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**Consumer affinity as a key factor to mitigate reluctance to buy foreign products: The moderating role of organic and induced image to counteract negative communication campaigns and image crises**

**JEL Classification:** M31

**Keywords:** *reluctance to buy; consumer affinity; perceived value and risk; organic and induced image; counteracting negative campaigns*

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## Abstract

**Research background:** Anti-consumption practices, in particular consumers' reluctance to buy (RTB) foreign products, are increasingly common in today's globalised and interconnected markets. This phenomenon is accentuated by the impact of negative consumer dispositions (e.g., animosity or ethnocentrism), which contribute to an unfavourable perception of foreign products and, consequently, increase RTB. However, knowledge about possible factors that may mitigate this RTB foreign products is limited, and even less is known about the influence that positive dispositions (e.g., affinity) may have on consumer perceptions and consumption/non-consumption decisions. Moreover, consumers are inundated with information from various sources, which can significantly influence their perceptions and image of a product-country, especially in a context associated with negative communication campaigns and image crises.

**Purpose of the article:** This research delves into the study of consumer affinity towards a foreign country, understood as an emotional feeling or positive disposition of a consumer that may mitigate their RTB foreign products, which often results from negative communication campaigns and a country-product image crisis. In addition, its influence on perceived risk and value, and the impact of these on RTB, is investigated. The moderating effect of the organic and induced image formed by the consumer on the risk-value relationship is also analysed, determining whether the induced image undermines this relationship.

**Methods:** The empirical study focuses on the Spanish agri-food sector, which has been the subject of negative communication campaigns and image crises in foreign markets. The conceptual model was tested in a sample of German consumers, as Germany is the primary destination country for these products and has also been the origin of several image crises in this sector. PLS-SEM was used to validate the proposed hypotheses.

**Findings & value added:** This research underlines the importance of fostering feelings of affinity towards a country and its products as a means to counteract negative campaigns, increase perceived value and mitigate RTB in foreign destination markets. Companies and public institutions, which influence the formation of the induced image in consumers, can contribute to improving consumers' perception of a product-country. By shedding light on these dynamics, this study offers valuable insights for companies trying to cope with image crises fuelled by negative communication campaigns, which are increasingly prevalent in the competitive international landscape.

## Introduction

One of the consequences of today's globalized and interconnected market is that consumers worldwide receive a large amount of information about organisations, associations, countries, products, and countless other subjects and fields. However, not all the information consumers receive is verified and accurate, often stemming from 'fake news' or 'misinformation' defined as "any information that turns out to be false" (Ecker *et al.*, 2022; p. 13). This unverified information, disseminated through media such as TV, press, and social networks, may significantly affect consumers' percep-

tions and generate anti-consumption behaviour (Leong *et al.*, 2021; Vafeiadis *et al.*, 2019).

Frequently, information linked to unfavourable economic, social, and environmental sustainability practices about a country, company, or sector impacts consumer perception, causing an image crisis (Jakubowska & Radzymińska, 2019). A “crisis” is described as “an urgent, dynamic situation that is rapidly changing with unpredictable outcomes, it is poorly understood and has an impact on society and politics” (Van Asselt *et al.*, 2017, p. 477). When an image crisis occurs, it significantly and negatively affects the target’s reputation (e.g., a country, company, or sector; Singh *et al.*, 2020), leading to heightened consumer perception of risk and unfavourable publicity (Vassilikopoulou *et al.*, 2009). In particular, these crises often foster a generally negative attitude among consumers towards a country and its products (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, negative communication campaigns, especially those related to unsustainable practices in the production process of foreign products (Pereira *et al.*, 2019), require proactive responses from companies, associations, and institutions (e.g., see Pérez-Mesa *et al.*, 2019).

Some studies have examined the effect of ‘fake news’ on consumer dispositions and perceptions towards a referent (Pennycook & Rand, 2021; Visentin *et al.*, 2019), and how they trigger image crises in countries, companies, or sectors (Jahng, 2021). Hence, understanding consumer dispositions and perceptions that underlie these image crises will allow organisations to know how to repair their image, which can be the key to business viability, especially in sectors where sustainability has been questioned. These image crises may give rise to the phenomenon known as anti-consumption (Serrano-Arcos *et al.*, 2021).

One of the most prominent practices of anti-consumption behaviour is the reluctance to buy (RTB) foreign products (Mishra *et al.*, 2023; Ortega-Egea *et al.*, 2021). RTB is associated with rejecting or excluding specific products/brands from consumption, being a rather passive behaviour (Makri *et al.*, 2020). Examples of this behaviour include RTB products from a “hostile” nation (Souiden *et al.*, 2018; Verma *et al.*, 2021) or specific foreign products, such as electronic goods (Khan *et al.*, 2019) and food products (Tosun & Gürce, 2018). Previous research has focused on the factors motivating the reasons for rejection of particular products/brands (e.g., Cherrier & Lee, 2022). However, there is a lack of studies regarding the potential factors mitigating RTB specific foreign products. Accordingly, it is neces-

sary to investigate further to identify potential factors that could reduce consumers' RTB, as early identification and the implementation of corrective and proactive strategies are key "before the situation escalates into a crisis" (Pecot *et al.*, 2021, p. 67).

This paper outlines a new approach to contribute to the knowledge of consumers' RTB foreign products, based on the analysis of a positive consumer disposition or emotional feeling. Following Belbağ (2021), consumer dispositions are "important for international trade, the purchase of consumer goods and the segmentation of international markets" (p. 3). In this international context of consumption, the concept of "consumer dispositions" is associated with the consumer attitude towards a country (Prince *et al.*, 2020). Based on Social Identity Theory (SIT), consumers can develop two types of orientations: in-group (in this context, the country of origin, COO) or out-group (i.e., foreign country) (Salomão *et al.*, 2022). This means that consumers adopt favourable or unfavourable behaviour towards a country depending on whether they identify this country within their reference group.

Previous studies suggest that some consumers may display RTB foreign products due to negative consumer dispositions or emotional feelings (e.g., animosity, ethnocentrism, or universal-diverse orientation; Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2018; Riefler, 2017). However, positive consumer dispositions (e.g., locavorism, cultural openness, and consumer affinity; Al-Maghrebi *et al.*, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2021; Kock *et al.*, 2019) have been less explored in the literature (e.g., Bartsch *et al.*, 2016; Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2019). As a possible mitigating factor of RTB, this research explores a positive consumer disposition, known as "consumer affinity" (Oberecker *et al.*, 2008), which has been defined as a positive emotional bond towards a certain foreign nation based on experiences with that country, such as its culture, landscape, people, and food (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Consumer affinity has been scarcely studied in the literature. Traditionally, research has focused on how affinity affects the intention to purchase products from a particular country (e.g., Kock *et al.*, 2019; Zaid *et al.*, 2022). However, previous studies do not provide much evidence on how affinity affects product judgement (Asseraf & Shoham, 2016; Ercis & Celik, 2019; Oberecker *et al.*, 2008) and in particular, there is a dearth of studies that explore the role of affinity on consumers' RTB. Consequently, this research revisits the concept of consumer affinity under the lens of the anti-consumption phenomenon, that is,

RTB foreign products, providing new insights into the relevance of this positive consumer disposition in the international marketing sphere.

To better understand what determines and hinders the development of consumer RTB, it is particularly important to analyse the influence of consumer affinity on the perception of foreign products as a possible mediating variable that explains RTB. In this study, the concept of consumers' perceived value, which is key in the analysis of consumer behaviour (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2020), is analysed to understand how affinity towards a foreign country influences consumers' judgement (Asseraf & Shoham, 2016; Ercis & Celik, 2019) or value perception of products from that origin. Additionally, it examines how a positive value perception may contribute to reducing the rejection of certain foreign products. Another core variable in this process is the perceived risk of consuming foreign products, as it can potentially increase consumers' RTB (Alyahya *et al.*, 2023). From a business management perspective, and considering the temporary and reversible nature of consumers' RTB, international organisations could benefit from promoting strategies focused on affinity feelings towards a specific foreign country and its products (Avraham, 2021). These policies and actions could raise the value of its products, mitigate risk perception and, ultimately reduce the RTB associated with products from a 'hostile' country (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2018).

In the context of frequent negative campaigns and image crises in international media, the study of the information sources that influence consumers' perceptions and behaviour is also crucial to explain consumers' RTB. Individuals are exposed to a wide variety of information sources, including commercial information that shapes consumers' attitudes and perceptions, forming the basis of consumer choice (Bilynets *et al.*, 2023). However, these information sources can also spread fake news, severely damaging the image of countries, sectors, companies, and products (Singh *et al.*, 2020). The rapid spread of misinformation through social media and other platforms can lead to image crises, as false information can quickly tarnish image and alter consumer perceptions (Jakubowska & Radzymińska, 2019). Thus, while the media play a crucial role in informing consumers, their potential to spread fake news requires careful management to avoid significant image crises.

In this research, the information sources are explored through two concepts: organic image, which involves the consumers' engagement with non-commercial information sources (Parrey *et al.*, 2019); and induced im-

age, resulting from the ongoing information search provided by companies, institutions, and associations (Almeida-García *et al.*, 2020). This study examines whether information sources play an important role as moderators in the relationship between perceived risk and perceived value, to determine whether they reinforce (through organic image) or undermine (through induced image) this risk-value link.

Building on this background, this research aims to provide empirical evidence on factors that mitigate RTB foreign products, particularly in an international context where negative communication campaigns and country-product image crises are frequent. First, this study analyses the role of a positive consumer disposition that has been scarcely analysed in the literature, that is, consumer affinity towards a foreign country. It explores whether it is possible to reduce the RTB products from a particular COO by fostering consumer affinity towards this country. Furthermore, this study investigates whether consumer affinity affects their product-country perception, understood as lower perceived risk and, conversely, higher perceived value of products from the affinity country. In turn, this research empirically analyses the impact of both consumer affinity and perceived value on reducing RTB, and whether this effect is greater than the capacity of perceived risk in increasing RTB. Finally, the moderating effects of different sources of information to which the consumer is exposed, defined through the organic and induced image, are studied to explain the mechanisms that shape consumer perceptions of foreign products through the risk-value relationship.

For this purpose, we analysed the agri-food sector in Spain, the most important supplier of fruits and vegetables in Europe (Rondinella *et al.*, 2019), as the selected setting for this study. This sector has been the subject of much criticism and numerous controversies in some of its main destination markets (mainly Germany, France, and the Netherlands). This sector has been subject to a negative organic image originating mainly in the German market, leading to image crises<sup>1</sup>. These crises, despite later news

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<sup>1</sup> The two main image crises that the Spanish agri-food sector has suffered are those derived from the accusation of finding Isofenphos-methyl in peppers (2006) and *Escherichia-Coli* (2011) in peppers, both derived from a negative organic image in the German media. Additionally, over the years, the sector has had to face continuous negative campaigns, such as those related to inadequate working conditions (e.g., see “Hell in the greenhouse: grave working conditions of workers in plastic greenhouse farms”, 2019, *Der Spiegel*, Magazine, or “Defends local production in the United Kingdom versus imports to combat COVID food shortages”, 2020, BBC England).

reports proving them untrue, caused great damage to demand, leading to RTB for these products. Despite these negative campaigns and constant image crises over time, Oberecker *et al.* (2008) cited Spain as an illustrative example of an agri-food affinity country, which makes this case study particularly interesting. Drawing on the specific scenario of this product category and the German market as the main destination of the Spanish agri-food exports, this paper analyses the role of consumers' affinity towards Spain and their perception of risk and value regarding their agri-food products, and how these variables can explain consumers' RTB these products. In addition, this paper examines other relevant and less studied variables in this topic such as organic and induced image.

The structure with which this research has been designed is as follows. First, the investigated conceptual framework is introduced, including the conceptual model and the hypotheses proposed. Second, the data collection and the research design are described. Third, the results are provided according to measurement and structural models. Finally, the discussion and conclusions are detailed in the final section.

## **Literature review**

Anti-consumption is understood as “a set of actions by consumers that, within a group setting, result in the choice to abstain from consuming, consume less, or change consumption patterns to suit anti-consumption goals” (Pinto & Casais, 2023, p. 606). Anti-consumption can focus on specific brands, consumption habits, consumer attitudes and COO of certain products (Makri *et al.*, 2020). Specifically, this study focuses on consumers' RTB, which is a type of anti-consumption that has been defined in an international context as “perceived guiltiness and tendency to avoid buying foreign-made products” (Suh & Kwon 2002, p. 669), and on the possible factors that could increase and/or mitigate this reluctance, with special emphasis on a concept that has been scarcely analysed in this type of literature, namely consumer affinity.

In this sense, SIT provides a conceptual framework for this research. SIT (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel *et al.*, 1979) establishes a socio-psychological framework for understanding group dynamics, including favouritism within groups and bias against out-groups (Lee *et al.*, 2016; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). According to SIT, discrimination between groups is motivated by

a desire to strengthen personal self-esteem through positive group distinctiveness (So *et al.*, 2013). Individuals tend to selectively perceive differences between groups that reinforce their in-group (e.g., COO) while disregarding information that supports out-groups (e.g., a foreign country; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001). Consequently, variations in reactions and evaluations can be anticipated among individuals with different levels of psychological commitment to their group (Brown, 2000).

SIT suggests that social groups are essential because they fulfil individual and societal needs for simplification, structure, predictability and order (Hogg, 2016). Employing the principle of accentuation derived from SIT aids in understanding the interpretive process through which consumers categorize themselves, subsequently influencing their endorsement or rejection of products and services concerning in-groups and out-groups (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Individuals use these groups as coordinates to denote their position relative to others through symbolic (anti-) consumption (Hogg *et al.*, 2009). In addition, SIT posits that a group forms the foundation of one's identity. When a majority of group members share similar perceptions, these perceptions mutually reinforce, leading to individuals exhibiting comparable behavioural outcomes (Stets & Burke, 2000).

While most consumer research primarily focuses on analysing consumption patterns as indicators of membership within in-groups (e.g., subcultures of consumption, Castillo-Villar *et al.*, 2020; brand communities, Raimondo *et al.*, 2022) and the social significance individuals derive from their group affiliations and brand relationships (e.g., Dessart *et al.*, 2020), there is relatively less emphasis on investigating the use of anti-consumption behaviours to signify membership within in-groups or out-groups (Simpson *et al.*, 2019). A pro-out-group orientation has been described as “the potential inclusion of out-groups (foreign country) in people's in-groups (home country)” (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011, p. 47). This is why the conceptual framework for this research incorporates a pro-out-group variable through the concept of consumer affinity towards a foreign country. Consumer affinity leads to the inclusion of a foreign country (i.e., an out-group) in people's home country (i.e., in-group), establishing an emotional bond with the affinity country and its products. In fact, Oberecker *et al.* (2008, p. 36) found that ethnocentric consumers “indicated a specific interest in buying products from the country of affinity simply because they liked the country”.



Thus, drawing on SIT, we propose that this pro-out-group role of consumer affinity may contribute to the mitigation of the RTB products from the affinity country (see Figure 1). Furthermore, consumers' identification with a particular (foreign) country as their pro-out-group could enhance the perceived value of products from this origin and, as a result, decrease the risk associated with that country's products. Consequently, it can be thought that both consumer perceptions (i.e., perceived value and risk) encourage or diminish RTB foreign products. In addition, the consumer's product-country image formed through social influence from different information sources (i.e., organic and induced image) has been included in the proposed conceptual model to figure out their moderating effect on the relationship between perceived value and risk.

#### *Positive consumer disposition through consumer affinity*

This study focuses on consumers' RTB (rather than purchase intention), and the potential factors that could mitigate this rejection, with a special emphasis on a concept that has been scarcely analysed in this type of literature (i.e., affinity feelings). Consumer affinity is a concept introduced by Oberecker *et al.* in 2008. Under the theoretical basis of SIT, consumer affinity can be conceived as an emotional feeling of sympathy and attachment for an out-group, that is, a foreign country (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Consumer affinity is, thus, considered a pro-out-group orientation, with a favourable disposition towards a particular foreign country (Fazli-Salehi *et al.*, 2021). Following Terasaki *et al.* (2022), affinity is conceptualised as "favouritism and attachment to a particular country" (p. 348). Accordingly, Nes *et al.* (2014) state that, on many occasions, consumers develop an affinity for a foreign country, and consequently, attach a symbolic meaning which leads them to want to maintain that emotional attachment to that country by purchasing products originating from the affinity-country. In this sense, consumer affinity affects product evaluation and consumer behaviour (Banovic *et al.*, 2022; Ma & Kim, 2021).

Few studies have analysed consumers' positive emotions from the perspective of the anti-consumption phenomenon (e.g., boycott; Abdelwahab *et al.*, 2020; Kim *et al.*, 2022). Abdelwahab *et al.* (2020) showed that brand love weakens the consumer's desire to boycott (in the agri-food industry). Subsequently, Kim *et al.* (2022) incorporated the notion of consumer affinity into the boycott literature, demonstrating that it diminishes the positive

impact of animosity-driven boycott attitudes towards economic sanctions. Nevertheless, no previous research has tried to explain the possible connection between consumer's affinity towards a foreign country and the RTB products from that country. This proposal could be explained through SIT and how consumer affinity to an out-group (i.e., foreign country) can favour the positive evaluation of the products from the affinity country and, therefore, decrease consumer rejection of these products. Following the previous reasoning, it is possible to formulate this hypothesis:

H1: *Consumer affinity towards a foreign country is negatively associated with consumer RTB products from that country.*

#### *Antecedents of risk and value*

Risk is an essential concept of customer behaviour (Yeung & Morris, 2006). The term risk refers to the "subjectively determined expectation of loss" (Mitchell, 1999, p. 168). According to Forsythe and Shi (2003), risk perception occurs in a choice situation when customers are uncertain about the potential consequences of a behaviour and the potential displeasure that could arise from it. Consumers are aware of the high risks when deciding to buy unfamiliar products and/or in uncertain situations, which pressures them to prefer the most suitable products (Jawabreh *et al.*, 2022; Seo & Lee, 2021). According to Aqueveque (2006), extrinsic cues (e.g., home country and/or brand trust; see Arruda Filho *et al.*, 2020) often serve as risk-relieving information.

Various types of feelings tend to accentuate perceived risk, such as psychological discomfort, concern, cognitive dissonance, and anxiety, which significantly impact purchasing decisions (Bhatti & Ur Rahman, 2019; Marriot & Williams, 2018). However, little is known about positive feelings that could mitigate this negative effect in risky consumption decisions (e.g., affinity feelings). In this sense, Cakici and Shukla (2017) suggested that perceived risk should be examined alongside consumer affinity in the context of foreign countries. Rehman *et al.* (2020) argued that reinforcement of positive emotions can act as a risk reducer.

Drawing on SIT, which posits individuals' categorization into in-groups (home country) and out-groups (foreign country), consumers can develop positive emotional feelings of affinity for a particular out-group (i.e., a country and its products or brands), considering this foreign nation as

part of its in-group, and potentially alleviating perceived risk associated with its products (Zaid *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, an individual's identification with a certain (foreign) country as their pro-out-group decreases the risk associated with products from that country (Halim & Zulkarnain, 2017; Nugraha *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, we expect feelings of affinity to act as a reducer of perceived risk. Formally stated:

H2: *Consumer affinity towards a foreign country is negatively associated with the perceived risk of products from that country.*

According to previous literature, perceived value is considered a key concept in consumer behaviour (El-Adly, 2019; Leroi-Werelds, 2019; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2020). Despite the traditional approach to the notion of value by authors such as Zeithaml (1988), who advocates understanding value as purely utilitarian and logical as a “trade-off between costs and benefits”, other proposals emphasised the relevance of emotions from the perspective of the consuming experience (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Holbrook, 1999; Gallarza *et al.*, 2021). As a result, value perception was defined by Holbrook (1999) as “an interactive relativistic preference experience” (p. 5), and it is crucial in understanding, among others, consumer happiness, repurchase intention, and word-of-mouth (Papadopoulou *et al.*, 2023; Miao *et al.*, 2022; Kuppelwieser *et al.*, 2022, respectively). According to Mekonnen *et al.* (2008), affinity might have an impact on perceived value. Other studies have found that strong affinities can affect how foreign products are perceived by consumers (e.g., reducing the perceived risk; see Halim & Zulkarnain, 2017).

Over time, affinity towards a country and its brands can increase the value of products/brands, making them attractive in foreign and new markets (Paulose & Shakeel, 2022). This occurs because consumer identification with a product positively affects consumers' perceptions and judgments (Zeng *et al.*, 2009). The social identity principle predicts that when a stimulus (e.g., a product) is related to a consumer's social identity, there is an affective transfer from the social identity to the product, influencing product evaluation and determining a favourable response to the product (Zeugner-Roth *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, linking a product to a social identity is likely to result in more positive favourables' perceptions by more identified consumers (McGowan *et al.*, 2017). In this regard, a sense of belonging to an out-group (i.e., a foreign country) is expected to be related to con-

sumers' value perceptions of the affinity country (and its products). Indeed, Cakici and Shukla (2017) suggested that conceptual frameworks for further studies about affinity should incorporate "other outcome variables such as perceived value" (p. 373). For this reason, we will investigate the effect of consumer affinity on perceived value in an international context in response to this dearth of research, suggesting that having a strong sense of affinity towards a certain country raises the perceived value of its products.

*H3: Consumer affinity towards a foreign country is positively associated with the perceived value of products from that country.*

Consumers are satisfied with goods that may not cause them any harmful effects (Permatasari & Kuswadi, 2017). In this sense, the notion of risk has been analysed as a relevant hindrance influencing consumer behaviour (e.g., Şen Küpeli & Özer, 2020). To further understand this behaviour, perceived risk has been examined conceptually together with the notion of perceived value (Tzavlopoulos *et al.*, 2019). Consumers are aware that losses could result from product failure (Wai *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, a product thought to have a high likelihood of malfunctioning will be seen as having a lesser value (Knight *et al.*, 2008). The premise of perceived risk and value models is that consumers make decisions during the purchasing process based on maximizing value and minimizing risk. Previous studies have investigated how risk influences perceived value (e.g., Kim, 2012).

Numerous studies (Beneke & Carter, 2015; Permatasari & Kuswadi, 2017; Rouibah *et al.*, 2021) have revealed that risk perception adversely and considerably affects perceived value. According to Chang (2008), financial, functional, and physical risks have an unfavourable effect on functional value, and time risk on situational value. Likewise, psychological risk and social risk have unfavourable effects on emotional value, epistemic value, and social value (e.g., Kim *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, Chang and Hsiao (2008) explored how risk is perceived in the tourism sector, concluding that risk has a negative impact on value. Therefore, from the perspective of the consumption of foreign products, we formulated the following hypothesis:

*H4: Perceived risk is negatively associated with consumer perceived value.*

*Organic and induced image as moderators*

Central to the formation of social identity are communicative behaviours, as identity is formed and refined through social interactions (Scott *et al.*, 1998). In these interactions, individuals express their membership in diverse groups and assess the image of groups (Dutton *et al.*, 1994). By examining individuals' interactions and relationships with others, as well as their affiliations with specific social groups, we can gain deeper insight into their perceptions. Social influence occurs when an individual's behaviour is affected by the media and the people around them (Zhang *et al.*, 2019). A potential customer may have favourable or unfavourable cognitive reactions based on information from many information sources, including the news, word-of-mouth, and social media, which describe consumers' experiences with a particular product category.

Information, both real and fake, is acquired through media influence, encompassing generic and commercial sources. This information provides knowledge and shapes consumers' perceptions, which serve as the foundation for their purchasing decisions (Tasci *et al.*, 2007). This study integrates two sources of information: induced and organic images. An induced image is generated by actively seeking information from commercial sources, including those provided by governments, businesses, associations, and institutions (e.g., Parrey *et al.*, 2019). Organic image comprises information obtained passively through interaction with non-commercial sources such as blogs, print media, news, and information from friends and family (e.g., Bilynets *et al.*, 2023).

Previous research has found that the impact of the organic image is stronger than the induced image, as individuals tend to be sceptical of the information conveyed through marketing communication channels (e.g., Currie, 2020). However, when sudden news emerges, such as a negative event, both promotional and non-promotional sources influence how risk is perceived, negatively impacting consumers' judgments (Vafeiadis *et al.*, 2019). When consumers are unfamiliar with a foreign nation and its products, they often rely more on mass media as a source of information (Ecker *et al.*, 2022). Perceived risk, according to Liu *et al.* (2022), provides insight into market evaluation, preference, and purchasing tendencies. Source risk, on the other hand, is defined as the possibility that the business, which a consumer buys products from, is not trustworthy and credible (Chen *et al.*, 2021). In this regard, scholars argue that the media plays a crucial role

in shaping consumers' perceptions of a foreign country's value, with consumers' assessments heavily influenced by media coverage. However, less is known about the power of institutions and organisations to counteract these negative effects. It can thus be hypothesised that:

H5a: *The information sources formed by organic image strengthens the relationship between perceived risk and value.*

H5b: *The information sources formed by induced image undermines the relationship between perceived risk and value.*

#### *Other antecedents of reluctance to buy*

When the results of the decision are unpredictable and certain options are more desirable than others, a purchasing decision carries a risk. According to Cunningham *et al.* (2005, p. 359) "an extremely high level of perceived risk can cause a consumer to postpone or avoid a purchase entirely". When risk perception is high, it implies lower consumer welfare, potentially leading, for example, to RTB, which is considered an anti-consumer practice (Hassan *et al.*, 2013). Previous studies have shown the substantial and favourable effect of two types of risk on consumers' RTB: perceived psycho-social risk and perceived performance risk (e.g., Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos, 2021). According to Singhal *et al.* (2019), there are chances that consumers possess RTB specific products (e.g., remanufactured products) due to safety, quality and performance issues (Wang *et al.*, 2018), which affect their perception and preferences towards those products. Hence, the perception of risk (related to social, environmental, and quality issues) towards foreign products from a certain country can be expected to increase RTB products from that country.

On the other hand, another possible mitigating variable of RTB is consumers' perceived value. Identification with a product predicts consumers' value perceptions (e.g., Persaud & Schillo, 2017). In this sense, perceived value can be used to describe consumer attitudes toward foreign products, according to studies on COO and international marketing literature (Alden *et al.*, 2013; Davvetas & Diamantopoulos, 2016). Nevertheless, the literature has not yet suggested a clear link between perceived value and consumer RTB. The 'assessment' of imported products, according to Nijssen and Douglas (2004), has a detrimental impact on RTB. Rose *et al.* (2009) only

partially supported the association between favourable product evaluation and RTB foreign products. García-de-Frutos and Ortega-Egea's (2015) study provided empirical evidence that consumer RTB is negatively influenced by judgments of foreign products. Accordingly, positive consumer value perception of products from a certain foreign country can be expected to diminish RTB products from that country. It can thus be hypothesised that:

H6: *Perceived risk is positively associated with consumer RTB certain foreign products.*

H7: *Perceived value is negatively associated with consumer RTB certain foreign products.*

Before delving into the methodological and empirical aspects of this research, it is essential to provide a comprehensive overview of the prevailing empirical approaches in the field. The main studies on anti-consumption, particularly RTB, have predominantly addressed topics such as health, environmental sustainability, lifestyle, and consumer behaviour (for details, see e.g., Makri *et al.*, 2020; Pinto & Casais, 2023). Both qualitative (e.g., Dekhili *et al.*, 2021) and quantitative (e.g., Balderjahn *et al.*, 2020; Inch *et al.*, 2017; Sekhon & Soule, 2020) methods have been employed in this field, with structural equation modelling (SEM) being the most widely used method (e.g., Ortega-Egea & García-de-Frutos, 2023; Thøgersen & Pedersen, 2021).

Regarding consumer affinity, the main themes studied in the marketing literature include the COO context, marketing strategy development, buyer decision-making processes, and direct foreign investment (for details, see Serrano-Arcos *et al.*, 2022). It is worth noting that despite the limited number of articles on this topic, most of them are empirical studies, utilising both qualitative (e.g., Asseraf & Shoham, 2017; Oberecker *et al.*, 2008) and quantitative (e.g., Ercis & Celik, 2019; Fazli-Salehi *et al.*, 2021; Guo *et al.*, 2018; Moraes & Strehlau, 2020) methodologies.

In order to analyse the proposed conceptual model, which has been previously justified, we will carry out a quantitative survey research using SEM as the analytical technique, given its suitability for testing the proposed model. The research context, data collection method, constructs

measurement and estimation techniques will be described in the following section.

## **Research methods**

### *Research context and data collection*

The empirical study was conducted in the Spanish agri-food sector, the main supplier of fresh fruits and vegetables to Europe, encompassing 40% of the European population (ICEX, 2023). This context was deemed particularly suitable for this research due to its history of enduring multiple image crises, primarily related to social, environmental, economic and food quality issues. These crises have resulted in negative campaigns in various destination markets, many of which were based on fake news. Germany, despite being the primary recipient of agri-food products from Spain (ICEX, 2023), was the origin of the sector's most significant misinformation issues (Pérez-Mesa *et al.*, 2019), significantly impacting its organic image and, consequently, consumer demand. Despite these repeated image and demand setbacks, previous research has associated this sector with an emotional bond in the food category (Oberecker *et al.*, 2008). Hence, the German market was chosen as a representative sample for the empirical study.

The causal research was designed through a survey. Initially, pre-tests were conducted with a sample of academics and consumers (ten and fifty pre-tests, respectively) to review the measurement scales before administering the survey. Subsequently, the services of a professional marketing research company were enlisted, utilising a panel of German consumers for the data collection in January-February 2020. Based on data from the German Federal Statistical Office (see Table 1), the sample was selected according to the geographical and demographic representativeness of the German territory. Consequently, the sampling procedure involved stratified random sampling by gender, age, and region (see Table 1). Individuals participating in the survey earned loyalty programme points, a common method for incentivising survey participation (e.g., Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Over a three-week survey period, 335 of the initial 450 invited consumers responded to the questionnaire, yielding a satisfactory response rate of 74.4%, considered adequate for sample size (e.g., Memon *et al.*, 2020).



All variables included in the conceptual model were pre-coded in the questionnaire and measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from '1' (strongly disagree) to '7' (strongly agree). Several steps were taken to mitigate the possibility of respondent bias, including reversing some scale items, changing the order of questionnaire sections, and assuring respondents of complete confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Additionally, a back-translation process was employed to guarantee linguistic accuracy of the questionnaire, which was initially developed in Spanish and then translated into English and German.

### *Constructs measurement*

Regarding the construct measurement, we employed the multidimensional scale proposed by Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011) to measure consumer affinity, utilising either three and four items to operationalize two dimensions: sympathy (soft emotions) and attachment (strong emotions). Perceived risk was measured using nine items, with three items each for social risk, quality risk and environmental risk (Al-Ansi *et al.*, 2019). Twenty-one additional items operationalising four dimensions of perceived value – efficiency and quality, hedonic, social, and altruistic value – were included in the questionnaire based on Holbrook (1999) and an original scale by Sánchez-Fernández *et al.* (2009). Specifically, eight items measured efficiency and quality, seven items measured hedonic value, while three items each measured social and altruistic value.

For information sources, consistent with previous studies (e.g., Lin & Kuo, 2018), organic image was measured using five items and the induced image using four items. Consumers' RTB was assessed using six items, encompassing general and relative components, as two dimensions of this concept, according to previous scales by Darling and Wood (1990) and Klein *et al.* (1998). The general dimension contained items that measured the direct avoidance of consumers from purchasing specific foreign products, while the relative dimension included consumers' comparative and contextual RTB foreign products compared to domestic product alternatives and situational constraints.

Details of the items of the different measurement scales are given in Appendix.

### *Data analyses and estimation techniques*

Structural equation modelling was employed to analyse the data using the Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) technique, which is commonly used in the business marketing literature (Guenther *et al.*, 2023). PLS is described as “a causal-predictive approach to SEM that emphasizes prediction in estimating statistical models, whose structures are designed to provide causal explanations” (Hair *et al.*, 2019, p. 3). Despite its primary emphasis on prediction, PLS-SEM has been found to be suitable for complex models in the literature (Guenther *et al.*, 2023; Hair *et al.*, 2019; Hult *et al.*, 2018). Particularly, when dealing with models that contain numerous constructs and elements (Hair *et al.*, 2019), this technique offers reliable results with modest sample sizes, as observed in this study with a sample of 335 participants. This characteristic distinguishes it from many other statistical methods (Dabija *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, researchers benefit from its flexible model specification capabilities, making it apt for estimating models with higher-order constructs (Szostek *et al.*, 2022), as utilised in this study for constructs such as consumer affinity, perceived value, perceived risk and RTB. The statistical software Smart-PLS 3.3 was employed to run the conceptual model.

It is important to highlight that the rationale for opting for PLS-SEM over CB-SEM (Covariance-Based SEM) was based on several considerations. PLS-SEM demonstrates superior resilience to multicollinearity issues, small sample sizes, and non-normal distributions, rendering it more robust in such scenarios. Moreover, while CB-SEM prioritises explanation, PLS-SEM emphasises prediction while also aiding in explanation (Hair, 2021). Therefore, considering the study’s objectives and assumptions regarding the underlying theoretical constructs and the characteristics of the data, PLS-SEM emerged as the most appropriate approach for this research.

## **Results**

### *Measurement model*

The psychometric properties of the measurement scales in the conceptual model were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The multi-dimensional structure of the four variables in the conceptual model was

supported by the CFA as expected: consumer affinity, perceived risk, perceived value, and RTB. Consistent with Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011), consumer affinity comprised two separate dimensions: sympathy, and attachment. Both dimensions made substantial contributions to customer affinity ( $\beta_s > 0.70$ ;  $p_s < 0.01$ ), with attachment being the most prominent. Similarly, the separate dimensions of perceived risk — social risk, quality risk and environmental risk — demonstrated significant contributions, with social risk being the most influential.

Perceived value, according to Holbrook (1999), was categorized into four main dimensions: efficiency and quality (functional value), hedonic, social, and altruistic value. Hedonic value emerged as the most prominent, followed by efficiency and quality, altruistic value, and social value. All four dimensions made solid contributions to perceived value ( $s > 0.70$ ;  $p_s < 0.01$ ). The results also indicated that the outcome factor, RTB foreign products, exhibited a multidimensional structure. General RTB and relative RTB constitute the two distinct subscales comprising RTB on product-country, and both demonstrated the same impact magnitude ( $s > 0.70$ ;  $p_s < 0.01$ ).

Following the completion of the CFA, it was ensured that all factor loadings were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) for both first and second-order constructs, with standardised loadings exceeding 0.70 (see Tables 2 and 3, respectively). Consistent with the guidelines of Hair *et al.* (2014) and Fornell and Larcker (1981), internal consistency reliability, discriminant validity and convergent validity of the first and second-order constructs were assessed. Internal consistency reliability, measured through Rayko's rho and Cronbach's alpha coefficients, yielded satisfactory results, with coefficients ranging from 0.74 to 0.97. Additionally, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and convergent validity were considered (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The recommended cutoff value of 0.70 was exceeded by the first and second-order CR values. Discriminant validity was confirmed as the AVE values exceeded the inter-construct squared correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and were above 0.50 in all constructs (Table 2).

Discriminant validity was also assessed by ensuring that each latent variable's AVE exceeded the variance it shared with other components (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This criterion was met for all first-order (Table 3) and second-order variables (Table 4). Furthermore, following the guidelines of Henseler *et al.* (2015), the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlations was analysed to confirm discriminant validity. According to

this criterion, discriminant validity is established if any HTMT value is higher than the cut-off point of 0.90. As a result, 1 should not be included in the confidence interval of HTMT. For the model's recommended constructions, each of these requirements was satisfied.

To evaluate the level of multicollinearity of the items within the measurement model, it is essential to examine their individual values. None of the items surpassed the threshold value of 5, with the item "The environmental improvement from their production is coherent with my ethical and moral values" (altruistic value) displaying the minimum value (i.e., 2.87). This suggests that multicollinearity is not a concern in this study (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, the collinearity between the constructs was examined, revealing that the highest VIF value within the inner model was 2.32 (from consumer affinity to perceived value), which falls below the threshold value (Ali *et al.*, 2018), indicating the absence of multicollinearity between constructs.

To investigate moderating effects (see H5a and H5b), we followed Ping's (2004) recommendation and employed the two-step method. In the first step, we assessed the immediate effects, and in the second step, we included the interaction effect. The residual centring method was used to calculate latent variable interaction terms (Little *et al.*, 2006). Product terms were generated by multiplying each indication of the moderator variables by each indicator of the respective predictive variable (risk and value). The residuals obtained by regressing these product terms on their respective first-order components were used as indicators of latent interaction terms within the structural model. Using the two-step estimation method, three structural models were employed, each incorporating latent variable interaction terms to estimate the relationships. M1 primarily emphasised the moderating impact of the organic image (first step:  $\chi^2=219.48$ , SRMR=0.07; second step:  $\chi^2=118.75$ , SRMR=0.06), M2 examined the subsequent moderating impact of the induced image (first step:  $\chi^2=198.62$ , SRMR=0.05; second step:  $\chi^2=205.22$ , SRMR = 0.04), and M3 investigated how the interaction of risk and value was impacted simultaneously by organic and induced images (see Figure 2; model fit for step 1:  $\chi^2=250.12$ , SRMR=0.06; step 2:  $\chi^2=253.78$ , SRMR=0.05).

To ensure the absence of common method bias, we adhered to Harman's (1976) one-factor test following the guidelines outlined by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003). This approach confirmed that any discrepancies observed were attributed to the method of measurement rather than the constructs them-

selves. We applied varimax rotation to include all items of the measurement scale in a principal components analysis, helping to identify any evidence of a single factor. In addition, we assessed the degree of common method bias, revealing no significantly strong correlations between constructs ( $r > 0.9$ ) (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012), ensuring our results were not significantly affected by common method bias.

### *Structural model*

A measurement of estimated model fit is the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Chen, 2007). According to Hu and Bentler (1998), a model fits the data well when the SRMR is less than 0.80, with lower values indicating better fit. Our study model exhibited strong fit, with an SRMR of 0.063, alongside a Chi-Square of 348.416 and an NFI of 0.789. Based on goodness-of-fit statistics, the model fit was deemed satisfactory. We employed a higher-order model, specifically a hierarchical component model (HCM), which includes second-order constructs. Through a two-stage of the PLS-SEM methodology, we combined the repeated indicator method with latent variable scores to evaluate the model (Ping, 2004). The findings show  $R^2$  values and path coefficients (Figure 2). The model accounted for a substantial portion of the variance of endogenous variables, explaining 39.2%, 49.8%, and 45.4% of the variance in perceived risk, perceived value, and RTB, respectively. All  $R^2$  values were significant at  $p < 0.001$ , exceeding the suggested threshold of 0.10 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The path coefficients provided robust support for the proposed model, being statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction.

A notable result from the data is that consumer affinity had a significant effect on consumer RTB, supporting Hypothesis H1 ( $\gamma = -0.15$ ,  $q < 0.05$ ). Following Halim and Zulkarnain (2017) and Oberecker and Diamantopoulos (2011), affinity has a direct and unfavourable impact on risk perception. However, in this study, the impact of affinity on perceived risk was non-significant ( $\gamma = -0.07$ , n.s.), not supporting H2. As expected for H3, consumer affinity positively affected the perception of value, reinforcing the idea that strong emotional attachments to a certain country increase the perceived value of products from that origin ( $\gamma = 0.51$ ,  $q < 0.01$ ). In contrast, risk negatively and significantly affected the perceived value of foreign products, supporting Hypothesis H4.

The results also indicate that organic image has a strong moderating effect on the relationship between perceived risk and value when it is the sole conditioning influence (M1), consistent with H5a. Similarly, the interaction effect is substantial when induced image is the conditioning influence (M2), showing that induced image undermines the link between risk and value. One of the most notable discoveries was the fact that each facet of media influence, including the organic and induced images, has unique consequences. For high levels of organic image, the association between perceived risk and value is reinforced ( $b=-0.15$ ,  $t=2.33$ ,  $r=0.01$ ), supporting H5a. Conversely, the impact of risk on value diminishes at high levels of induced image ( $b=0.32$ ,  $t=2.62$ ,  $0.01$ ), supporting H5b. These findings suggest that induced image can reduce the effect of risk on value when individuals are more influenced by information about the product-country coming from organisations and institutions related to the sector. However, the risk-value relationship is strengthened when individuals are more exposed to information from external media (e.g., the internet, blogs, social media, etc.).

We have also demonstrated that consumer RTB products from a foreign country is positively impacted by perceived risk ( $=0.43$ ,  $0.01$ ), supporting H6. Moreover, we found that consumer RTB is negatively impacted by positive perceived value ( $=-0.10$ ,  $0.05$ ), confirming Hypothesis H7.

## **Discussion**

The main purpose of this research was to analyse the key variables in consumer behaviour that explain the generation of RTB foreign products and, most importantly, how to mitigate this phenomenon. This study emphasises the significance of consumer affinity towards a foreign country as a mitigating factor for consumers' RTB products from that country, highlighting the importance of positive emotional feelings in the consumer decision-making process. By examining this relationship within an international context, particularly in the presence of negative communication campaigns and image crises that suffer some institutions, organisations and companies in certain countries, this research also demonstrates the significant impact of affinity towards a certain country on consumers' perceptions of risk and value of the products from this COO and how both variables influence consumers' RTB. Furthermore, this study corroborates the negative rela-

tionship between perceived risk and value, analysing the influence on this relationship of the different sources of information on which the consumer relies in making decisions, and showing the importance of both promotional and non-promotional sources in forming consumer perceptions.

One of the main contributions of this research is the empirical demonstration that consumer affinity towards a foreign country can significantly reduce RTB products from that country. From the perspective of SIT, several studies have explored how consumer affinity affects the intention to purchase products or brands from the affinity country (e.g., Ercis & Celik, 2019; Kock *et al.*, 2019; Moraes & Strehlau, 2020). However, this is the first study to analyse consumer affinity in an anti-consumption context, directly derived from negative campaigns and image crises, showing how the development of positive emotional feelings towards an out-group element (in this case, a foreign country) may reduce RTB products from the affinity country. Consistent with the reasoning provided by SIT, this study demonstrates that affinity towards a foreign country or out-group significantly and positively influences the perceived value of products from this COO. Therefore, we suggest that emotional feelings can increase the perceived value for the consumer. Furthermore, in contrast to previous research (e.g., Halim & Zulkarnain, 2017; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011), our findings indicate that consumer affinity does not significantly influence the perceived risk of products from the affinity country. This suggests that under adverse conditions resulting from image crises, the development of positive emotional feelings may not prevent consumers from continuing to perceive considerable risk in the purchase of certain products.

In line with previous studies (García-de-Frutos & Ortega-Egea, 2015), this research shows that consumers' perceived value negatively influences RTB foreign products. This implies that when consumers perceive higher value in products from a foreign country (considered an out-group), they may be less likely to refuse to buy those products. Additionally, consistent with prior research (e.g., Zhang & Yu, 2020), the results indicate a positive and significant impact of perceived risk on RTB, showing a greater impact than consumer affinity or perceived value. This may be motivated by the high risk derived from negative events and crises related to social, environmental, and food quality/safety aspects associated with image crises. However, our findings show that the development of positive emotional feelings towards a foreign country, combined with a higher perceived value of their products, can play a crucial role in mitigating RTB products

from that COO, helping to counteract the negative effect of the consumer's perceived risk. In this sense, in the context of consuming products coming from another country, this research suggests that it is possible to overcome unfavourable campaigns and misconceptions in the market about a certain product-country if institutions and companies promote consumer affinity for that foreign country and base their marketing strategies on emotional appeal.

In line with previous research (Permatasari & Kuswadi, 2017; Rouibah *et al.*, 2021), this study has also demonstrated that risk perception adversely and considerably affects perceived value. Thus, it has been verified that in relation to foreign products, perceived risk is a key variable influencing the perceived value by the consumer. In addition, this is the first study that analyses how two different information sources – organic and induced – moderate the relationship between perceived risk and perceived value, especially in the context of the consumption of foreign products. These variables have primarily been studied in the context of consumers' evaluation of tourist destinations (e.g., Parrey *et al.*, 2019). Both organic and induced image conditions have different effects. As expected, the link between perceived risk and perceived value exhibits a weaker relationship due to the moderating effect of induced image (e.g., Currie, 2020). Additionally, the relationship between perceived risk and perceived value is strengthened by organic image. Therefore, in contrast to previous studies (e.g., Currie, 2020), it has been demonstrated that the moderating effect of the induced image is stronger than that exerted by organic image. This corroborates that when unexpected news, such as a negative incident, seriously affects the image of a country and its products, it is crucial for companies and institutions to design controllable marketing strategies based on commercial sources, which will significantly influence a consumer's perception of risk and value.

Multiple practical implications can be drawn from this study. It is crucial for private organisations and public institutions in an international context that have experienced negative communication campaigns and/or image crises in their countries to understand the factors affecting consumer behaviour and their perception of products from other countries. In this regard, they should actively engage in fostering positive emotional feelings towards that COO in consumers in the target markets, which will mitigate perceived risk and RTB products from that origin (Khan *et al.*, 2019). This study empirically demonstrates the importance for institutions and organi-



sations to develop and implement strategic marketing plans focused on emotional feelings of affinity for the COO of their products, which will ultimately combat image crises and stem the decline in demand. This will ultimately positively reposition the perception of the product-country (Asseraf & Shoham, 2017).

The results of this study also highlight the importance of collaboration between companies and institutions to generate a unique and favourable image of the country so that this image induced in consumers in the destination markets can control the risk associated with it. These sources not only affect consumers' perceptions of the value of foreign products, but also lessen the impact of perceived risk on value in the face of image crises. In this way, we showed that organisations and institutions could benefit from using emotion-based advertising to arouse favourable feelings of affinities towards a foreign country (due to the positive correlation between affinities and willingness to purchase goods from a country, as seen in Terasaki *et al.*, 2022; or brands, as seen in Shi *et al.*, 2021). Such initiatives might involve attracting foreigners, creating an emotional reaction towards a certain nation (caused by personal experience), and encouraging others to travel there and use their products, services, and brands (Oberecker *et al.*, 2008). The potential of a single company to increase consumer affinity in destination markets is constrained. A potent strategy to address this issue is collaboration together with strong linkages between companies, sectoral associations and institutions of the same country. It is crucial to generate and enhance affinity towards a foreign country, thus mitigating the impacts of unpredicted risk perception (derived from image crises) and RTB these companies/institutions or even the country itself in international markets.

On the other hand, companies must understand that organic information sources (e.g., blogs, social media, word of mouth) and induced information sources (promotional campaigns) have different effects on the perception of value and risk. Promotional campaigns that are developed should attempt to counteract the negative effect of organic information. This may involve disseminating positive information of attributes such as quality, safety and sustainability, among others, as well as responding quickly and transparently to any image crisis derived from negative communication campaigns.

To sum up, the practical implications of this research suggest that both company marketing strategies and institutional policies should focus on

creating and strengthening a positive affinity towards the product's COO. This can be achieved through emotional campaigns, vertical and horizontal collaboration in the value chain (including other stakeholders and related sectors), and effective risk perception management by enhancing the product/sector image in the media. From the point of view of supranational administrations, as in the case of the European Union (EU), which wants to promote a general feeling of affinity in this geographical area, they must be aware of the existence of a phenomenon of RTB foreign products and image crises in some countries and sector, which has its origin in variables of animosity to foreignness or ethnocentrism, which must be "combated". In fact, in the specific case under study, the implementation of European institutional campaigns could be an opportunity to promote a "farm to fork" strategy that would foster the feeling of affinity towards the product produced in the EU.

## **Conclusions**

This research significantly contributes to the understanding of the anti-consumption phenomenon, particularly regarding the RTB foreign products, offering both theoretical insights and practical implications for business policy. By examining factors that potentially increase RTB foreign products (e.g., perceived risk) and incorporating elements that could mitigate this undesirable effect, the study provides a nuanced understanding of RTB in destination markets. Unlike previous literature that often focused on general perceptions of foreign countries (Guo *et al.*, 2018; Halim & Zulkarnain, 2017; Rabêlo-Neto *et al.*, 2020), this research explores consumer affinity towards a specific foreign country and a product category.

The study, focusing on the Spanish agri-food sector, known for grappling with numerous image crises in key destination markets, elucidates how consumer affinity can shape consumers' perceptions and demand under adverse circumstances. In the international context, this study highlights the role of positive emotional connections in decision-making processes, revealing that affinity positively influences the perceived value of products from a particular country, thereby impacting RTB. Notably, it highlights the exacerbation of perceived risk amidst problems, consequently dampening RTB. This underscores the importance for companies to consider consumers' affinity for specific countries when designing marketing

strategies, especially in high-risk contexts, to enhance the perceived value of products from the affinity country.

Furthermore, this study highlights the significance of an individual's induced image, formed through interactions with various commercial information sources, as a pivotal determinant of consumer perceptions and preferences. It elucidates the moderating effect of induced image on the risk-value relationship, enriching our understanding of consumer behaviour and offering actionable insights for companies seeking to cultivate positive perceptions and projected image, while mitigating RTB. Thus, from the empirical study conducted, it can be deduced that, to the extent that commercial sources with positive messages about the country-product are used, the consumer's perceived risk impacts the perceived value of these products to a lesser extent.

#### *Limitations and scope for future research*

One of the key limitations of this study is its setting, as the research focuses solely on a specific sector and target market. First, since we have analysed a single country-product (i.e., Spanish fruits and vegetables), future research could adopt a category-specific approach, establishing various product categories relevant to the context and a brand-focused approach to assess the effects on specific consumer brands. Future studies should also include a wider range of product categories to gain deeper insights into pleasant emotional states, such as hedonic, utilitarian, and natural-based products. Second, it is crucial to extend this study to determine whether differences exist among different destination markets (e.g., the United Kingdom, France or the Netherlands). In addition, this study analysed information sources through organic and induced images as moderating variables. Future research should consider analysing the effect of each media source to provide companies and institutions with information on which source is the significant in inducing consumer affinity and product-country image. Moreover, studies examining consumer affinity and its antecedents and outcomes are still scarce (e.g., Nes *et al.*, 2014). As a result, future studies should explore how feelings of affinity are created and how they affect consumers' decision-making processes. This includes incorporating other relevant variables in the analysis of consumer behaviour, such as macro and micro country image (Nes *et al.*, 2014), country-specific concepts (i.e., xenophilia or internationalism; Bartsch *et al.*, 2016), and consum-

er animosity (e.g., Asseraf & Shoham, 2016). Furthermore, the anti-consumption phenomenon needs further examination. Therefore, it would be beneficial to investigate how factors like competence and warmth could mitigate the effects of a negative image (Belanche *et al.*, 2021) and place attachment (Tasci *et al.*, 2022), which have been mainly studied in the context of tourist destination images, and their impact on anti-consumption through boycotts (Bagus *et al.*, 2022).

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## Annex

**Table 1.** Demographic and geographical representativeness of the sample

Variables	Total sample (n=335)	
	%	n
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	49.0%	164
Female	51.0%	171
<b>Age</b>		
18-29	17.1%	57
30-39	13.7%	46
40-49	20.0%	67
50+	49.2%	165
<b>Region</b>		
Baden-Württemberg	13.1%	44
Bayern	15.5%	52
Berlin	4.5%	15
Brandenburg	3.3%	11
Bremen	0.9%	3
Hamburg	2.4%	8
Hessen	7.5%	25
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	1.8%	6
Niedersachsen	9.6%	32
Nordrhein-Westfalen	21.5%	72
Rheinland-Pfalz	4.8%	16
Saarland	1.2%	4
Sachsen	5.1%	17
Sachsen-Anhalt	2.7%	9
Schleswig-Holstein	3.6%	12
Thüringen	2.7%	9

Source: The population data for German people (in the year 2019) stem from the German Federal Statistical Office: [www.destatis.de](http://www.destatis.de).

**Table 2.** Construct measurement. Convergent validity of second-order constructs

Construct and items	Indicator <sup>a</sup> validity and reliability		Construct validity and reliability			
	Stand. loading	t-value	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Rho	CR	AVE
<b>Consumer Affinity</b>			0.94	0.94	0.95	0.73
Sympathy	0.93	85.6**				
Attachment	0.95	133.0**				
<b>Perceived Risk</b>			0.95	0.95	0.96	0.69
Social Risk	0.95	128.1**				
Quality Risk	0.87	41.8**				
Environmental Risk	0.90	68.9**				

**Table 2.** Continued

Construct and items	Indicator <sup>a</sup> validity and reliability		Construct validity and reliability			
	Stand. loading	t-value	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Rho	CR	AVE
<b>Perceived Value</b>			0.96	0.96	0.96	0.54
Efficiency and Quality	0.89	49.0**				
Social Value	0.60	12.1**				
Hedonic Value	0.91	55.2**				
Altruistic Value	0.73	17.9**				
<b>Reluctance to Buy (RTB)</b>			0.91	0.93	0.93	0.70
General RTB	0.97	220.6**				
Relative RTB	0.96	139.7**				

Note: <sup>a</sup>First-order dimensions (for second order-constructs); \*\*Significant for  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 3.** Correlations between first-order constructs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>1. Sympathy</b>	1.00										
<b>2. Attachment</b>	0.77**	1.00									
<b>3. Social Risk</b>	-0.10	0.05	1.00								
<b>4. Quality Risk</b>	-0.23**	-0.09	0.74**	1.00							
<b>5. Environmental Risk</b>	-0.07**	0.01	0.82**	0.64**	1.00						
<b>6. Efficiency and quality</b>	0.53**	0.55**	-0.18*	-0.37**	-0.16*	1.00					
<b>7. Social value</b>	-0.10**	0.05	0.10	0.18*	0.03	0.34**	1.00				
<b>8. Hedonic value</b>	0.49**	0.55**	-0.22**	-0.28**	-0.23**	0.75**	0.39**	1.00			
<b>9. Altruistic value</b>	0.26**	0.45**	-0.02	0.09	-0.17*	0.49**	0.71**	0.53**	1.00		
<b>10. General RTB</b>	-0.24**	-0.12*	0.55**	0.57**	0.55**	-0.34**	0.17*	-0.37**	-0.02	1.00	
<b>11. Relative RTB</b>	-0.27**	-0.14*	0.54**	0.16*	0.52**	-0.32**	0.16*	-0.37**	-0.02	0.87**	1.00

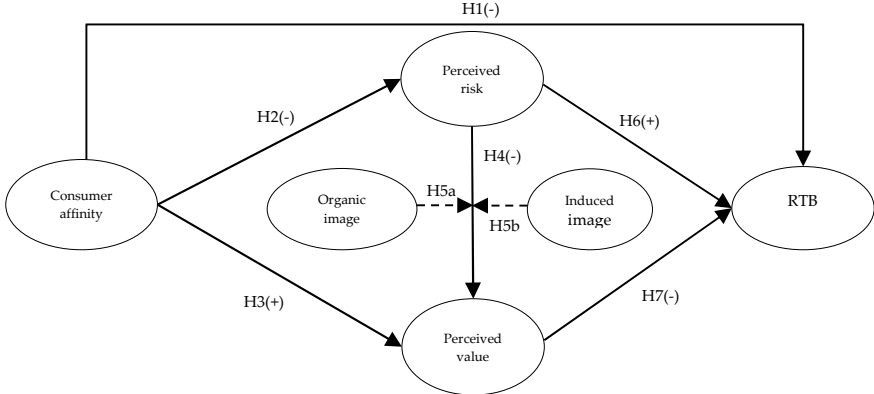
Note: \*\*Significant for  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 4.** Discriminant validity

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>1. Consumer Affinity</b>	0.86					
<b>2. Perceived Risk</b>	-0.07	0.83				
<b>3. Perceived value</b>	0.60**	-0.22**	0.74			
<b>4. Organic image</b>	0.19*	0.42**	0.18**	0.77		
<b>5. Induced image</b>	0.17*	0.33**	0.29**	0.76**	0.89	
<b>6. RTB</b>	-0.20**	0.63**	-0.29**	0.40**	0.25**	0.84

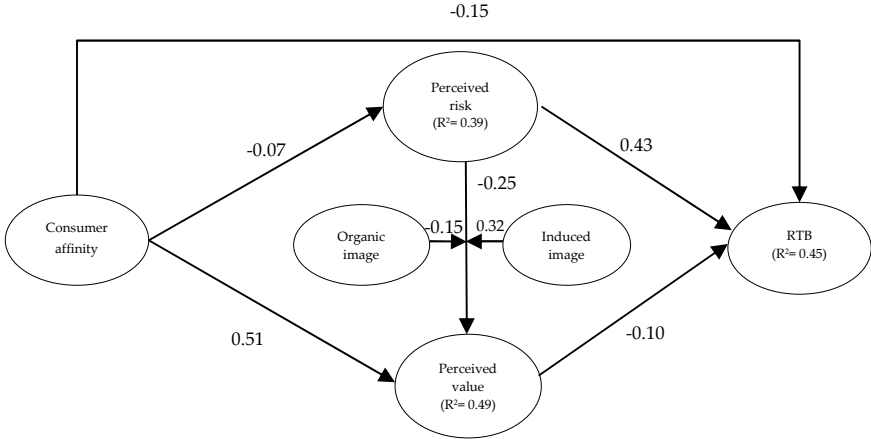
Note: \* Significant for  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*Significant for  $p < 0.01$ . The elements on the diagonal (values in parentheses) represent the square root of the variance extracted (AVE).

**Figure 1.** Conceptual model and hypotheses



Note: The dotted paths represent the moderating effects.

**Figure 2.** Structural model



## Appendix

### Construct measurement. Convergent validity of first-order constructs

Construct and adapted items	Indicator <sup>a</sup> validity and reliability		Construct validity and reliability			
	Stand. loading	t-value	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Rho	CR	AVE
<b>Sympathy</b>			<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>0.87</b>
Pleasant feeling	0.92	— <sup>b</sup>				
Like	0.93	50.5**				
Feelings of sympathy	0.94	75.4**				
<b>Attachment</b>			<b>0.92</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.80</b>
Captivated	0.83	— <sup>b</sup>				
Feeling attached	0.92	26.6**				
Love	0.90	58.8**				
Inspired	0.91	47.7**				
<b>Social Risk</b>			<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.90</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.76</b>
I am worried about labour conditions in this sector	0.88	— <sup>b</sup>				
I am worried since the system attracts illegal immigration	0.89	46.2**				
I worry about integrity of producers and sellers about the quality of products/services	0.82	27.1**				
<b>Quality Risk</b>			<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.89</b>
I am concerned with the lower quality of the products/services than I expected	0.93	— <sup>b</sup>				
I worry about quality of the products/services are unmatched with the descriptions given on products package or ads	0.95	85.8**				
I worry about fulfilment of requirements of Spanish horticultural products/services	0.93	73.3**				
<b>Environmental Risk</b>			<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.89</b>
I am concerned about environmental conditions of producing and processing the Spanish horticultural products/services	0.92	— <sup>b</sup>				
I am concerned about water consumption in production	0.95	80.1**				
I am concerned about his type of production in climate change	0.94	95.1**				
<b>Efficiency and Quality</b>			<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>0.69</b>
Are reasonably priced	0.82	— <sup>b</sup>				
Offer good value for money	0.88	27.4**				
Are good products for the price they have	0.88	30.13**				
At the price shown these products are very economic	<i>Deleted item</i>					
Have consistent quality	0.86	37.5**				
Are adequately produced	0.80	27.3**				
Have an acceptable standard of quality	0.88	61.1**				
Comply with my expectations for horticultural products	0.87	51.9**				
<b>Social Value</b> You think that buying Spanish horticultural products:			<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.88</b>
Improve the way other people perceive me	0.89	— <sup>b</sup>				
Makes a good impression on other people	0.95	32.4**				
Give those who buy it social approval	0.95	51.54**				
<b>Hedonic Value</b> Regarding the Spanish horticultural products, you think that:			<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.97</b>	<b>0.81</b>
I like them	0.90	— <sup>b</sup>				
I like to consume them	0.92	55.2**				
I feel comfortable consuming them	0.88	42.6**				
They make me feel good	0.89	59.0**				
I like the appearance of the Spanish horticultural products	0.89	46.1**				
I find the Spanish horticultural products' texture and colour attractive	0.90	44.6**				
In my opinion, Spanish horticultural products' taste is fine	0.90	60.0**				
<b>Altruistic Value</b>			<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.89</b>
Buying them would have an ethical interest for me, as I consider that these products have been ecologically produced	0.94	— <sup>b</sup>				
The environmental improvement from their production is coherent with my ethical and moral values	0.93	63.3**				
Purchasing these products have ethical value for me	0.95	52.75**				

Construct measurement. Convergent validity of first-order constructs – Continued

Construct and adapted items	Indicator <sup>a</sup> validity and reliability		Construct validity and reliability			
	Stand. loading	t-value	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Rho	CR	AVE
<b>General RTB</b>			<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.82</b>
I would feel guilty if I buy Spanish horticultural products	0.88	— <sup>b</sup>				
I do not like the idea of owning Spanish horticultural products	0.90	38.9**				
I would never buy Spanish horticultural products	0.92	67.1**				
<b>Relative RTB</b>			<b>0.76</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>0.86</b>	<b>0.68</b>
Whenever possible, I avoid buying Spanish horticultural products	0.91	— <sup>b</sup>				
If two horticultural products were equal in quality, but one was from Spain and one was from Germany, I would pay 10% more for the product from Germany	0.78	12.0**				
In comparison to the products from other countries, as a general rule I do not like the horticultural products produced in Spain	0.90	51.3**				
<b>Organic Image</b>			<b>0.85</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>0.87</b>	<b>0.60</b>
Blogs and social media	0.86	— <sup>b</sup>				
Internet (i.e., digital newspapers and specialized websites)	0.75	4.27**				
Electronic media (TV, radio, broadcasting, etc.)	0.60	2.99**				
Information received from relatives and friends	0.81	4.29**				
Print media (magazines, newspapers, etc.)	0.78	3.51**				
<b>Induced Image</b>			<b>0.95</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.87</b>
Advertising and outdoor advertisements (e.g., billboards, lighted signs, etc.)	0.92	— <sup>b</sup>				
Sales promotion	0.93	51.8**				
Sponsorship	0.94	59.4**				
Others (e.g., visits to fairs or exhibitions)	0.92	61.2**				

Note: <sup>a</sup> Individual items (for first-order constructs); <sup>b</sup> Parameter fixed at 1.0 in the CFA solution; \*\*Significant for  $p < 0.01$ .