Table 1.** Illustrative examples of related research

Study	Methods	Sustainability-related COIs	Subjective knowledge	Congruence	Relevant findings
Dekhili & Achabou (2015)	Quantitative (experiment)	<b>Yes</b> (Ecological country image)	No	No	The COO's ecological image affects consumer evaluations of eco-labeled products. Negative COIs had a greater impact on evaluations than positive ones. Product evaluations were contingent on the level of consumers' confidence in the eco-label and COO.
Dekhili, Crouch, & El Moussawel (2021)	Qualitative (interviews)	<b>Yes</b> (Ecological country image)	No	No	A country's ecological image is relevant for professionals and consumers in two different national settings. The authors identify several ecological COI subdimensions.
García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea (2015)	Quantitative (SEM)	<b>Yes</b> (Social and environmental country images)	No	No	The three subdimensions of COI (political-economic, social, and environmental ones) have differentiated effects on foreign product judgements and consumer animosity.
Lala, Allred, & Chakraborty (2008)	Qualitative (focus group) and quantitative (SEM)	<b>Yes</b> (Environment and labor country images)	No	No	Modelled as a second-order factor, COI comprising environment and labor subscales significantly affected consumer evaluation of two different product categories.
Thøgersen & Pedersen (2021)	Quantitative (SEM)	<b>Yes</b> (Environmental country image)	No	No	The (macro) environmental COI influences (micro) country-product images. These, in turn, influence consumer response to environmentally differentiated products.
Cilingir & Basfirinci (2014)	Quantitative (regression analysis)	No	<b>Yes</b> (Subjective product knowledge)	No	COO cues influence product evaluations. This relationship is moderated (weakened), among other variables, by the level of product knowledge.
Lee & Lee (2009)	Quantitative (experiment)	No	<b>Yes</b> (Subjective product knowledge)	No	Subjective product knowledge moderates (weakens) the relationship between COO cues and consumer evaluations of foreign-made products.
Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos (2021)	Quantitative (SEM)	No	<b>Yes</b> (Subjective country knowledge)	No	The effect of subjective country knowledge on consumers' reluctance to buy foreign-made products is mediated by performance risk perceptions.
Schaefer (1997)	Quantitative (correlations)	No	<b>Yes</b> (Subjective product knowledge)	No	Subjective product knowledge has no significant effects on consumer product evaluations. Consumers with higher levels of objective country-product knowledge rely more on the COO when evaluating foreign-made products.

Chao (2001)	Quantitative (experiment)	No	No	<b>Yes</b> (Congruity between country of assemblance, design, and production)	When country of assemblance and country of production, and country of assemblance and country of design are congruent, attitude towards the product improves. However, this finding does not hold when the three (country of assemblance, production, and design) are considered at the same time.
Chao, Wührer, and Werani (2005)	Quantitative (experiment)	No	No	<b>Yes</b> (Congruity between COO and brand)	Consumers' intention to purchase is significantly higher when the brand name was congruent with the COO.
Essoussi & Merunka (2007)	Quantitative (SEM)	No.	No.	<b>Yes</b> (Congruity between brand and country of manufacture)	Consumer images of both the country of manufacture and country of design influence perceived product quality. In addition, congruity between the brand and the country of manufacture significantly influences the perceived quality of branded products.
Insch, Mather, & Knight (2017)	Quantitative (multinomial logit choice models)	No	No	<b>Yes</b> (Congruence between COO and product)	Moderate positive effect of country-product congruence on wiliness to pay. Differences emerge between the three product categories under analysis.
Josiassen (2010)	Quantitative (hierarchical moderated regression)	No	No	<b>Yes</b> (Congruency between product and COO)	Product-country congruency significantly affects the product evaluations of younger consumers. These consumers rely more on COIs when there is a high level of congruence between the country and the product evaluated.
This study	Quantitative (SEM)	<b>Yes</b> (Social and environmental COIs)	<b>Yes</b> (Subjective country knowledge)	<b>Yes</b> (Congruence between foreign and domestic COIs)	Detailed in the 'Results' section of this paper.

Note. The selected studies are arranged by themes (sustainability-related COIs, subjective knowledge, and congruence) and then in alphabetical order. Our study is listed last.

**Table 2.** Demographic and geographic representativeness of the sample

Variables	Total sample (n = 400)	Spanish adult population (n = 39,163,709)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	49.0%	49.0%
Female	51.0%	51.0%
<b>Age (in years)</b>		
15–24	9.3%	8.8%
25–34	18.8%	17.6%
35–44	20.5%	20.7%
45–54	17.5%	18.0%
55–64	13.3%	13.7%
65+	20.8%	21.3%
<b>Region</b>		
Andalusia	17.9%	23.0%
Aragon	2.9%	2.5%
Asturias	2.3%	2.0%
Balearic Islands	2.4%	1.3%
Basque Country	4.7%	2.8%
Canary Islands	4.5%	5.0%
Cantabria	1.3%	0.3%
Castile-La Mancha	4.5%	4.5%
Castile-Leon	5.4%	5.3%
Catalonia	16.0%	15.5%
Ceuta	0.2%	0.0%
Extremadura	2.4%	2.8%
Galicia	5.9%	2.8%
La Rioja	0.7%	0.3%
Madrid	13.7%	20.0%
Melilla	0.2%	0.0%
Murcia	3.1%	3.0%
Navarra	1.4%	1.5%
Valencia	10.7%	7.8%

- Data for the Spanish adult population drawn from the Spanish Statistical Office (INE): [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es)

**Table 3.** Convergent validity of first- and second-order constructs

Constructs and items	Indicator <sup>a</sup> validity and reliability			Construct validity and reliability			
	Standardized loading	Standard error	<i>t</i> -value	Alpha	Rho	Composite reliability	AVE
Political-economic COI (China)				0.81	0.81	0.76	0.40
COI-1		<i>Deleted item</i>					
COI-2	0.77	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
COI-3	0.82	0.08	12.44**				
COI-4	0.55	0.08	8.26**				
COI-5	0.68	0.08	10.38**				
COI-6	0.53	0.08	7.96**				
Environmental COI (China)				0.97	0.97	0.92	0.70
COI-7	0.90	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
COI-8	0.95	0.03	32.12**				
COI-9	0.97	0.03	29.06**				
COI-10	0.93	0.04	27.14**				
COI-11	0.89	0.04	25.73**				
Social COI (China)				0.89	0.89	0.83	0.56
COI-12	0.87	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
COI-13	0.91	0.05	22.99**				
COI-14	0.85	0.06	15.50**				
COI-15	0.68	0.07	12.55**				
Political-economic COI (Spain)				0.83	0.83	0.79	0.38
COI-1	0.64	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
COI-2	0.73	0.13	8.57**				
COI-3	0.65	0.14	7.83**				
COI-4	0.65	0.13	8.12**				
COI-5	0.65	0.14	7.79**				
COI-6	0.72	0.13	8.11**				
Environmental COI (Spain)				0.95	0.95	0.90	0.64
COI-7	0.91	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
COI-8	0.94	0.03	30.52**				
COI-9	0.93	0.04	25.19**				
COI-10	0.85	0.05	21.57**				
COI-11	0.80	0.05	17.96**				
Social COI (Spain)				0.89	0.89	0.83	0.54

COI-12	0.82	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
COI-13	0.87	0.06	19.18**				
COI-14	0.81	0.07	12.23**				
COI-15	0.78	0.06	15.01**				
National stable country animosity				0.80	0.81	0.73	0.48
CA-1	0.80	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
CA-2	0.83	0.08	12.16**				
CA-3	0.64	0.08	10.18**				
National situational country animosity				0.80	0.84	0.73	0.58
CA-4	0.95	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
CA-5	0.71	0.06	11.04**				
Personal stable country animosity				0.89	0.89	0.81	0.59
CA-6	0.89	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
CA-7	0.90	0.05	18.32**				
CA-8	0.78	0.04	20.99**				
Foreign product judgments				0.86	0.86	0.82	0.44
PJ-1	0.79	— <sup>b</sup>	— <sup>b</sup>				
PJ-2	0.85	0.07	15.31**				
PJ-3	0.68	0.08	11.77**				
PJ-4	0.59	0.10	8.87**				
PJ-5	0.82	0.07	16.23**				
PJ-6	0.60	0.08	11.34**				

<sup>a</sup> Individual items (for first-order constructs) and first-order dimensions (for second-order constructs).

<sup>b</sup> Parameter fixed at 1.0 in the CFA solution.

\*\* Significant for  $p < 0.01$ .



**Table 4.** SEM models of ‘COI and knowledge’ relationships with foreign product judgments and three consumer animosity dimensions

Outcomes / Models	Estimated SEMs					R <sup>2</sup>
<i>Outcome: Foreign Product Judgments (FPJ)</i>						
<i>Model 1a:</i> Political-economic COI and knowledge	FPJ = <b>.387</b> *PC + .054*PK – .035*PC*PK – <b>.080</b> *PC <sup>2</sup> – .069*PK <sup>2</sup>					.200
	(.053)	(.050)	(.021)	(.018)	(.018)	
<i>Model 1b:</i> Social COI and knowledge	FPJ = <b>.539</b> *SC + .053*SK + .049*SC*SK – <b>.323</b> *SC <sup>2</sup> – <b>.105</b> *SK <sup>2</sup>					.420
	(.049)	(.039)	(.015)	(.016)	(.012)	
<i>Model 1c:</i> Environmental COI and knowledge	FPJ = <b>.440</b> *EC + <b>.116</b> *EK + .083*EC*EK – <b>.203</b> *EC <sup>2</sup> – <b>.113</b> *EK <sup>2</sup>					.274
	(.042)	(.043)	(.016)	(.013)	(.014)	
<i>Outcome: National stable animosity (NStA)</i>						
<i>Model 2a:</i> Political-economic COI and knowledge	NStA = –.030*PC + .139*PK + .040*PC*PK + .083*PC <sup>2</sup> – .022*PK <sup>2</sup>					.030
	(.072)	(.069)	(.035)	(.023)	(.024)	
<i>Model 2b:</i> Social COI and knowledge	NStA = – <b>.255</b> *SC + .055*SK – <b>.136</b> *SC*SK + <b>.172</b> *SC <sup>2</sup> + .001*SK <sup>2</sup>					.110
	(.071)	(.066)	(.029)	(.027)	(.021)	
<i>Model 2c:</i> Environmental COI and knowledge	NStA = –.092*EC + .149*EK – .031*EC*EK + .099*EC <sup>2</sup> + .036*EK <sup>2</sup>					.048
	(.059)	(.071)	(.028)	(.021)	(.024)	
<i>Outcome: National situational animosity (NSiA)</i>						
<i>Model 3a:</i> Political-economic COI and knowledge	NSiA = <b>.192</b> *PC + .008*PK + .076*PC*PK + .020*PC <sup>2</sup> – .044*PK <sup>2</sup>					.045
	(.089)	(.091)	(.045)	(.027)	(.035)	
<i>Model 3b:</i> Social COI and knowledge	NSiA = –.037*SC + .060*SK + .041*SC*SK + <b>.122</b> *SC <sup>2</sup> – .035*SK <sup>2</sup>					.022
	(.057)	(.056)	(.024)	(.017)	(.019)	
<i>Model 3c:</i> Environmental COI and knowledge	NSiA = <b>.204</b> *PC + .026*PK + .072*PC*PK + .003*PC <sup>2</sup> + .058*PK <sup>2</sup>					.048
	(.071)	(.086)	(.033)	(.025)	(.030)	
<i>Outcome: Personal stable animosity (PStA)</i>						
<i>Model 4a:</i> Political-economic COI and knowledge	PStA = <b>.177</b> *PC + .003*PK + <b>.163</b> *PC*PK + .001*PC <sup>2</sup> – .021*PK <sup>2</sup>					.058
	(.094)	(.088)	(.046)	(.028)	(.033)	
<i>Model 4b:</i> Social COI and knowledge	PStA = .052*SC – .072*SK + .011*SC*SK + <b>.167</b> *SC <sup>2</sup> + .007*SK <sup>2</sup>					.037
	(.095)	(.088)	(.041)	(.036)	(.029)	
<i>Model 4c:</i> Environmental COI and knowledge	PStA = <b>.169</b> *EC – .013*EK – .062*EC*EK – .003*EC <sup>2</sup> – .048*EK <sup>2</sup>					.034
	(.077)	(.086)	(.035)	(.029)	(.033)	

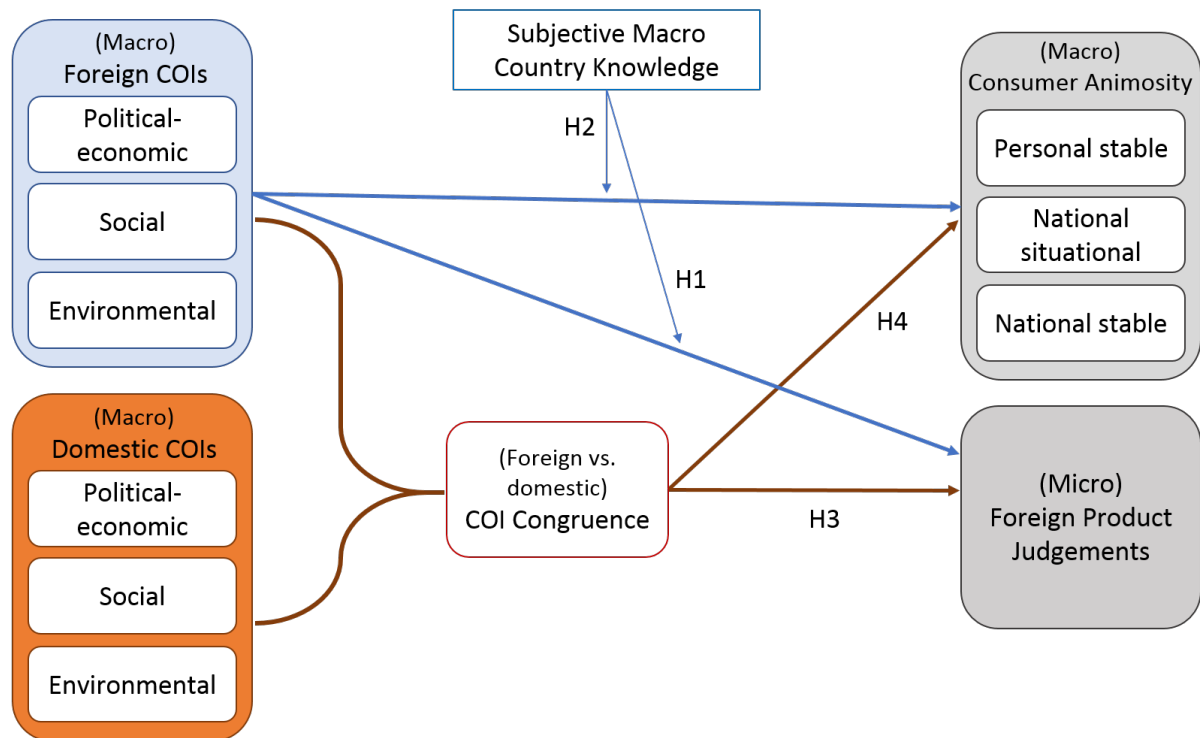
*Note.* Entries are estimations of standardized effects with robust standard errors (in brackets). Statistically significant effects are highlighted in bold. PC = political-economic COI; SC = social COI; EC = environmental COI; PK = political-economic knowledge; SK = social knowledge; EK = environmental knowledge.

**Table 5.** Summary of hypothesis testing results

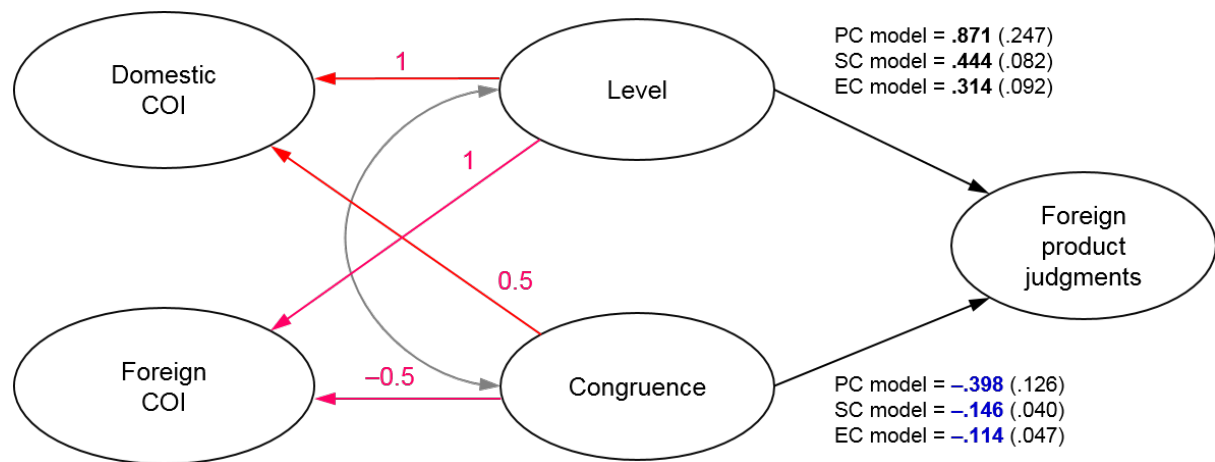
Moderating effects of subjective knowledge of COI issues on:		Supported
H1a	Political-economic COI → foreign product judgments	No
H1b	Social COI → foreign product judgments	No
H1c	Environmental COI → foreign product judgments	No
H2a(i)	Political-economic COI → national stable animosity	No
H2a(ii)	Political-economic COI → national situational animosity	No
H2a(iii)	Political-economic COI → personal stable animosity	<b>Yes</b>
H2b(i)	Social COI → national stable animosity	<b>Yes</b>
H2b(ii)	Social COI → national situational animosity	No
H2b(iii)	Social COI → personal stable animosity	No
H2c(i)	Environmental COI → national stable animosity	No
H2c(ii)	Environmental COI → national situational animosity	No
H2c(iii)	Environmental COI → personal stable animosity	No
Congruence effects:		Supported
H3a	Political-economic COI → foreign product judgments	<b>Yes</b>
H3b	Social COI → foreign product judgments	<b>Yes</b>
H3c	Environmental COI → foreign product judgments	<b>Yes</b>
H4a(i)	Political-economic COI → national stable animosity	No
H4a(ii)	Political-economic COI → national situational animosity	No
H4a(iii)	Political-economic COI → personal stable animosity	No
H4b(i)	Social COI → national stable animosity	<b>Yes</b>
H4b(ii)	Social COI → national situational animosity	No
H4b(iii)	Social COI → personal stable animosity	No
H4c(i)	Environmental COI → national stable animosity	No
H4c(ii)	Environmental COI → national situational animosity	No
H4c(iii)	Environmental COI → personal stable animosity	No

## Figures

**Figure 1.** Conceptual diagram

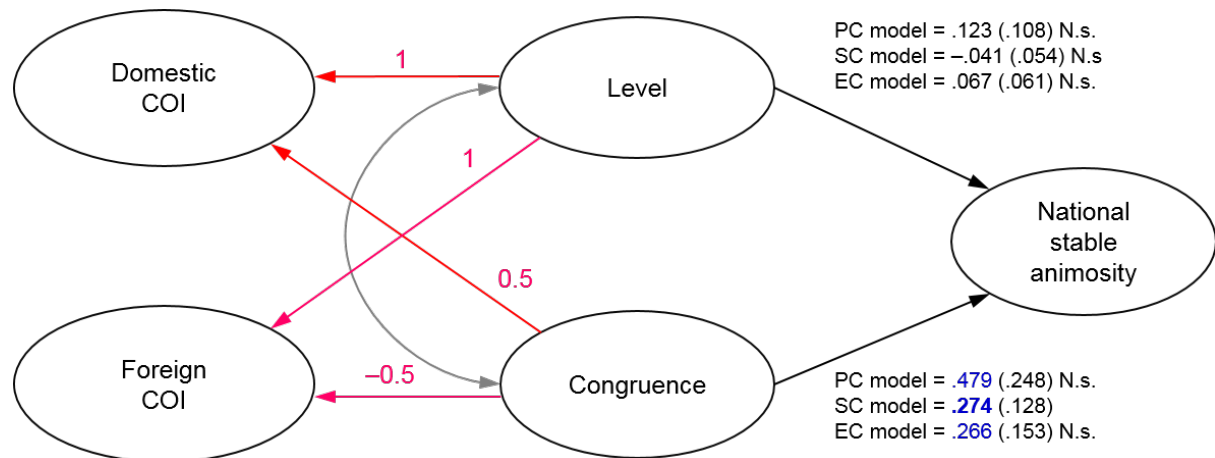


**Figure 2.** Results of three LCM models with congruence of political economic, social, and environmental COI as antecedents and foreign product judgments as an outcome



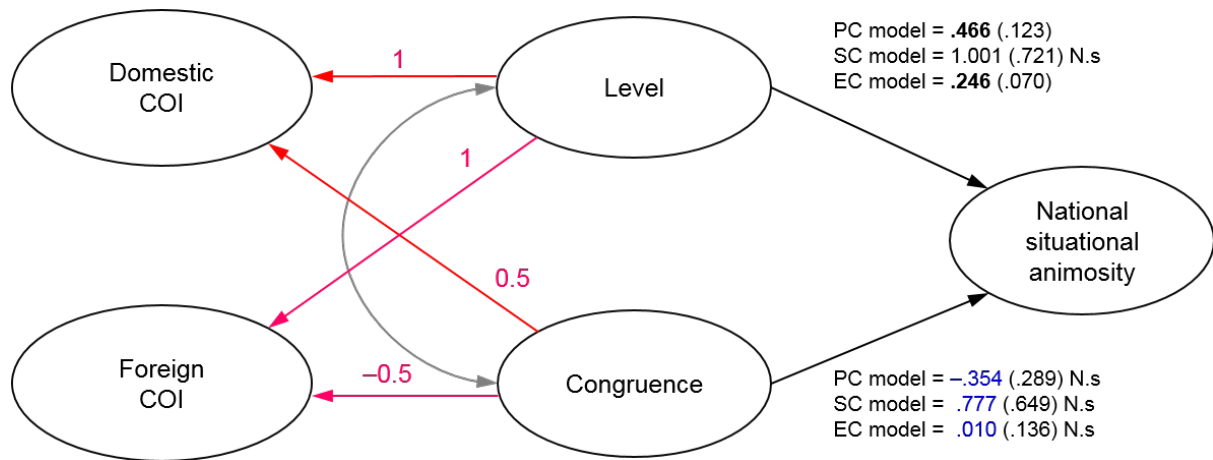
*Note.* Entries are estimations of standardized effects with robust standard errors (in brackets). Statistically significant effects are highlighted in bold. PC = political-economic COI; SC = social COI; EC = environmental COI.

**Figure 3.** Results of three LCM models with congruence of political economic, social, and environmental COI as antecedents and national stable animosity as an outcome



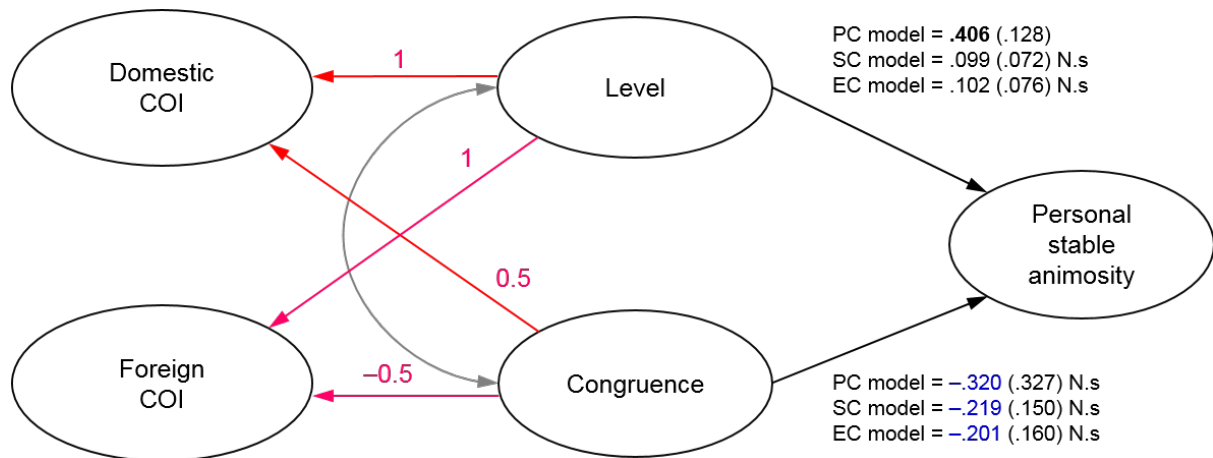
*Note.* Entries are estimations of standardized effects with robust standard errors (in brackets). Statistically significant effects are highlighted in bold. PC = political-economic COI; SC = social COI; EC = environmental COI.

**Figure 4.** Results of three LCM models with congruence of political economic, social, and environmental COI as antecedents and national situational animosity as an outcome



*Note.* Entries are estimations of standardized effects with robust standard errors (in brackets). Statistically significant effects are highlighted in bold. PC = political-economic COI; SC = social COI; EC = environmental COI.

**Figure 5.** Results of three LCM models with congruence of political economic, social, and environmental COI as antecedents and personal stable animosity as an outcome



*Note.* Entries are estimations of standardized effects with robust standard errors (in brackets). Statistically significant effects are highlighted in bold. PC = political-economic COI; SC = social COI; EC = environmental COI.

## Appendix 1. Measurement items

Political-economic COI (Source: Oberecker and Diamantopoulos, 2011)	
	The image you have of [China/Spain] is that of a country...
COI-1†	...with a high level of industrialization.
COI-2	...with a high standard of living.
COI-3	...with a good welfare system.
COI-4	...with a stable, developed economy.
COI-5*	...with a highly educated and skilled workforce.
COI-6	...with advanced and innovative technology.
Social COI (Sources: Adapted from Passow et al., 2005; Heslop et al., 2004)	
	The image you have of [China/Spain] is that of a country...
COI-12	...that safeguards individual rights and freedoms.
COI-13	...where respect for 'work ethic' principles is guaranteed.
COI-14	...that promotes good causes (i.e., socially responsible ones)
COI-15	...that is a responsible member of international community.
Environmental COI (Sources: Adapted from Chang and Fong, 2010; Chen, 2008; Passow et al., 2005; Heslop et al., 2004)	
	The image you have of [China/Spain] is that of a country...
COI-7	...with an excellent environmental reputation.
COI-8	...that is trustworthy about its environmental conservation practices.
COI-9	...that promotes responsible environmental policies and practices.
COI-10	...that supports and ratifies the major international agreements on environmental protection (e.g., the Kyoto Protocol).
COI-11	...with sufficient environmental pollution controls.
National stable consumer animosity (Source: Jung et al., 2002)	
	In general, you would say that...
CA-1	...China is not reliable.
CA-2	...China has never been fair to my country.
CA-3	...China collaborates with my country only in its own interest.
National situational consumer animosity (Source: Newly developed items)	
	In general, you would say that...
CA-4	...Chinese people are invading my country.
CA-5	...the commercial activities carried out by the Chinese in Spain are detrimental to the domestic economy.
Personal stable consumer animosity (Source: Jung et al., 2002)	
	In general, you would say that...
CA-6	I dislike the Chinese.
CA-7	I feel angry when I have to deal with Chinese people.
CA-8	I do not want to be friends with the Chinese.
Foreign product judgments (Source: Klein et al., 1998)	

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Next, we will refer to a specific type of product: ‘apparel produced in China, and sold in Spain through Chinese-owned stores’. You think that apparel products from such stores...

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- |      |  |
|------|--|
| PJ-1 | ...are carefully produced and have fine workmanship.                                       |
| PJ-2 | ...are generally of a higher quality than similar products available from other countries. |
| PJ-3 | ...are manufactured with the most advanced technology in the industry.                     |
| PJ-4 | ...show a very clever use of color and design.   |
| PJ-5 | ...seem to last the desired length of time.  |
| PJ-6 | ...are usually a good value for the money.   |
- 

Subjective country knowledge (Source: adapted from Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999)

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You would say that you have a high level of knowledge about China regarding...

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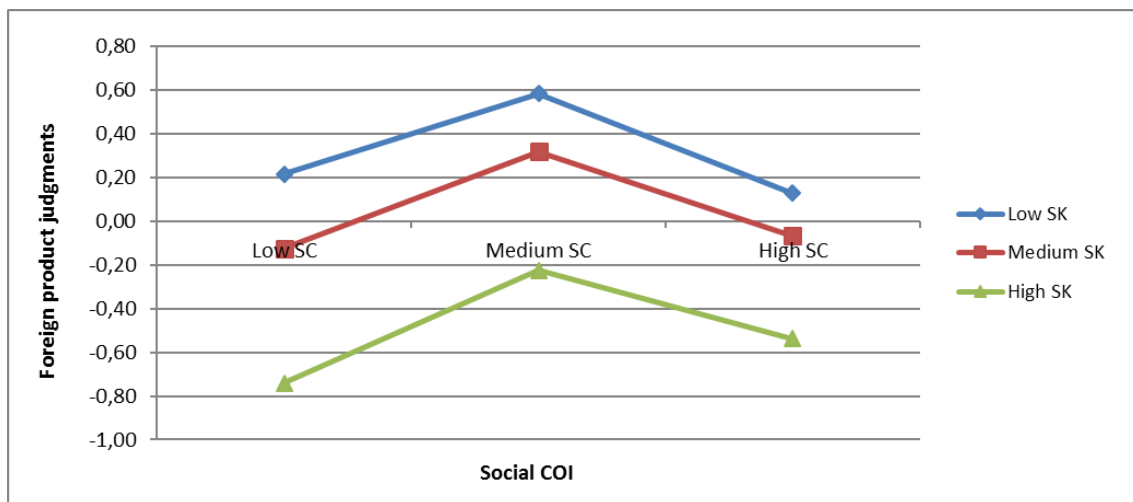
- |         |                                 |
|---------|---------------------------------|
| SK-P.E. | ... economic and politic issues |
| SK-ENV  | ... environmental issues        |
| SK-SOC  | ... social issues               |
- 

† Item deleted in the scale purification stage.

## Appendix 2. Interaction plots

Plots 1 and 2 display mean foreign product judgments against social and environmental COIs, separately for low (1 SD below the mean), moderate (the mean), and high (1 SD above the mean) levels of subjective knowledge.

**Plot 1.** Mean foreign product judgments as a function of social COI, separately for low, moderate, and high levels of subjective knowledge



**Plot 2.** Mean foreign product judgments as a function of environmental COI, separately for low, moderate, and high levels of subjective knowledge

