

Heading Home? Reshoring and Sustainability Connectedness from a Home-Country Consumer Perspective

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Extensive globalisation has presented several sustainability challenges highlighted in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. These include the environmental impact of global product procurement and manufacturing and the irregular treatment of indigenous workers in developing countries. Thus, reshoring, defined as a firm's voluntary strategy to partially or totally relocate production to the home country, is gaining traction. However, most research on reshoring focuses on firms, leaving the consumers' perspective under-researched. Here, we examine British consumers' perspectives on reshoring to the UK and sustainability. By employing the theoretical lens of connectedness, anchored in attachment theory, we conducted 30 in-depth interviews using projective techniques and analysed the data using the constant comparison method. We found that consumers not only positively viewed their connectedness with the concept of reshoring from a sustainability perspective, but also appraised it from a global perspective, demonstrating empathy towards the host country. Further, they doubted corporations' motives regarding reshoring. Three theoretical dimensions emerged based on consumers' connectedness with reshoring and sustainability, specifically, supporting reshoring conditionally, inclusive reshoring, and doubting reshoring.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, consumers have had access to various global products and services at affordable prices owing to globalisation and the offshoring of manufacturing activities to developing countries, which come with lower labour costs (Orzes and Sarkis, 2019; Tate *et al.*, 2014; Wilkinson *et al.*, 2021). However, offshoring-related deficiencies are surfacing, including manufacturing inefficiencies and delivery delays, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding sustainability, the social and environmental impact of procuring and manufacturing products and the poor treatment of workers in developing countries are also concerning (Donaghey and Reinecke, 2018; Gillani *et al.*, 2021). In response, there has been a business and political steer towards reshoring,

defined as 'a voluntary company decision to relocate its activities back to the home-country, after having implemented an offshoring decision in the past, regardless of the ownership of the activities reshored' (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2020, p.70). This is attributed to increasing labour costs (Ellram, Tate and Petersen, 2013), low product quality (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2020), and sustainability issues in developing countries (Brennan *et al.*, 2015; Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019; Orzes and Sarkis, 2019; Sirilertsuwana, Ekwall and Hjelmgren, 2018).

Reshoring is gaining prominence globally; for example, in the US, more than 1300 organisations are likely to partially or fully relocate their manufacturing activities to their country, generating 138,000 new jobs (Reshoring Initiative, 2021). In Europe, the UK has the most reshoring cases

(17%), followed by Italy (15%) and France (14%) (Eurofound, 2019). Reshoring is also evident in developing countries. For example, Boat, a leading Indian consumer electronics brand, moved its manufacturing from China to India and aims to produce 40% of its products in India by 2024 (Techradar, 2022).

The UK, the home country in this study, has recently been pushing for British reshoring. In a survey conducted by *The Manufacturer*, a leading UK industry publication, it was found that 70% of the participant organisations plan to reshore their manufacturing activities, while 40% have already done so (The Manufacturer UK, 2021). For example, Alexander Dennis (Product Engineering Solutions, 2021), a leading British bus maker, reshored from Hungary and China to the UK. Also, the 'Made in Britain' initiative, a collective association of British manufacturers, is assisting brands that decide to manufacture in Britain, further prompted by supply chain disruptions resulting from Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic (Reshoring UK, 2021).

Concurrently, reshoring is amassing academic interest. Most reshoring literature has examined the effects of reshoring on supply chains and operations management (Gray *et al.*, 2017; McIvor and Bals, 2021; Wiesmann *et al.*, 2017), as well as the motivators, outcomes, and barriers to reshoring (Ellram, Tate and Petersen, 2013; Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019). However, research from the consumer's perspective (see Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2015, 2018, 2020; Pal, Harper and Velle-salu, 2018) is limited (Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019; Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2020), despite the potential effect of consumer brand perceptions on reshoring decisions (Eurofound, 2019). In a recent Deloitte study, one of the few exploring the consumer perspective, around 65% of consumers – individual and corporate – preferred locally manufactured products and organisations with operationally excellent supply chains and ecologically friendly approaches (Deloitte Insights, 2021).

Recently, there has been an interest in the consumer side of the equation; however, few studies (see Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2015, 2018, 2020; Pal, Harper and Velle-salu, 2018) have examined the consumer perspective. Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2015) found that consumers consider reshoring companies to be morally superior and thus show a higher willingness to purchase their products. Furthermore, Moore, Rothenberg

and Moser (2018) found that consumers perceive home production to have fewer adverse environmental effects than offshore manufacturing. However, these studies mostly examine consumers' positive perceptions: comprehensive analyses, including negative reactions, if any, are scant (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2020). Therefore, there is a need to gain a holistic understanding of consumer perspective, as consumers are a key demand-side driving factor impacting company reshoring decisions.

The literature (e.g. Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019; Sawhney and Rastogi, 2015) recognises the interdependencies between reshoring and the three dimensions of sustainability – economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The economic dimension refers to fair wages, poverty reduction, and efficient resource allocation. The social dimension involves labour rights and the wellbeing of communities, workers, and consumers. The environmental dimension relates to the use of renewable resources and reductions in the pollution and carbon footprints (Gao and Bansal, 2013; Hengst *et al.*, 2020; Huang and Rust, 2011; Khurana and Ricchetti, 2016). For example, Ashby (2016), examining the reshoring activities of a UK-based fashion brand, found that building and developing mutually beneficial relationships with local manufacturers and suppliers contributed to them achieving sustainability goals. Heikkilä, Martin-suo and Nenonen (2018) examined reshoring within the Finnish manufacturing sector and emphasised the importance of understanding the impact of reshoring on employment levels in both the home and host countries. In a review of studies on reshoring and sustainability, Fratocchi and Di Stefano (2019) argued that a firm's sustainability strategies need to be developed using a 'systemic approach', including consumers' perspectives.

From the perspective of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), consumers significantly influence reshoring decisions concerning manufacturing and supply chain activities, particularly as reflected in SDG-12: 'Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns' (United Nations, 2021). This Goal targets the realisation of sustainable consumption and production and invites developed countries to play a leadership role in achieving this. While this implies a significant impact on sustainability-related reshoring decisions, research examining this relationship considering the three dimensions of

sustainability from the consumer's perspective remains scarce (Ashby, 2016; Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019; Orzes and Sarkis, 2019). Specifically, to our knowledge, there is no study that examines the consumer's perspective regarding the relationship between reshoring and the three dimensions of sustainability.

To analyse this relationship and address the literature gaps described above, we employ the connectedness concept anchored in attachment theory (Townsend and McWhirter, 2005), which defines attachment as arising 'when a person is actively involved with another person, object, group, or environment, and that involvement promotes a sense of comfort, wellbeing, and anxiety-reduction' (Hagerty *et al.*, 1993, p. 293). This suggests that individuals are inclined to experience deep fondness with significant others, thus developing strong connections with them (Mikulincer, Shaver and Pereg, 2003; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007). As consumers could be influenced by, for example, attachment to their home countries or connections that they have with other people, it is important to examine their perceptions about reshoring manufacturing activities and the resulting impact on the three dimensions of sustainability in the home country (UK). Considering the above-mentioned gaps, the main research question of this study is as follows. How do British (home country) consumers perceive the relationship between organisations' reshoring activities and the three (economic, social, and environmental) dimensions of sustainability? Accordingly, the overarching research objective of this study is to understand consumer perspective regarding the relationship between reshoring and the three (economic, social, and environmental) dimensions of sustainability.

By addressing this research question, we make several contributions. First, while most reshoring literature focuses on the firm's perspective, we assume a holistic approach. We add to the reshoring literature by examining the perspective of British consumers regarding organisations' reshoring activities. Second, to our knowledge there is no research considering the consumer perspective on the relationship between reshoring and sustainability, and we provide a comprehensive analysis of consumers' perceptions of reshoring and sustainability considering the social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Third, we demonstrate connectedness as a helpful and novel the-

oretical lens for examining consumer perspective towards reshoring and sustainability. We extend the theoretical conceptualisation of connectedness by proposing the following three theoretical categories: national sustainability connectedness, global sustainability connectedness, and indifference towards sustainability connectedness.

Literature review

Reshoring and consumer behaviour

Reshoring is defined as a firm's decision to relocate all or some of its functions back to the home country (Ellram, Tate and Petersen, 2013; Gray *et al.*, 2013). Reasons for reshoring include increased transportation and labour costs in developing countries, low product quality, sustainability concerns, and, more recently, COVID-19-induced supply chain disruptions (Dachs, Kinkel and Jäger, 2019; Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019; McIvor and Bals, 2021). While sustainability considerations are described tangentially as factors influencing organisational reshoring decisions in relation to the host country, which suggests an increasing understanding of the impact of production and supply chains on the environment, they have not been sufficiently explored (Wiesmann *et al.*, 2017). Further, it is argued that reshoring production from developing countries may be detrimental to the sustainability of marginalised workers in those countries, who depend on such production for their livelihood (Doherty, Davies and Tranchell, 2013; Eckhardt, Belk and Devinney, 2010; Gillani *et al.*, 2021).

While most of the reshoring research concentrates on a firm's supply chain and operations management (e.g. Di Di Mauro *et al.*, 2018; Gray *et al.*, 2013; Tate *et al.*, 2014), the consumer's viewpoint remains under-researched (Ashby, 2016; Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019; Moretto, Patrucco and Harland, 2020; Srari and Ané, 2016). This is surprising, because the literature affirms that consumers are increasingly demanding authentically and locally made products, and are willing to pay more for them (Collins and Weiss, 2015; Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2020; Robinson and Hsieh, 2016). In a seminal study examining consumers' willingness to buy products from companies that reshore, Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2015) found that a company's reshoring decision positively influenced consumer attitudes

towards the organisation through increased gratitude and decreased anger. Further, concerning corporate social responsibility (CSR), they argue that consumers appreciate reshoring that they perceive as motivated by serving others as opposed to that perceived as self-serving.

More recently, Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2018) found that the perceived superior quality of reshored products and host-country-related sustainability concerns increased the intention to buy home-country products. However, in measuring consumer attitudes towards organisations' pre- and post-reshoring decisions, Cassia (2020) found that only consumers who were aware of companies' previous offshoring activities and were highly ethnocentric had an increased perception of quality towards reshored products. Recently, Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2020) argued that consumers with strong reshoring sentiments are more inclined towards purchasing such products and speak positively about them to others. However, these studies have mostly examined the positive aspects of consumer responses to reshoring decisions and ignored negative consumer reactions, and thus the literature is not holistic. We fill this research gap by considering both positive and negative consumer perceptions towards reshoring to the UK.

Furthermore, the increasing number of scandals regarding the devastating social and environmental impact of offshoring (Tsouflias and Pappis, 2006) are raising consumers' sustainability concerns (see Veit *et al.*, 2018). Consumers might consider reshoring strategy as an ethical decision, in that companies comply with the labour and environmental laws of home countries as opposed to those of host countries (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2018). Bonini and Oppenheim (2008) conducted a multinational study in the USA, the UK, India, and China and found that approximately 50% of respondents were inclined to buy products from companies that invested in alternative energy or made efforts to be environmentally conscious. Maronde *et al.* (2015) found that the environmental benefit of reshoring significantly influences customers' willingness to pay more for such products. From a social sustainability perspective, reshoring may not always create job opportunities, but it may avert layoffs (Engström *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, it is important to consider the influence of sustainability concerns on reshoring decisions (Fratocchi and Di Stefano,

2019; Orzes and Sarkis, 2019). Although there is growing customer interest in sustainability and a demand for organisations to engage sustainably in reshoring practices (Delis, Driffield and Temouri, 2019; Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019; Gualandris, Golini and Kalchschmidt, 2014), to our knowledge there is no research examining consumer perspective regarding the relationship between reshoring and the three dimensions of sustainability.

Theoretical framework: Sustainability connectedness and consumer behaviour

Extant consumer research on reshoring has witnessed a constrained use of theories, and there is a lack of studies examining consumers' perceptions towards reshoring and sustainability through a complementary theoretical perspective. Organisations' reshoring decisions have been traditionally explicated through the cost–benefit factors rooted in transaction cost economics, focusing on the role of economic factors such as labour costs or overseas supplier dependence (Choudhary *et al.*, 2022; McIvor and Bals, 2021). In contrast, we adopt a unique theoretical perspective to examine consumer perspective regarding reshoring and sustainability – the connectedness concept, which hinges on attachment theory. Bowlby defined attachment as a 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (1969, p. 194) that creates social bonds and links people through their common concerns (Lastovicka and Sirianni, 2011).

Connectedness is a multi-dimensional concept, encompassing various forms (see Table 1), such as social connectedness (Åkestam, Rosengren and Dahlen, 2017; Wang, Keh and Chao, 2018), connectedness to nature (Dong *et al.*, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2019), global connectedness (Lee, Lee and Kim, 2016; Strizhakova and Coulter, 2015), and connectedness to self (Liang and Guo, 2021). For example, concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, Kirk and Rifkin (2020) found that consumers established social connectedness through virtual social events, cloud clubbing, or wellbeing sessions to cope with the crisis. Further, Åkestam, Rosengren and Dahlen (2017) argue that social connectedness is important for marketers when designing advertising campaigns, as it can engender an inclusive society. In this study, connectedness could provide a useful lens through which to examine the relationship between reshoring and social sustainability by examining how consumers

Table 1. Selected empirical studies on connectedness in the literature on marketing and consumer behaviour

Study	Form of connectedness	Country	Method	Sample	Findings
Wang and Mowen (1997)	Advertising	US	Questionnaire survey	144 students	Individuals who demonstrated a connected self-schema favoured a connected advertising theme, while individuals who displayed a separate self-schema chose a separated advertising theme.
Russell, Norman and Heckler (2004)	Television programs and characters	US	Focus groups, questionnaire survey	613 students	Connectedness predicted an individual's short- and long-term memory related to program information and brand imagination.
Li and Zhang (2014)	Psychological	Hong Kong, Singapore	Experiment	Study 1, 43 students Study 2, 41 students Study 3, 76 students Study 4, 50 students	When individuals were shown pictures of attractive women or were hungry, they felt less connectedness to others. Such decreased psychological connectedness led to a lower commitment of resources to others or helping others.
Strizhakova and Coulter (2015)	Global	Australia, Brazil, China, India, Russia, UK, and US	Consumer and national-level data from Euromonitor's Global Market Information Database	2197 consumers	Consumers purchased local brands rather than global brands depending on local-global values, and this link was mediated by their identification with the local (global) brands.
Zhang and Aggarwal (2015)	Psychological	-	Questionnaire survey	Study 1, 170 students Study 2, 322 participants	Participants with a strong sense of connectedness, compared with weak connectedness, demonstrated a positive assessment of products, social causes, and the brand.
Lee, Lee and Kim (2016)	Global	US, Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, China, Thailand, UAE	Questionnaire survey	2070 consumers	The association between customers' experiences and intentions to return to the restaurant was moderated by global-connectedness distance.

Table 1. (Continued)

Study	Form of connectedness	Country	Method	Sample	Findings
Akestam, Rosengren and Dahlen (2017)	Social	North Europe	Experiment	Study 1, 154 consumers Study 2, 529 consumers Study 3, 173 consumers	The depiction of homosexuality in promotional activities led to consumers being more empathetic, hence impacting their perceptions of social connectedness.
Nowlin, Walker and Anaza (2018)	Salesperson	US	Questionnaire survey	230 participants	During times of high internal volatility, connectedness led to higher performance through the sales strategy implementation.
Wang, Keh and Chao (2018)	Social	US, China	M-Turk/ Field experiment	Study 1, 155 consumers Study 2, 101 consumers Study 3, 146 consumers Study 4, 310 consumers	Social connectedness mediated the link between nostalgia and liking for indulgent foods.
Liu et al. (2019)	Nature	China	Questionnaire survey	Study 1, 86 students Study 2, 89 students Study 3, 134 students	Pro-environmental behaviour and mother/father nature were mediated by connectedness to nature.
Tran, Yazdanparast and Strutton (2019)	Celebrity endorsement	US	Questionnaire survey	502 students from two universities	There was a positive association between participants' connectedness and their preferred celebrity's endorsed message, thus impacting the intention to buy the products endorsed by that celebrity.

Table 1. (Continued)

Study	Form of connectedness	Country	Method	Sample	Findings
Dong <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Nature	China	Questionnaire survey	856 participants	A positive relationship between connectedness to nature and purchasing and recycling, and an indirect association on sustainable consumption behaviour was found.
Li <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Nature	UK, US	Questionnaire survey	523 participants	Connectedness to nature mediated the relationship between mindfulness and consumption.
Liang and Guo (2021)	Future self	China	Longitudinal survey, Experiment	136 participants	Connectedness to the future self moderates the mediation process in the path from gratitude to sustainable product choice and in that from gratitude to time discounting. Connectedness to the future self moderates the mediation process in the path from gratitude to sustainable product choice and in that from gratitude to time discounting. Connectedness to the future self moderates the mediation process in the path from gratitude to sustainable product choice and in that from gratitude to time discounting. Connectedness to the future self moderates the mediation process in the path from gratitude to sustainable product choice and in that from gratitude to time discounting.
Yang, Hu and Nguyen (2021)	Social	China	Questionnaire survey	Study 1, 626 participants Study 2, 235 students Study 3, 440 participants	Social connectedness mediated the relationship between (a) dispositional awe and (b) induced awe with preferences around majority-endorsed vs. minority-endorsed options.

may feel connected to people in the home country, and how reshoring could impact their livelihoods.

The dominant perspective in consumption studies espouses an ecological perspective of connectedness, conceptualising it as the degree to which people embrace nature (Mayer and Frantz, 2004; Schultz, 2002). Individuals who demonstrate high levels of connectedness to nature are more likely to positively view environmental preservation and negatively view harmful activities towards nature (Barbaro and Pickett, 2016; Dong *et al.*, 2020). Connectedness to nature could evoke positive feelings, such as empathy and involvement in prosocial behaviour and socially responsible consumption (Mayer and Frantz, 2004; Weinstein, Przybylski and Ryan, 2009; Zhang, Howell and Iyer, 2014). For example, in a survey of 546 online consumers, Li *et al.* (2021) noted that consumers demonstrating strong connectedness to nature were more likely to choose sustainable alternatives such as fair-trade products or to actively reduce their consumption.

Some studies have also stated that people who experience higher levels of connectedness to nature tend to be considerate about other individuals and society at large; for example, Russell and Russell (2010) found a positive association between consumer global connectedness and responsiveness to foreign CSR initiatives. Since the advent of globalisation, global brands are not seen as complementary, but rather as competitive (Varman and Belk, 2009). This argument gains more impetus in the context of reshoring and sustainability, where these values could tip this delicate balance, yet it remains understudied. These studies mostly infer relationship between the human–nature connection and societal welfare, which demonstrates a significant gap in the literature regarding this relationship, which leads to the need for clarity on these basic assumptions.

From a global viewpoint, Strizhakova and Coulter (2015), after examining consumer ethnocentrism and global connectedness, found that higher levels of global connectedness are inversely related to consumer perceptions of local product quality, compared with global products. When consumers feel connected to broader society, instead of just their nation, the self–other gap reduces, potentially inducing empathy and stronger emotional reactions (Escalas and Stern, 2003; Galinsky, Ku and Wang, 2005). While global connectedness alludes to increased consumer involvement

in the world, making consumers more receptive to global brands, consumer ethnocentrism refers to supporting local brands, and is often associated with stronger nationalistic beliefs (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2011; Cleveland, Laroche and Papadopoulos, 2009). This can be significant when consumers evaluate reshoring motives and alter their attitudes and behaviours considering the welfare of both local and distant individuals.

Conceptualising connectedness at a more internal level, researchers argue that individuals recognise their present and future selves to be associated, which affects their future decisions (Urmitsky, 2017). Consumers with a connectedness to their future self may choose sustainable alternatives over short-term and cost-saving ones. The reshoring and sustainability context may accentuate connectedness to the future self, because consumers who perceive environmental and social sustainability to be unrelated to organisations' reshoring decisions may react negatively to reshoring (Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019).

There is a significant gap in the connectedness literature because these studies adopt a unitary view by focusing either on the individual's relationship with the environment or on the social interface with others, and thus do not offer a holistic view of the concept concerning reshoring and sustainability. This is a significant omission, given that individuals are embedded within broader economic, social, and ecological contexts. Connectedness could provide a much-needed anchor to study consumers' perceptions around reshoring and sustainability, which could explain the motivation to include consumers in organisations' decision-making processes (Moorman and Price, 1989; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007).

We conceptualise sustainability connectedness as the degree to which a consumer is cognisant of the economic, social, and environmental aspects of reshoring. We argue that consumers can foster connections with the natural environment, societal wellbeing, and economic prosperity, which play important roles in influencing their perceptions around reshoring. Drawing upon this concept allows the simultaneous identification of the three interrelated and sometimes conflicting demands that consumers should be conscious of when considering organisations' reshoring decisions. Therefore, addressing the above-mentioned gaps, the main research question of this study is: How do British (home country) consumers perceive

Table 2. Participant characteristics

Number	Occupation	Gender	Age
1	Employability manager	Female	26
2	Admissions coordinator	Female	25
3	NHS nurse	Female	24
4	Head of human resources, Small and Medium Enterprise (SME)	Female	50
5	Human resources adviser, independent school	Female	28
6	Undergraduate student	Female	20
7	Freelance consultant	Male	25
8	Social media marketer	Male	23
9	Account relationship manager	Male	23
10	Digital learning coordinator	Male	43
11	Independent consultant	Male	57
12	Book publisher	Female	59
13	Organisational consultant	Female	31
14	Sales and business developer	Male	25
15	Postgraduate student	Female	23
16	Child-minder	Female	23
17	Business support officer	Male	41
18	Administrator	Male	37
19	University academic	Female	60
20	Mortgage advisor	Male	48
21	Operations coordinator	Female	50
22	Widening participation and outreach officer	Male	32
23	Sustainability manager	Female	28
24	Retired engineer	Male	67
25	Academic	Male	50
26	Marketing consultant	Female	60
27	Book author	Male	80
28	Retired consultant	Male	64
29	Energy manager	Male	26
30	Freelance consultant	Male	34

the relationship between organisations' reshoring activities and the three (economic, social, and environmental) dimensions of sustainability?

Methodology

While a quantitative design may uncover the extent of the relationships, it does not unveil the 'why' and 'how' behind the relationships (Plakoyiannaki and Budhwar, 2021; Saunders and Townsend, 2016), and it thus offers a limited understanding of concepts. Therefore, we adopted a qualitative design, as it provides in-depth insights and rich descriptions of concepts and encourages detailed considerations for sounder conceptualisation (Doz, 2011). Further, our study is exploratory in nature, highlighting the relationship between organisations' reshoring activities and the three (economic, social, and environmental) dimensions of sustainability from a consumer's perspective, as there is a dearth of research in this area. The extant

research on reshoring and consumer behaviour predominantly examines positive opinions, ignoring the negative opinions that consumers may have regarding reshoring, and hence there is a dearth of research considering a holistic perspective (e.g. Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2020). To overcome the limitations of the extant research described in the previous section and to acquire a broader view of British participants' perspectives related to reshoring and sustainability, we conducted in-depth interviews with participants from the UK, as the 'home' country.

To minimise bias, we purposively selected participants (Patton, 1990) belonging to a wide range of occupations, income levels, age groups (20–80 years), and gender demographics (for details see Table 2). Initially, we recruited participants through researchers' social media accounts. Further, consistent with data analysis and the themes emerging therefrom, we performed theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), selecting participants who were willing to share their opinions.

These participants were recruited from UK-based sustainability and reshoring groups on Facebook, where regular discussions are held on these topics.

We conducted interviews over three months until data saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Saunders and Townsend, 2016) was achieved at 27 interviews. We then conducted three further interviews, which failed to reveal any new information, and the data collection process was terminated at 30 interviews. Informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to the interviews. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and various social-distancing measures (during the data collection), the interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom/Teams/mobile, in a format in which participants felt comfortable in sharing their views (Holt, 2010; Stephens, 2007). The interviews lasted from 30 minutes to over an hour and were recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in detailed descriptions of participants' accounts and strong descriptive validity (Becker, 1970; Maxwell, 1992).

The interview guide was flexible, and probes were used throughout the interviews. Before finalising the guide, it was discussed with two academic experts and improved via three pilot interviews. Initially, we solicited consumers' opinions about product provenance. As reshoring and connectedness may not be a part of consumers' common parlance, 'reshoring' and 'connectedness' were not explicitly mentioned. Instead, we asked them about their perceptions regarding British companies bringing manufacturing back to the UK, the challenges and opportunities for the home and host countries, and the related sustainability impacts. To gain deeper insights, we used projective techniques (Belk, Ger and Askegaard, 2003) and presented photos (see online Appendix 1) of products by companies that are reshoring. The interviews involved detailed discussions about reshoring effects on economic, social, and environmental sustainability and participants' connectedness with people or systems within and outside the UK.

Data analysis was carried out in tandem with data collection, as guided by the emergent themes and employing the constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). We constantly compared incidents to establish relationships among the themes. This ongoing comparison enabled us to ascertain whether the data supported and strengthened the emerging categories, while defining their properties and dimensions (Walsh *et al.*,

2015). Regarding the inter-rater reliability, each researcher coded the transcripts independently and compared and discussed notes regularly with the others. Open coding was carried out for each transcript to identify various opinions and attitudes. This resulted in several initial codes, for example, 'supporting local', 'lack of transparency', 'conflicted between local and global', and 'cynical of corporate exploitation'. Data were then subject to focused coding, and nine second-order themes were derived. Advanced memos were written up to refine these themes and improve the level of analysis from descriptive to conceptual, by identifying aggregated dimensions (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013), including 'supporting reshoring conditionally', 'inclusive reshoring', and 'doubting reshoring' (depicted in Figure 1).

Findings

Overall, our findings demonstrate that sustainability connectedness significantly affects consumers' perceptions about reshoring and economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The data analysis revealed that not all participants shared positive perceptions towards reshoring; their opinions varied according to the emphasis they placed on connectedness to economic, social, and environmental sustainability and self-interest. Three themes emerged from the data – supporting reshoring conditionally, inclusive reshoring, and doubting reshoring, which are explained below and depicted in Table 3.

Supporting reshoring conditionally: National sustainability connectedness. The interview analysis revealed that some participants felt strong connectedness to the UK, their home country, and supported reshoring, as it could help the national economy, society, and the overall environment. However, this support was contingent upon factors impacting long-term sustainability within the home country. By presenting illustrations of products offered by reshoring British brands, most participants demonstrated a deeper sense of national identity. For example, when shown the image of the recently reshored Hornby toy train, one of the participants demonstrated national sustainability connectedness, supporting the perceptions of UK-based manufacturing's adherence to high environmental standards. They also demonstrated nostalgia regarding English

Table 3. Link between reshoring and sustainability through connectedness

Aggregate dimension	Sustainability connectedness to reshoring and sustainability	Level of sustainability	Sustainability dimension	Indicators
Supporting reshoring conditionally	National sustainability connectedness	National	Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost national economy through purchasing locally made products • Support small businesses • Rebalance economy through more local manufacturing, reducing dependence on other countries • Increased cost of production • Affordability of locally made products owing to potential increased product price
			Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local employment opportunities in reshored and ancillary industries • Skill development • Better standards in the society – improved morale • Inconvenience to local communities due to manufacturing activities • Potential wealth divide
			Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less shipping miles- pollution • Reduction in carbon emissions- Buying locally • Pollution and air-quality issues owing to increased local manufacturing activities • Long-term disruption to national ecosystems
Inclusive reshoring	Global sustainability connectedness	Global	Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployment in host country due to shift in manufacturing to home country • Lowering economic growth • Impact on trade relationships • Help other countries become more economically sustainable rather than bringing back manufacturing – living wage
			Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier to universalism – potential divide ‘us and them’ • Lack of skills and expertise • Help other countries become more socially sustainable rather than bringing back manufacturing-worker conditions
			Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased environmental issues due to manufacturing in home country – if raw material production is attempted • Help other countries become more environmentally sustainable rather than bringing back manufacturing
Doubting reshoring	Indifference towards sustainability connectedness	Indifference	Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-serving – prioritising individual needs over sustainability, for example price • Questioning financial motives of previous offshoring decisions
			Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unethical practices within British manufacturing – poor working conditions

Table 3. (Continued)

Aggregate dimension	Sustainability connectedness to reshoring and sustainability	Level of sustainability	Sustainability dimension	Indicators
			Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distrust about origins and sustainability of a product • Greenwashing – inauthentic marketing ploy around ethics and sustainability

traditions, childhood memories, and local brand iconicity, representing a lasting impression of trustworthiness towards British brands:

Looking at the home Hornby train, that's such an English brand. I mean, it goes back to the 1920s and 1930s when it started, and I still got my father's Hornby train. It's lovely, and most of them are clock-work so you can wind them back, they never really broke. All I'd say is if it is made in England, I'd like

to think it was made to a better standard, you know would be recyclable. You know thankfully our local authorities do recycle plastic bottles and glass, which is good. (Participant 14)

The excerpts, 'it's such an English brand...they never really broke', and 'thankfully our local council...do recycle' represent trust in the quality of British brands and the emphasis on environmental sustainability in the UK. Further, others

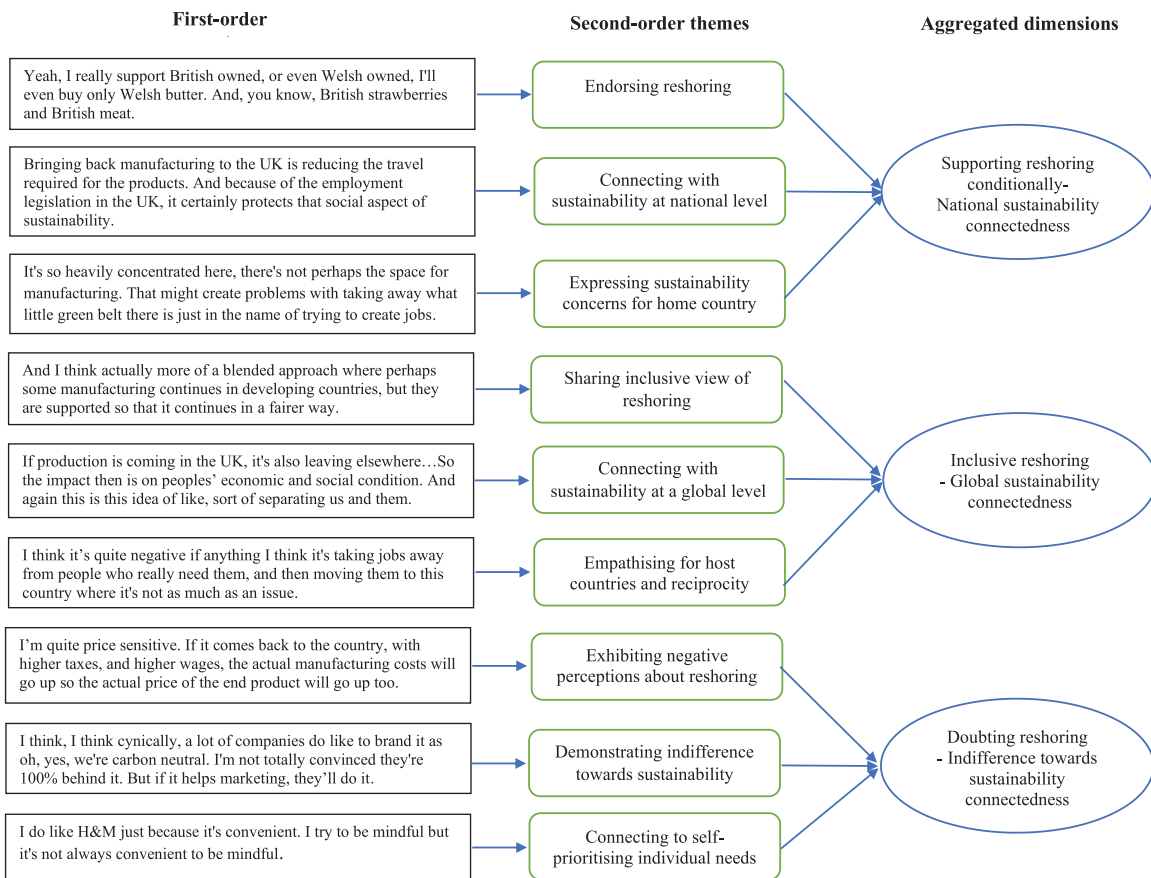


Figure 1. Data Scheme [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

demonstrated strong national connectedness concerning socio-economic sustainability, quoting improved economic conditions, skill development, and the livelihoods of British people and small businesses in local communities. They explicated that reshoring could even create employment opportunities by supporting industries in the UK. A retired male engineer expressed the potential positive ‘knock-on’ effects of bringing manufacturing back to the UK and recognised that more jobs may be beneficial for the wider British society, stating:

It’s bound to help, it’s like a car industry. It’s not just selling the car and employment for the workers. It’s all the subsidiary industries, and there are thousands of local companies, within a 50-mile radius of the car plant that are supplying all this equipment, and they’re producing jobs. And then obviously, you’ve got the service industries as well. So, you’ve got people that turn up in their vans with the food and coffee, cleaners. It does help the economy. (Participant 24)

You are bringing back, in some respects you are re-skilling you are equipping the people in the UK, with those skills of manufacturing, which over the decades, have been reduced. So yeah, equipping people with a wider range of skills. (Participant 1)

Participants also noted the positive social impact of creating more employment within the home country, as it is linked with overall better living standards:

If you look at jobs, and certain areas in the country that feel like they’ve sort of been left behind, particularly in the North, jobs are the biggest issue. If production is moved to certain areas and that has a positive impact, as employment sort of leads to better lifestyles and better opportunities for people ... so, that would be a positive impact in terms of morale as a country. (Participant 22)

Nevertheless, this national sustainability connectedness is contingent upon participants’ long-term sustainability concerns. They also expressed strong concerns regarding the impact of reshoring on air quality, pollution, and long-term disruption to national ecosystems, exhibiting sustainability connectedness to the natural environment. For example, one participant demonstrated a less optimistic viewpoint, perceiving the interlinked nature of established activities and the potential harm they may cause:

It’s creating jobs for individuals that are on manufacturing lines. However, I guess long-term, if we were to just strip back all of our remaining green space, and, turn that into factories, that would have a negative impact. And the pressures that it puts on biodiversity, and even things like air quality, the energy involved in powering those factories. (Participant 20)

Phrases such as ‘*strip back ... green space ... turn to factories*’ and ‘*air quality*’ demonstrate conditionality in terms of reshoring and long-term sustainability in the home country’s environment. Some participants recognised that reshoring could offer gains in the local economy, as consumers may favour UK-manufactured products. However, they also recognised that this will increase production costs, which will be borne by the consumer. For example, one participant who was concerned about the affordability of British-made products identified a potential increase in product prices as a barrier to accepting such reshored products:

I guess you’re pumping more money back into the economy from purchases. So that could be potentially good. The only worry is that prices might become higher and those goods might be less affordable for people who are struggling with money anyway, so it might make some products just unattainable, and might create a bit more of a wealth divide. (Participant 7)

Here, conditionality pertaining to national sustainability connectedness is related to ongoing associated problems of a more social nature, namely a potential ‘wealth divide’ within society and unaffordability concerns, demonstrating socio-economic connectedness within the community and British society. Overall, participants demonstrated a strong national sustainability connectedness regarding reshoring to the UK. This phenomenon is strongly embedded in national identity, nostalgia for British brands, and personal experiences, but conditioned upon concerns for the wellbeing of local communities, environment preservation, and economic stability.

Inclusive reshoring: Global sustainability connectedness. Global sustainability connectedness encompasses a worldwide sustainability view, and the implementation of reshoring is fraught by participants’ concerns about its sustainability effects on home and host countries. Thus, some participants also demonstrated an inclusive view of reshoring, resonating with Schwartz’s (1994) universalism

values that entail broadmindedness, equal opportunities, empathy, and environmental protection. The participants perceived that reshoring means job losses in the host country, creating socio-economic instability:

The other thing is what it takes away isn't it, if production is coming in, it's also leaving elsewhere. You know, people probably wouldn't think about the fact that while there's going to be people in those countries that then lose their jobs because they are just stripped away, and this is the idea of, sort of separating us and them. (Participant 5)

Global sustainability connectedness regarding sustainability, emanating from concerns regarding separation, which reshoring may bring about, is demonstrated through a potential divide between the UK and other host countries, as it could '*separate us and them*'. This view implies a strong global sustainability connectedness as participants perceived reshoring to the UK as a barrier to universalism, as it focuses on the benefits to the UK and not necessarily on the implications for the host countries.

Further, participants showed a deep global sustainability connectedness, which is characterised by their strong sense of empathy towards the loss of employment in host countries, which could be '*a lifeline for them*'. They compared the impact of reshoring on the home and host country, highlighting the fallibility of institutional systems that guarantee the wellbeing and economic sustainability of the workforce:

So, for those people who are losing their jobs out there, that's a lifeline for them. Whereas in the UK, if you lose a job, you've got a bit of safety net, you've got Universal Credit as a last resort fallback. Whereas those systems aren't really in place in some other countries. (Participant 8)

The availability of '*Universal Credit*' as a '*last resort fallback*' for unemployed people in the UK is mentioned, whereas the fact that host countries do not have such alternatives is considered as a challenge that that could risk the livelihoods of people.

In addition to a universal viewpoint and empathy towards sustainability in the host country, global sustainability connectedness is also linked to political agendas underpinning the reshoring business model. Participants preferred a more inclusive agenda over a nationalist UK-based drive. This view is also reflected in SDG-12, which en-

courages developed countries to support developing countries in implementing sustainable production and consumption practices (United Nations, 2021). For example, a participant explained:

I think what we should be doing is supporting factories in China and India to operate sustainably in terms of their waste emissions, their energy consumption but also in terms of worker rights and living wage and worker conditions. So, I think it'd be better if we could push that agenda more than just have everything grown and manufactured in the UK. (Participant 17)

This implied the clear presence of global sustainability connectedness, indicated by a strong push to support others, rather than being focused solely on the UK. Global environmental sustainability is reflected in phrases such as '*sustainability in terms of... waste emissions...energy consumption*'; global social sustainability in terms such as '*worker rights*' and '*working conditions*'; and global economic sustainability in terms including '*living wage*'. It is expressed that bringing manufacturing back to the UK may not, on its own, be an ideal strategy.

Connectedness is also associated with the relational aspects of trade between the home and host countries. Alongside the country interdependencies illustrated above, most participants were also concerned about the effects of reshoring on international political and trade relationships, from a global viewpoint. This poses yet another challenge to the economic sustainability of reshoring without major potential political and trade implications for the UK:

There are countries that we were buying stuff from. And then there's the impact on relationships between countries. If you're not buying this from us, then we're not going to sell you that anymore, then that could have a negative impact politically, as ultimately we build our relationships on trade. (Participant 3)

Participants recognised that the reduction of manufacturing opportunities for host countries may negatively impact trade relationships between countries, which could cause negative repercussions further down the line.

In conclusion, we found that connectedness correlates with sustainability concerns at the global level, considering both the home and host country perspectives. However, participants raised issues regarding reshoring and the dichotomy

it may create between the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the host country as opposed to the home country and hence, engendering an ‘*us versus them*’ divide.

Doubting reshoring: Indifference towards sustainability connectedness. Some participants demonstrated scepticism, doubt, and suspicion towards reshoring. This creates a gap between consumers and sustainable reshoring, resulting in indifference towards sustainability connectedness. Such participants reported not trusting reshoring organisations, questioning their motives and establishing a clear disconnect:

I know some shady practices are going on with companies in terms of masking where things come from, like I've seen some stuff on supermarket branding, like Gilbert's farm and farm aesthetic on it but it's made in a factory somewhere. (Participant 12)

Furthermore, research participants questioned corporations' intentions around sustainability reshoring, viewing them as greenwashing and ingenuine. A female consultant expressed concerns over the authenticity of the reshoring model and stated that organisations may want to gain a reputation for sustainability, even if they do not practise it. This caused an additional level of indifference towards sustainability connectedness:

For the larger UK companies, I would say sustainability is on their agenda. But I would be sceptical to call it authentic. I think it's high on their agenda to be perceived as doing something to enhance sustainability, but I don't think the actions and the effectiveness of those actions are real. (Participant 26)

This participant further expressed exasperation, questioning why consumers are being expected to demonstrate sustainable consumption behaviours while organisations are not necessarily upholding ethical standards. Specifically, the participant expressed concerns regarding organisations that deceived the public into believing that their products were sustainable and charged a higher price:

So, I guess some products that claim to be sustainable are cost-competitive ... is it kind of expensive because it's being branded as being ethical, or is that just marketing and trying to squeeze money out of the people who buy ethically ... Why should I pay more then? (Participant 26)

Participants also gave examples of unethical practices within the British manufacturing industry, causing them to disengage and casting further doubt on whether they would ever view reshoring and manufacturing in the UK positively. They suggested that if reshoring was further implemented, organisations would either have to accept lower profits or descend into unsustainable and unacceptable work conditions, as expressed below through an example from the fashion industry:

Like Pretty Little Things and Boohoo, I think they do produce clothes in the UK. They have terrible ethical standards in factories, but if you were to maintain good standards, then most likely not so much profit. Therefore, it's a risk when you say reshore back to the UK when they have that factory in Leicester, and they got away with paying them less than minimum wage and working 70 hours a week. I think that would be a risk regarding sustainability and reshoring. (Participant 18)

The potential indifference regarding sustainability connectedness resulting from such cynicism may lead to participants being unwilling to research reshoring further:

Maybe sustainability choices could be at times difficult. I needed a bit more research in those situations. I don't engage so much because it means I've got to do a bit more extra work. (Participant 13)

Another participant was extremely sceptical, as he linked the motive of reshoring to the motive of offshoring, which is sourcing cheap labour with solely financial outcomes in mind. He expressed negative feelings and distrust towards that and felt that reshoring would not be a meaningful sustainable process:

I think it's moving one issue to a different country. So, I think, the idea of globalisation, reaching out, justifying cheaper employment in the first place is a bit of a dodgy situation. And that was all done just with profit in mind ... they might make an active choice to try and be sustainable, but it's kind of just an empty gesture. (Participant 22)

Participants also expressed cynicism towards sustainable choices. They preferred other factors, such as current clothing styles and price, over sustainability and presumed that sustainable options were less affordable:

For clothing I just say what's on trend is a priority for me ... because a lot of the time sustainable clothing options are a lot more expensive. (Participant 9)

To summarise, the research participants were distrustful, unsure, and suspicious of corporations' reshoring and sustainability motives and showed strong disdain towards the idea. They highlighted instances where British organisations engaged in unethical practices, such as poor working conditions or paying less than the minimum wage to workers, and these practices caused them to be indifferent towards sustainability connectedness and to prioritise self-centred needs over sustainability.

Discussion and conclusion

In this study, we found that participants' opinions varied, substantiating an intricate interplay between reshoring and sustainability. Three theoretical aggregate dimensions emerged from the data. First was the 'supporting reshoring conditionally' dimension related to national sustainability connectedness, where participants favoured products from the UK, which they associated with high quality, previous experiences, and nostalgia. This supports research that suggests that consumer ethnocentrism positively affects the quality of local brands and purchases (Balabanis and Siamagka, 2017; Strizhakova and Coulter, 2015; Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar and Diamantopoulos, 2015). However, most of these previous studies focus on nationalistic appeals instead of highlighting sustainability concerns, which marks an important point of departure. We extend this literature by revealing that consumers supported local products not only because of national pride, but also because of empathy towards local communities, for example, providing jobs to citizens and ensuring better environmental measures. However, this support was conditioned upon the home country's environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

Second, the 'inclusive reshoring' dimension entails a more global outlook on the evaluation of reshoring, demonstrating connectedness with the people, economy, and environment that may be affected by reshoring, particularly in host countries. This adds to previous studies on consumer attitudes that focus on the implications of reshoring for the home country, but not necessarily for the

host country (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2020). This supports the work of Russell and Russell (2010), who found a positive relationship between consumer global connectedness and responsiveness to foreign CSR initiatives. Furthermore, this global connectedness reduces the self–other gap, inducing empathy and strengthening emotional reactions (Escalas and Stern, 2003; Galinsky, Ku and Wang, 2005; Gentina, Daniel and Tang, 2021). This finding has been replicated in this research, as participants showed a strong empathetic response, specifically when expressing the potential devastating socio-economic effects of reshoring in host countries.

Finally, the 'doubting reshoring' dimension revealed strong scepticism towards reshoring motives, specifically regarding sustainability, leading to indifference towards sustainability connectedness. This is in contrast to previous studies, as they focused primarily on consumers' home-country-based positive evaluations of reshoring, overlooking negative attitudes (Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2020). We add to the findings of Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi (2015) that consumers display righteous anger when they perceive organisational reshoring motives to be self-serving. Furthermore, our work supports Fratocchi and Di Stefano (2019), who claimed that consumers who do not perceive sustainability as a reshoring motive are unlikely to support it. Moreover, participants prioritised their individual needs over those of others. For example, along with sustainability in reshoring, price consideration was apparent, resulting in indifference towards reshoring and sustainability.

Theoretical implications

Our study makes several contributions to the literature on consumer behaviour, reshoring, and sustainability. First, by providing a consumer perspective, we add to the extant reshoring scholarship, which predominantly presents the firm's standpoint (Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019; Wiesmann *et al.*, 2017). Second, unlike prior research on consumer perspective regarding reshoring, which focused on the positive aspects of reshoring (Cassia, 2020; Grappi, Romani and Bagozzi, 2020), we assume a holistic perspective. Our findings reveal that reshoring is not always positively evaluated, as consumers – specifically those who have a global outlook and are aware of the

negative implications of reshoring on host countries – also harbour negative feelings towards it, especially when sustainability is involved. Third, the emphasis on sustainability is a significant addition (Ashby, 2016), because existing studies emphasise the effect of the link between reshoring and sustainability on the environmental dimension (Fratocchi and Di Stefano, 2019). By adopting a more comprehensive view, we encapsulate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability, demonstrating that consumers often wrestle with maintaining a balance between the dimensions in forming their responses. Finally, by comprehensively conceptualising the concept of sustainability connectedness, we fill a theoretical void in the literature by demonstrating that consumer responses to reshoring are influenced by the degree of social, economic, and environmental connectedness. This is in line with ethical consumption research, which argues that when consumers identify or proximate with marginalised producers in developing countries, they develop empathy towards them (Eckhardt, Belk and Devinney, 2010; Gillani *et al.*, 2021). Thus, we extend this literature, as this issue has not been examined in the context of reshoring and sustainability.

Managerial implications

Our findings have valuable managerial implications. First, although, there is an increasing interest regarding sustainability among British consumers, participants expressed that just highlighting the ‘made-in’ effect may be perceived as divisive. It is also important to highlight the benefits of reshoring for the local community (e.g. creating jobs), the environment (e.g. reduced air miles, the use of renewable materials), and the region where the product is manufactured on the product packaging rather than just branding the product as ‘made in the UK’.

Second, some participants were doubtful and suspicious of organisations’ motives for their reshoring and sustainability decisions. Therefore, marketers could be more transparent when devising strategies to alleviate doubts among consumers. For example, short stories explaining the positive impact of reshoring manufacturing on the environment, economy, and society in the UK (home country) could be developed. Various social media channels (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) could be used to increase consumer engage-

ment regarding reshoring to the UK and its impact on sustainability.

Third, a fair and inclusive third-party labelling system, similar to the traffic-light system widely used in food packaging, could be developed for products, based on sustainability principles in relation to reshoring. In principle, this would make it easier for consumers to comprehend this impact; for instance, the label could present the environmental cost of products in relation to air miles and carbon footprint. This could help consumers to decide whether to purchase or avoid a product.

Limitations and future research

While our study has presented valuable insights into reshoring and sustainability from a consumer viewpoint, it has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, while we employed the concept of connectedness based on attachment theory, future studies could adopt other theoretical perspectives, such as transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1985). In the reshoring context, such costs could be linked with third-party manufacturers, thus affecting potential suppliers, required investment, or perceived risk in the operating environment. These supply-side factors, when studied alongside the consumer perspective (demand-side conditions), can be crucial in determining the opportunity costs associated with reshoring strategies (McIvor and Bals, 2021).

Second, because our study is based in the UK, future studies could examine reshoring and sustainability in countries with different economic, political, and institutional contexts. Future research could also examine consumer opinions from a host country’s perspective. Third, we focused on the consumer perspective, as consumers are a largely overlooked stakeholder within the reshoring literature. Given that other actors also play an important part in influencing reshoring–sustainability decisions, future studies could examine the roles of other stakeholders, such as not-for-profit organisations, workers, and governments, along with that of consumers.

Fourth, we used the concept of connectedness to explore the understudied relationship between reshoring and sustainability. Future studies could adopt other concepts such as proximity to investigate this link, as this can be useful in determining the extent to which consumers identify with the workers and producers in their own country

compared with those in host countries (Gillani et al., 2021). Finally, we found that consumer awareness about organisations selling reshored products was very low. We had to provide participants with examples of reshored products using projective techniques. In the future, studies could go beyond consumer attitudes and investigate their actual pre- and post-purchase behaviours regarding such products.

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