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Boycott, framing and morals:

a political consumerism study on H&M

Master thesis in Sociology – Politics & Society

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Abstract

In this age of digital media, forms of collective action such as boycotts spread faster and reach more people than ever before. Yet, the information we consume is often framed to make us react in manners we don't always understand or anticipate. These reactions are believed to be influenced by morals we all value to different degrees. The scope of this paper is to explore the impact of moral foundations on the link between boycott intentions and message framing, with a specific focus on sustainable fashion consumption. Exposing vignettes framing H&M's actions to participants through a questionnaire, a strong case is built for negative framing's influence on enhancing boycott intentions. Although no conclusive effects are observed for positive framing or the moral foundations studied, promising implications for future studies on this subject are indicated.

Keywords: Boycott; Information framing; Moral foundations theory; Sustainable fashion; Vignette survey experiment

Introduction

Boycotts are an increasingly popular form of political and social activism. One recent widescale example was the attempt to boycott the Qatar 2022 World Cup due to the numerous infractions the event caused to the human rights charter. According to Friedman (1985), boycotting refers to the collective attempt to "achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace". This specific purchase restriction process can stem from moral judgments or values. Such values have been identified as having an impact on boycott support as early as the 1970's, with following studies exploring the effects of personal ethics on consumer activism through research methods ranging from surveys to ethnographic and historical research (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Mahoney, 1976; Witkowski, 1989). Thus, taking a closer look at these moral elements can help us better understand motives for boycott participation.

Based on the moral foundations theory (MFT) by Haidt & Joseph (2004), moral values are established around the dimensions of fairness of outcomes, harm protection, respecting authority as well as purity and loyalty. The harm and fairness of outcomes aspects are labelled as "individualizing" moral foundations by the authors and have been linked with Liberal political participation, through Liberal's more empathetic inclinations (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Beyond boycotts being part of the abovementioned political participation, the link between boycotting and MFT is further emphasized by Fernandes (2020), who also describes how the latter explains the former, when linked to political ideologies. Nonetheless, new potential links between individual moral judgements and boycotts have yet to be explored in literature.

With the rise of digital media, more opportunities for non-institutional political participation such as boycotts have risen through easier access and more engagement with information, as well as cheaper and more efficient ways to organize boycott movements (Mosca & Quaranta, 2016). On the topic of information access, the way the former is presented, its framing, has also been studied to have significant effects on the actions resulting from the interpretation and internalization of said information. For instance, negative framing of information has been shown to be more effective in encouraging boycotts than positive framing has been to

encourage buycotts (Kam & Deichert, 2020). This can also apply for emotionally framed messages such as the case of the Canadian Seafood Boycott, where a renewed practice of seal hunting and skinning led to a strong backlash from people touched by this cause (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011).

Nevertheless, when studying the effects of brands' communication framing on boycott intentions while considering how brands' messages portray their actions as socially responsible, more mixed results arise (Park & Youn, 2009; Neilson, 2010). One possible cause for this occurrence comes from the assumption that the interpretation of a framed message happens in the same manner for everyone exposed to it. To address this, insights from the MFT have proven to have valuable impact in explaining how people with certain moral values differently perceive and internalize similarly framed political messages, including their willingness to partake in boycotts (Day, Fiske, Downing & Trail, 2014; Fernandes, 2020; Haidt & Graham, 2007). Drawing from these findings, it is of great interest to observe how the information framing is linked to boycotting and how this relationship is shaped by moral foundations.

To study the effects of this interaction, the case of H&M's controversies is an ideal fit. The clothing brand H&M is renowned for greenwashing and has had several instances of mediatized polemics throughout the years, including recent lawsuits filed against the firm for misuses of the Higg Index (a tool to assess supply chain sustainability) on their clothes (Quartz, 2022). The brand has also employed reparatory and rebranding corporate messaging to address polemics, making it a more than adequate subject to test information framing theories on. Beyond that, H&M is one of the main actors of the fast fashion scene and thus serves as an ideal brand to discuss ethical consumption-related boycotting.

Adding onto scientific relevance, not only is the analysis of the boycott-framing interaction moderated by moral foundations a research novelty, but so is looking at how controversial actions of H&M are likely to be perceived and judged based on how their practices are framed. This article also builds on previous studies such as that of Neilson (2010) and of Joergens (2006) and contributes to scientific literature by exploring previously formulated research recommendations, which I will further explain in the following section. Regarding the social

relevance of this study, the wider public is provided with wariness to messaging strategies and their impact, and NGOs and political parties in power can use results from this study to design policies promoting sustainable consumption. Thus, the following research question is formulated:

How does information framing impact boycott intentions and how is this relationship moderated by individualizing moral foundations?

To answer this inquiry, I have collected data on the perception of H&M's actions and on potential boycott partaking, through a vignette survey experiment. Following the distribution of the survey, the data has been analyzed and discussed to determine the effect of individual moral foundations on the relationship between information framing and boycotts.

Theoretical framework

Previous literature has described motives for boycotting as coming from different sources. The study published by Klein, Smith and John (2004) draws from previous papers on boycotting motivations and provides an encompassing overview of the factors at play, based on a cost-benefit approach for the consumer. The elements identified by the authors are the following: wanting to make a difference (boycotting being an effective action), feelings of self-enhancement (self-esteem, social pressure or guilt of buying certain products), constrained consumption (the cost of having to give up on the product) and counterarguments to boycotting (doubts and costs regarding the participation in boycotting). These factors are used to moderate and explain the effect of an initial trigger event perceived as a negative stimulus by the consumer (labelled as the company's egregiousness) on the decision to partake in boycott. This trigger event perceived as a negative stimulus is consistent with the effect procured by a negative framing of information.

Information framing has been shown in multiple studies to have consequential impacts on how people think and behave. Kahneman & Tversky (1981) were the first to raise concerns on how rational choices are influenced by the framing of outcomes. More recently, Kam & Deichert's (2020) recent study highlights the power of negative framing of information on the willingness to partake in boycotts. These findings are not only limited to inducing changes in beliefs but appear to also influence changes in behaviour. Furthermore, these results are obtained within the scope of ethical consumerism and are retrieved from experiments carried out solely on U.S. citizens.

Another article, by Amatulli et al. (2019), discusses the effectiveness of negative framing in convincing consumers to buy more sustainably. Judged as more effective than positive framing in promoting ethical consumerism across 4 experiments, the authors attribute the expected feeling of shame as a mechanism explaining the efficacy of negative frames. The mechanism unfolds through consumers' guilt of purchasing products with bad consequences for the environment, which is mobilized by the negative frames and in turn decreases their likelihood of partaking in such consumption. This feeling of pre-purchasing guilt correlates with the

description of the self-enhancement feeling provided by Klein, Smith and John, as a key element of boycott motivations. Drawing from the above literature, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 1: A negative framing of H&M's actions increases boycott intentions

Arguing from a different perspective, Sen, Gürhan-Canli & Morwitz (2001) make a clear connection between positive message framing and boycott intentions. This link is made based on a mechanism relying on the perceived efficacy of one's actions. The authors claim that through a high perceived efficacy of consumers' actions, the idea of these actions being impactful, positive framing helps create the momentum which leads to boycotts. This resonates with one of the main boycott-inducing factors identified by Klein, Smith and John (2004) namely, wanting to make a difference. Later, Neilson (2010) also links framing effects to boycott activity by claiming that corporate communications formulated to restore blemished reputations lack in effectiveness on boycotters, as they are associated with lower institutional trust. This implies that a positive framing of a reparatory message from a brand should not be effective in reducing boycotts.

However, Neilson himself questions the validity of his findings as these suffer from generalizations as product or brand characteristics are not specified. He recommends considering and specifying the product's style, distribution, quality as well as the company's status in the market, as including these criteria is likely to provide different results. H&M portrays an ideal example of specifics for these criteria as the brand is one of the leaders in the fast fashion market, with over 4465 stores worldwide and has been known to employ sweatshop labor to produce a very wide range of products for each new collection, with their quality coming at the expense of their affordability. Looking at other forms of political participation, positive framing of messages has been shown to increase electoral participation within the case of the Dutch EU Constitution referendum of 2005 (Schuck & de Vreese, 2009). Here, citizens were mobilized through positive news framing of the referendum campaign to reduce the risks of an unpleasant outcome that would alter their current situation. Drawing

from the abovementioned findings and contextualizing Neilson's results and recommendations, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 2: A positive framing of H&M's actions reduces boycott intentions

A previous study has shown that rather than reforming people's beliefs, framing mobilizes pre-existing beliefs (Nelson et al., 1997). Those beliefs in question can to some extent be expressed through values that individuals care about. Therefore, based on the framing employed, certain moral values are likely to be mobilized and influence individuals' intentions or their broader decision-making process. Drawing from the above, it is of academic interest and novelty to study what role people's ethical foundations play when specific information framing is utilized for persuasive purposes. To better understand individual moral inclinations, I specify the following theory. The moral foundations theory is a sociocultural theory with psychological bases whose goal is to understand the cross-cultural variations of morality and virtues Haidt & Joseph (2004). Out of the 5 foundations on care, fairness, loyalty, authority and purity, the first 2 are categorized as individualizing moral foundations. These individualizing moral foundations are mainly tied with the protection of personal freedoms and rights, while the latter 3 values, labelled as binding values, are related to the protection of social constructs and institutions (Napier & Luguri, 2012).

Developments upon the MFT have shown that individualizing moral foundations are linked to a higher likelihood of partaking in boycotts (Fernandes, 2020). This implies the presence of said individualizing foundations within the reflexive process leading to political consumerism. Another element that has been established to impact boycotting is framing, with a negative framing appearing as more effective than a positive framing in the case of corporate rebranding (Neilson, 2010), which is well-suited for this research considering H&M's greenwashing accusations. When linking the above findings, it becomes of academic novelty to explore the contribution of individualizing morals on the impact of negative message framing on boycott intentions. The relevance of pursuing such conjecture is emphasized by the presence of works such as that of Joergens (2006), who raises skepticism towards the presence of any effect of

moral issues on buying behaviour when it comes to fashion and clothes. to establish a clear link between the variables of interest. The third hypothesis is thus the following:

Hypothesis 3: Individualizing moral foundations strengthen the effect of negative framing on boycott intentions

The conceptual model displayed in Figure 1. serves the purpose of simplifying and illustrating the 3 hypotheses that I formulated above.

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the research
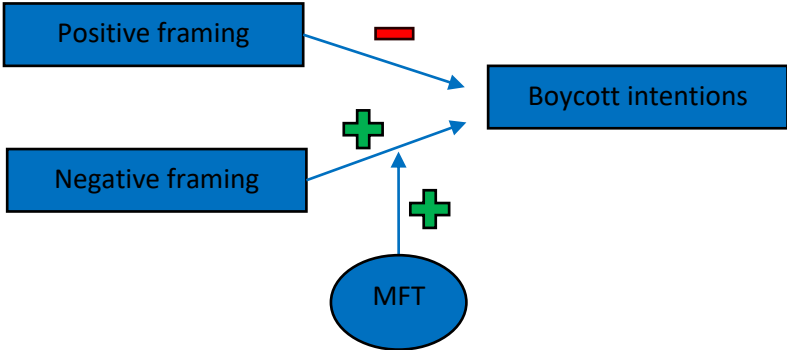
Methods & Data

Methods

To conduct this research, I designed an online survey through Qualtrics and shared it with a wide range of participants. I recruited these participants via WhatsApp, and other social media platforms to ensure a broad audience, and they primarily consist of friends, fellow students, and wide-scale family. The data collection period took place from the 24th of April 2023 until the 15th of May 2023. The methods I used to examine the collected data consist of analyses lead through the statistics software Stata. I chose these quantitative methods as they are the most suitable to perform an analysis of survey-collected data. More specifically, to compare the boycott-related answers to different framings, linear regressions and an ANOVA analysis are employed. For the analysis including individualizing moral foundations, I also carry and interpret linear regressions.

Boycott intentions are assessed via a question measuring the likelihood of participation, from which the answers are operationalized into a 7-point Likert scale (Definitely not boycott/ Not boycott/ Might not boycott/ Neutral/ Might boycott/ Boycott/ Definitely boycott). This scale's efficiency in questionnaires has been clarified in articles such as that of Guyatt et al. (1987) and this specific operationalization has previously been used by Sen, Gürhan-Canli & Morwitz (2001) to assess consumer boycott intentions. I evaluate individualizing moral foundations through the degree to which respondents agree with a series of 8 statements on fairness of outcomes and protection from harm. These statements have previously been employed by Graham, Haidt & Nosek (2009) and can be found in the *Appendix* section, along with the questionnaire. Answers to the moral values evaluations are measured on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree'' to "strongly agree''. Here, an even-numbered scale is used not only to stay true to the methods of Graham, Haidt & Nosek, but also to induce participants to state an opinion, by removing the option of an indifferent choice.

To test the 3rd hypothesis which studies the implications of individualizing moral foundations on the effects of negative framing on boycott intentions, two scales are required. One for the

fairness dimension and a second one for the care dimension, these scales will be regrouping subjects' evaluations of the moral statements they were presented with. I constructed these scales based on Chronbach's α coefficients for the subjects' agreement with the moral statements. Chronbach's α is a coefficient used to assess the internal consistency of a set of survey items, or in other terms, whether the characteristic measured by a scale is measured with reliability. In their study, the moral evaluation set of items employed by Graham, Haidt & Nosek (2009) have low internal consistency in study with a value of .50 for care and .39 for fairness. In statistics, a Chronbach's α under .50 means that the internal consistency is unreliable and a value between .50 and .60 reflects poor internal consistency. I will further examine this limitation in the *Discussion* section and will now focus on overcoming the weak item reliability through the next steps of the scales' construction.

In this study, the Chronbach α for care is .57 and the fairness value is .38. However, the fairness scale can reach a Chronbach α of .71 by removing two items of the fairness item set, namely the moral statements "If a friend wanted to cut in with me on a long line, I would feel uncomfortable because it wouldn't be fair to those behind me'' and "In the fight against terrorism, some people's rights will have to be violated''. The elimination of these items from the scale ensures a significantly higher reliability in the measurement of the fairness dimension, which is a crucial part to attain an adequate internal validity for this study. Finally, I leave the items of the two scales as unstandardized. This is because when studying interaction effects, which is the case here, standardized variables can falsify the meaning of the interaction effect and thus lead to misinterpretations.

Vignettes

I constructed the vignettes based on a statement obtained in the context of research published by Statista (Smith, 2023), which has been reformulated and joined with an introduction. The vignette manipulation for negative and positive framing can be found below in Table 1. The vignettes have an authentic and informational aspect and are formulated with particular care for readability and text-comprehension, to ensure their effectiveness for all levels of different

cognitive abilities. I guaranteed that by making both vignettes of the same length, using the yearly report statement basis, followed by the framing of H&M's actions. Beyond being of similar lengths, the framing conditions both share the same reference point of half of H&M's textile production. In the survey, the framing segments are written in italics to ensure that these central parts of the experimental conditions are properly internalized by the subjects.

Table 1. Vignette manipulation for positive and negative framing

Basis of vignette: yearly report	Negative framing	Positive framing
Fashion companies, especially when operating at a large scale, are required to be transparent with their actions. Here is some information that can be found from H&M's most recent yearly report: For most H&M products' lifecycles, fabric production leaves the biggest climate impact. *[H&M action]*	H&M action: However, H&M still produces close to half of its materials unsustainably.	H&M action: As an answer to this, H&M sustainably sources over half of its materials.

To test the formulated hypotheses, a control group is required. This third group is presented with a vignette framed in a neutral manner, as it contains information that is unrelated to positive or negative outcomes of H&M's textile production. This information appears in the second sentence, with the first sentence of the message and the yearly report theme remaining the same as for the other framing groups, to ensure its controlling purpose. The neutral vignette appears as follows:

"Fashion companies, especially when operating at a large scale, are required to be transparent with their actions. This is why H&M provides a yearly report, in which it can be found that as a

multi-brand organization, the H&M group includes brands such as COS, Weekday, Monki and ARKET. ''

The link between the material included in the vignettes and individualizing moral foundations relies in the idea that, if individuals value fairness and care, they should be affected by the harm and unfair worker treatments created from unsustainable resourcing. Indeed, differential or unfair treatment as well as emotional and exploitative harm are part of the individualizing moral foundations as defined by Haidt & Joseph (2004). I expect that the connection between these treatments and the formulation of the vignette messages on the ethics of H&M's textile production industry will be perceived and internalized by the subjects exposed to it.

An important strength of conducting a vignette survey experiment is the strong internal and external validity of the study. Beyond that, employing vignettes is a great method to explore individuals' implicit behaviours, their values, and assessments, moreover so as vignettes portray a realistic depiction of the actual world (Mutz, 2011). Regarding the experimental design, it is a between-subject design. This means that responses to a vignette, framed in 1 of 3 different manners (positive, neutral, and negative) will be compared across the group of respondents, with neutral framing serving as a reference category, controlling for the expected impact of positive and negative framings. These vignettes will be randomly distributed, and I will ensure that through a randomization check. For this reason, no control variables need to be included: control variables are used to adjust for imbalances in variables introduced after the randomization (which are not present in our case) and may lead to biases in the analysis if the sample is not particularly large (McEwan, 2015).

Ethical considerations

During the questionnaire, I do not inform participants about the true nature of the survey in order to ensure the validity of the framing effects. However, no non-ethical deception takes place. I inform the respondents about the average time needed to complete the survey and I guarantee them the confidentiality of their answers as well as the limited storage of the latter and the possibility to withdraw their participation, if desired. Once the questionnaire is over, I

reveal through a statement the true purpose of the survey to the participants, namely, to explore the relationship between information framing, moral attitudes, and boycott intentions. To ensure the respect of both ethical and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), this research studies the boycott intentions of adults only. For further specifications, the ethics & privacy checklist relevant to this study can be found in the *Appendix* section.

Data

As part of the data cleaning process, I remove incomplete participations as well as subjects with total survey durations under 1 minute or above 100 minutes, to exclude both too swift and inactive respondents. I start with 151 responses recorded at the end of the survey collection period. First, 3 participants are removed from being too swift and 24 are removed due to survey incompletion. I also inquire about demographic questions at the beginning of the survey, with this specific question order allowing me to easily eliminate participants under the age of 18 (Hughes, Camden & Yangchen, 2016). Beyond the efficacy of data selection, asking demographic questions at the beginning of the survey allows for more respondent engagement, as they are familiar with these questions, they become more comfortable and likely to finish the survey (compared to asking them at the end and obtaining inconsistent answers due to loss of motivation or attention). At the end of the survey, I perform a manipulation check through the assessment of the following question "About what brand was the message you read?" with answering options available being Zara, H&M, Uniqlo and C&A. The scope of this measure is to ensure that the participants followed through every step of the questionnaire without answering at random. From this step only one participant is removed from the population. After the data cleaning process, 123 out of the 151 recorded responses are validated.

Before conducting analyses, a closer look should be given to the sample population of this study. The mean age of the subjects studied is about 32 years old. Close to a third of the participants share the Romanian nationality, 17% come from Belgium, 12% from the Netherlands, and about 27% of the respondents are from different countries across the world.

Concerning the respondents' gender, 63% of them were women, 35% were men and 2% identified as non-binary.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of demographics

Variable	Mean	SD
Age	31.55	12.20
Country		0.08
Romania	.30	
Belgium	.17	
The Netherlands	.12	
France	.07	
Germany	.07	
Other	.27	
Gender		0.51
Male	.35	
Female	.63	
Non-Binary	.02	
Observations	123	

Table 3. displays the descriptive statistics of the boycott intentions for the different groups. On the 7-point boycott intentions scale, the mean values are of 3.93 for the positive framing group 3.83 for the neutral framing group and 4.98 for the negative framing group. When rounded to the nearest integer these values express neutral attitudes towards boycott for both the positive

and neutral framing groups and a possibility of boycotting ('Might boycott') when negative framing is employed.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of boycott intention ratings per framing group

Variable	Obs.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Positive_B	42	3.93	1.81	1	7
Neutral_B	40	3.83	1.58	1	7
Negative_B	41	4.98	1.39	1	7

Note. The letter "B" in each variable refers to the boycott intentions linked to each framing condition.

When it comes to individualizing moral foundations, the mean answer, when rounded to the nearest unit, was an agreement with the statement presented for both fairness and care values (converted from a 5 out of 6 on the agreement Likert-scale). This means that, on average, participants share and value both care and fairness moral values, with a slightly higher identification with the care moral value.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of individualizing moral foundations

Variable	Obs.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Care	123	5.05	0.77	3	6
Fairness	123	4.93	0.69	3	6

To establish that the randomization process assigning subjects to one of the 3 framing groups was properly carried out, I perform a randomization check. This verification process employs an F-test to compare the means of all 3 demographic variables, age, gender, and country of origin across the 3 framing groups. The P-values for age, gender and origin country are .99, .12 and .77 respectively. All these values are above the .05 statistical significance level, thus the assumption of equality of means holds. This implies that the means of gender, age, and origin country for the 3 groups are not significantly different. From this, it can be stated that the randomization process has been successful.

Table 5. Randomisation check for all demographic variables

	Negative framing			Neutral framing			Positive framing			F-test	
Variable	Obs.	Mean	SD	Obs.	Mean	SD	Obs.	Mean	SD	F	P-value
Age	41	31.49	11.57	40	31.38	12.95	42	31.79	12.34	0.01	.99
Gender	41	1.78	0.47	40	1.55	0.50	42	1.67	0.53	2.13	.12
Country	41	13.44	8.46	40	14.33	8.13	42	13.05	7.59	0.27	.77

Finally, to ensure that the population studied is large enough to observe statistically significant effects, I conduct a power test to establish the required sample sizes. Insights from this test are illustrated below in Figure 2. The estimated required population is of 96 with 32 subjects per group, and the collected sample has a population of 123, with 40 to 42 subjects per framing group. Based on the power analysis at the conventional power level of 80%, this study meets the population threshold requirements.

Figure 2. Actual vs. estimated population required, with sample per framing group
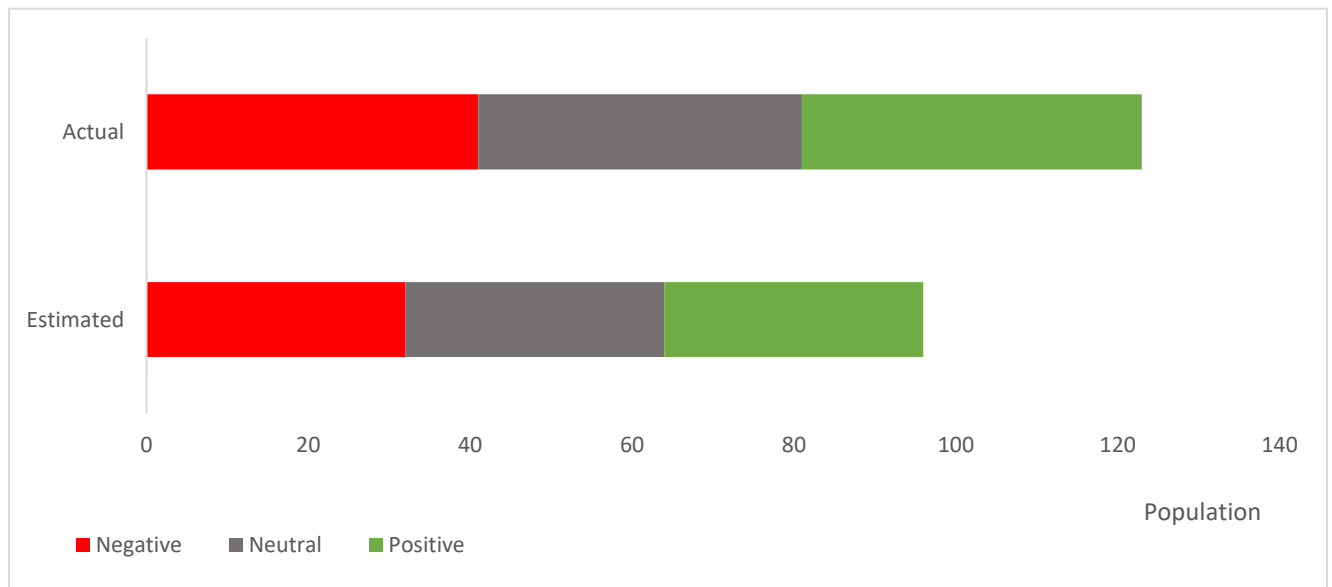
Results

First, to test whether the boycott intentions means significantly differ across the 3 framing groups, I perform a Kruskal Wallis H test. I conduct this specific test as it assumes a dependent variable measured on an ordinal level and an independent variable consisting of 2 or more categorical and independent groups, which is the case for boycott intentions and the framings respectively. Based on these assumptions, the Kruskal Wallis test is the most suitable one for this studies' purposes. The X^2 test statistic value of 11.72 is associated to a P-value of .003, which is below the statistical significance level of .05. Thus, the assumption of equal means does not hold and it can be affirmed that the boycott intentions means do significantly differ.

Table 6. Kruskal-Wallis test for framing groups comparison

Group	Obs.	Rank sum
Negative	41	3162.50
Neutral	40	2108.50
Positive	42	2355.00

Note. X^2 = 11.72. P-value = .003

First hypothesis testing

To test the first hypothesis, I run a simple linear regression with a dummy variable for negative framing to observe the specific effects of negative framing on boycott intentions. Dummy variables allow for the inclusion of categorical data, like framing in this case, within the regression analysis. As stated in the *Methods & Data* section, neutral framing serves as the reference category here.

Table 7. Regression of negative framing on boycott intentions

Variable	B	95% CI	β	t	P-value
(Constant)	3.88	[3.53,4.23]		21.95	.00
Negative_F	1.10	[0.49,1.70]	0.31	3.59	.00

Note. R² adjusted = .09. Negative_F = Negative framing. CI = confidence interval for B.

We observe that compared to the neutral framing reference category, negative framing leads to a 1.10-point increase on average, on the 7-point Likert scale measuring boycott intentions. From the P-value of .00, these results are statistically significant as they are below the .05 threshold. Thus, the first hypothesis stating that negative framing increases boycott intentions is supported.

Second hypothesis testing

To test the second hypothesis, I run another simple linear regression, this time with positive framing as dummy variable.

Table 8. Regression of positive framing on boycott intentions

Variable	B	95% CI	β	t	P-value
(Constant)	4.41	[4.04,4.77]		23.79	.00
Positive_F	-0.48	[-1.11,0.15]	-0.14	-1.51	.13

Note. R² adjusted = .01. Positive_F = Positive framing

We observe that compared to the neutral framing reference category, positive framing leads to a 0.48-point decrease on average, on the 7-point Likert scale measuring boycott intentions. However, from the P-value of .13 these results are statistically non-significant as they are above the .05 threshold. Thus, the second hypothesis stating a decreasing effect of positive framing on boycott intentions does not hold and is rejected.

Third hypothesis testing

To test the 3rd hypothesis exploring the moderation effects of individualizing moral foundations on the negative framing-boycotts link, I run regressions for the care and the fairness foundations which are reported in Table 9. and Table 10. respectively.

Table 9. Regression of moderating effect of care moral value on boycott and negative framing

Variable	B	95% CI	β	t	P-value
(Constant)	4.19	[1.89,6.50]		3.60	.00
Negative_F	-1.58	[-5.77,2.62]	-0.44	-0.74	.46
Care	-0.06	[-0.52,0.39]	-0.03	-0.28	.78
Negative_F x Care	0.52	[-0.29,1.33]	0.77	1.27	.21

Note. R^2 adjusted = .09.

When we observe the coefficient of the moderating effect of care on the relationship between negative framing and boycott intentions, we note that for every unit increase on the care scale, the relationship between negative framing and boycott intentions increases by 0.52-points on the 7-point Likert scale measuring boycott intentions, on average. While noting this strengthening effect, we also observe that the P-value assigned to it defines it as statistically non-significant (P-value: .21>.05). Thus, the assumption of an impact of the care foundation on the negative framing and boycott intentions link does not hold.

Table 10. Regression of moderating effect of fairness moral value on boycott and negative framing

Variable	B	95% CI	β	t	P-value
(Constant)	2.14	[-0.22,4.50]		1.80	.08
Negative_F	0.18	[-4.78,5.14]	.05	0.07	.94
Fairness	0.36	[-0.12,0.84]	.15	1.48	.14
Negative_F x Fairness	0.17	[-0.82,1.15]	.24	0.34	.74

Note. R^2 adjusted = .10.

By inspecting the coefficient of the moderating effect of fairness on the relationship between negative framing and boycott intentions, we remark that for every unit increase on the fairness scale, the relationship between negative framing and boycott intentions increases by 0.17-

points on the 7-point Likert scale measuring boycott intentions, on average. Here as well, this strengthening effect is non-significant (P-value: .74>.05). Thus, the assumption of an impact of the fairness foundation on the link between negative framing and boycott intentions does also not hold.

Drawing from the two regressions conducted, the lack of statistical significance in the results (despite increasing effects of both moral foundations being observed) leads to the rejection of the third hypothesis which claimed that individualizing moral values strengthen the relationship between negative framing and boycott intentions.

Conclusion and Discussion

Inspired by findings on the effectiveness of negative and positive framings for inducing boycott intentions, I tested and compared these framings in the context of H&M boycotting actions. First, I inquired whether negatively framing H&M's actions increased boycott intentions towards the fashion brand. Results showed that it was indeed the case, with the negative framing leading to boycott consideration for the population studied. These findings confirm the effects explored by Klein, Smith and John (2004) and Kam & Deichert (2020) on the power of negative framing and the feelings of guilt it procures, to impact boycott motivations. More specifically, the results of this study validate that of Amatulli et al. (2019), who observed that for the scope of promoting sustainable consumption, negative framing is significantly more powerful than positive framing. This shared observation contributes to the literature by specifying framing implications for the ethical fashion consumption aspect, as a sub-category of the sustainable consumption dimension. To reach even greater academic implications, future studies building on this topic can use purchasing guilt or shame as a mediator for framing effects on boycott intentions, to test whether the boycott-inducing mechanism stated by Klein, Smith and John is indeed the explanatory process for the effectiveness of negative framing.

Then, I tested the effect of positive message framing on boycotting intentions, with the results obtained being statistically non-significant. This means that the observed effect lacks evidence to derive a conclusion based on it. Authors such as Neilson (2010) claim that through the mechanism of low institutional trust, brand messages framed in a reparatory manner to recover their reputation are less effective among boycotters, as these persons are less likely to believe the brand and think its message is candid. While the statistically non-significant decreasing effect of positive framing opposes Neilson's findings, this comparison is limited as I did not include institutional trust as a variable in my analysis.

To better understand why the results for the second hypothesis defy their expectations, looking back on how these result expectations were created is necessary. As a matter of fact, studies on the effects of positive framing on political participation such as boycotts highlight mixed results (Amatulli et al., 2019; Schuck & de Vreese, 2009). One of the findings I base my rationale

around is the positive framing-induced mechanism of perceiving one's actions as impactful, which allows for the fruition of boycott intentions (Sen, Gürhan-Canli & Morwitz, 2001). However, here as well, I fail to include and collect a variable accounting for the perception of efficacy of participants' actions. I formulated the second hypothesis of this paper by taking into consideration and expanding on limitations mentioned in Neilson's (2010) study as well as the mixed effects observed in previous literature on the topic. Such mixed effects can occur from the expectation that all individuals exposed to a framed message perceive it and internalize it in a similar manner. Addressing this idea leads us to the application of the MFT through the third hypothesis.

Finally, I formulated the third hypothesis with the expectations of finding an impact of individualizing moral values, more specifically an enhancing effect, on the link between negative framing and boycott intentions. After conducting regressions for both care and fairness values, I observed that both had an increase on the link between negative framing and boycott intentions. While promising, this increase appears to be statistically non-significant. Several reasons for that can be found when deconstructing the moral value assessment employed. It is particularly hard to get accurate measurements of people's moral foundations with only 4 items per foundation, as using 6 items is the MFT authors' recommendation (Dobolyi, 2021). Beyond that, I had to use 2 items for the fairness value instead of 4, to ensure a satisfying reliability for the measurement scale. This happened as a cause of the low internal consistency of the scale items employed by Graham, Haidt & Nosek (2009), with an initial Chronbach α of .50 for care and one of .39 for the fairness foundation. Considering these shortcomings, the results I came across in the analysis can be better understood.

The research question ''How does information framing impact boycott intentions and how is this relationship moderated by individualizing moral foundations?'' is addressed as follows: I found results strongly supporting the effect of negative framing in promoting boycott intentions, with non-conclusive effects observed for positive framing. Regarding the moderation effect of individualizing moral foundations, no statistically reliable support for their impact on the framing-boycott relationship could be found. Nevertheless, the MFT can and should be employed to bridge differences in results in literature on this topic, as this theory has

valuable implications on the way framings impact individual's information assessment. Since this conclusion is impacted by different limitations, I will further discuss these drawbacks and will provide concrete suggestions along.

Contrary to what Joergens (2006) and a swift look over this paper's *Results* section might indicate, MFT should not be disregarded when studying effects of information framing on political consumerism. Rather, it should be employed with more precision and considering a broader scope. This research was conducted with time, breadth, and overall feasibility limitations. Future studies on the topic should either consider employing more items with high internal consistency or even relying on the 30-item questionnaire provided by the moral foundation official website. To efficiently do so while avoiding the survey's incompletion from participants, a monetary incentive (such as a bol.com giftcard) randomly drawn for one of the subjects can motivate them to pursue longer experiments thoroughly.

An additional implication resides in the usage of the framing vignettes. The message wording of the vignettes might not have been strong or clear enough to trigger the individualizing moral foundations of the readers. Specifically, the association between sustainability impact on the climate and the working conditions enforced in H&M's textile production might not have been clear enough in the vignettes. At the potential cost of experimental bias, where subjects become aware of the researcher's intentions, future research could further emphasize the experimental treatment by using words such as "unfair", "harm" and explicitly mentioning the consequences of H&M's actions on the workers and their labour.

On another note, including brand familiarity and brand perception into the randomization check is also a worthwhile recommendation. This is suggested as neutral framing might not be truly neutral: people may have pre-existing associations with some of the brands cited. For instance, brands such as Arket and COS have expanded through the reparatory process of brand image cleaning that H&M underwent through. This can imply that if people are already familiar with such brands, they might have different feelings towards them than towards H&M. Individual reactions might vary based on the brand perceptions and whether people knew these brands were associated to H&M. To ensure that brand perception and familiarity are

evenly distributed throughout the population, future research should include them in the randomization checking process, to build a stronger case for the validity and reliability of the framing used.

More practically, effects of the abovementioned potentially inaccurate framing of neutrality may have spilled over and impacted the effect size for either positive or negative framings, since neutral framing serves as the reference category for framing comparisons. Referring to the average boycott intention means provided in Table 3., I denote that the two means for the positive and neutral framings are very close to each other, on the 7-point Likert scale measuring boycott intentions. In fact, they are only a tenth of a decimal away from each other (3.93 for the positive and 3.83 for the neutral framing). While this no substantive proof in explaining the non-statistically significant effects of positive framing on boycotts, this observation highlights that both vignettes lead to similar boycott assessments, on average.

Building on the lack of statistically significant effects for positive framing's efficiency, a more specific research goal can help subsequent papers explore the same topic. Besides simply describing the drawbacks mentioned in Neilson's (2010) paper and arguing for their application to the H&M case, future studies should include the product style and quality, distribution, and market status criteria stated by Neilson as variables within their analysis. By doing so and contrasting the effects between two boycott-relevant fashion brands (for instance by comparing H&M to Balenciaga, also recently accused of disrespecting moral values by having children hold plush toys dressed in morally questionable outfits (Cheong, 2022)) much can be gained in the observations' precision and particular effects can be drawn based on the brands' specific attributes. Following along these lines, an interesting idea in the study of sustainable fashion-related boycotts would be to look at the two ''extremes'' of the pricing spectrum and compare a cheap brand such as H&M to a luxury one such as Balenciaga, while exploring how moral foundations can play a role in boycotting activity. As long as the moral foundations triggered by the brands' scandals align, such comparison would not only allow to profile consumption attitudes of differently priced, yet similarly unsustainable products based on people's care and fairness values, but also be a research novelty.

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Appendix

    A. Statements to evaluate individualizing moral foundations

<u>Care</u>:

If I saw a mother slapping her child, I would be outraged.

It can never be right to kill a human being.

Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.

The government must first and foremost protect all people from harm.

<u>Fairness</u>:

If a friend wanted to cut in with me on a long line, I would feel uncomfortable because it wouldn't be fair to those behind me.

In the fight against terrorism, some people's rights will have to be violated [reverse scored].

Justice, fairness and equality are the most important requirements for a society.

When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.

B. Questionnaire material

Thank you for participating in this survey. My name is Stefan Cojocariu, this study is part of my masters' thesis at Erasmus University Rotterdam and explores boycott intentions related to ethical fashion consumption. The survey should take about 4 minutes to complete. Your answers are anonymized and used solely for academic purposes. By pursuing, you acknowledge this and will do your best to answer honestly. For any further inquiries, you can reach out to stefan.cojocariu@student.eur.nl.

Q1: What is your gender?

Q2: How old are you?

Q3: Which country are you from?

(one of the following vignettes is then displayed, at random)

"Fashion companies, especially when operating at a large scale, are required to be transparent with their actions. Here is some information that can be found from H&M's most recent yearly report: For most H&M products' lifecycles, fabric production leaves the biggest climate impact. *As an answer to this, H&M sustainably sources over half of its materials.*''

"Fashion companies, especially when operating at a large scale, are required to be transparent with their actions. Here is some information that can be found from H&M's most recent yearly report: For most H&M products' lifecycles, fabric production leaves the biggest climate impact. *However, H&M still produces close to half of its materials unsustainably.*''

"Fashion companies, especially when operating at a large scale, are required to be transparent with their actions. This is why H&M provides a yearly report, in which it can be found that as a multi-brand organization, the H&M group includes brands such as COS, Weekday, Monki and ARKET. ''

Q4: How likely would you be to boycott H&M?

You will be presented with a series of statements regarding moral values. Please assess them based on the extent you agree with each.

If I saw a mother slapping her child, I would be outraged.

It can never be right to kill a human being.

Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.

The government must first and foremost protect all people from harm.

If a friend wanted to cut in with me on a long line, I would feel uncomfortable because it wouldn't be fair to those behind me.

In the fight against terrorism, some people's rights will have to be violated [reverse scored].

Justice, fairness and equality are the most important requirements for a society.

When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.

Q5: About what brand was the message you read?

Thank you for your participation! This study actually explored the relationship between information framing, boycott intentions and moral foundations. It is thus disclosed that the message you've read was designed for the purpose of this survey.

C. Ethics & privacy checklist

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Boycott, framing and morals: a political consumerism study on H&M

Name, email of student: Stefan Cojocariu, stefan.cojocariu@student.eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Vivian Visser, visser@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 13th Feb – 25th June

Is the research study conducted within DPAS   **YES** - NO

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1.   Does your research involve human participants.   **YES** - NO

      If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research?   YES - NO

2.   Does your research involve field observations without manipulations
      that will not involve identification of participants.   YES - NO

3.   Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary
      data that has been anonymized by someone else).   YES - NO

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what
    participants can expect during the study be withheld from them?   YES - NO

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written
    'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study?   YES - NO

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation
    at any time be withheld from participants?   YES - NO

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants?   YES - NO
    *Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to
    think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study
    is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they
    harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).*

5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or
    negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by
    participants?   `   YES - NO

6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined
    by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or
    philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric
    data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning
    mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual
    orientation)?

    YES - NO

7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or
    other groups that cannot give consent?   YES - NO

8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study?   YES - NO

9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the
    confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured?   YES - NO

10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study?   YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

In order to ensure the validity of the framing effects applied, some degree of deception is required regarding the true nature of the survey.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

First, safety regulations regarding the confidentiality of participants' data will be specified. At the end of the survey, the participants will be informed about the fictional nature of the vignette as well as the actual purpose of the study.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

No harmful or non-ethical consequences can be derived from the participation of the study.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

A Qualtrics survey will be used, which will then be distributed via shared links on social media.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample? 100

What is the size of the population from which you will sample? 123

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Data will be stored on Qualtrics, then exported to Excel or directly to my statistical software of choice for sorting and then analysis. The device on which the data will be stored is my laptop

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Myself only

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Only whenever important steps in the data processing will be accomplished

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

No individual respondent will be able to be traced or identified and no personal details (beyond a sum of the different countries of origin) will be disclosed within the study

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Stefan Cojocariu   Name (EUR) supervisor: Vivian Visser

Date: 21/03   Date: 24/03/2023