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Anti-consumption: A Preliminary Examination of a Set of Social Considerations That Impact a Consumer's Decision to 'Punish' Marketers Deemed to be Engaging in Irresponsible Behavior

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ABSTRACT

A sample of 175 students from two universities provided insight regarding the rationale for engaging in anti-consumption behavior. A review of the literature identified myriad reasons why consumers engage in personal boycotts. This study examines 12 of these reasons: environmental concerns, political stance, religious orientation/affiliation, country-of-origin (COO), attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, the size of the marketer, the use of disliked celebrity endorsers, the use of offensive marketing tactics (e.g. advertising), animal cruelty including the use of live animal testing, perceived violations of basic human rights, employing a nonunionized workforce, and employment-related discrimination based on the gender, age, race, religion, or ethnicity of the individual. Respondents rated the appropriateness of each of these 12 issues as a consideration for consumers when making a purchase decision, and they indicated the extent to which they personally use each issue in making their own purchase decisions. The results show that the most accepted rationale for engaging in a public boycott is a reported transgression related to sustainability whereas the least acceptable of the 12 reasons under scrutiny is the large size of the marketer. The respondents also indicated that they were personally most likely to consider anti-consumption because of a firm's engagement in perceived violations of the basic human rights of the firm's employees whereas the use of a non-unionized workforce was the issue that was least likely to result in a personal boycott. Five of the six measured demographic variables were found to be associated with the decision-making process with gender and ethnicity being the most common factors. The consideration most likely to be influenced by demographic variables was the company's position regarding the LGBTQ community.

Keywords: *Anti-consumption, Boycotts, Politics, Purchase, Punish, Demographics, LGBTQ*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, marketers have witnessed an uptick in two distinct consumer actions. More specifically, consumers are known to engage in boycotts and buycotts – two issues at opposite ends of the social spectrum. A *boycott* is a behavior that most consumers have long understood; it has been defined by Friedman as “an endeavor by at least one gathering to accomplish certain goals by asking singular buyers to avoid making chosen buys in the commercial center.” Perhaps more succinctly stated, it was also defined by Friedman as “an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace” (Friedman 1985, p. 97). Conversely, a *buycott* represents “the conscious and deliberate decision of consumers to make consumption choices to reward organizations for their good deeds” (Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013; Crane and Matten, 2004, p. 290). So, whereas boycotts represent anti-consumption as a way of punishing unacceptable behaviors, buycotts represent the antithesis or the “flip side” of boycotts (Rivaroli, Ruggeri, Novi and Spadoni, 2018, p. 143). Thus, buycotts represent an overt effort to encourage the purchase of specific products as a way of rewarding positive behavior on the part of the marketer (Friedman, 2002).

While both phenomena are important for marketers to understand, this study focuses solely on boycotts. These refusals to purchase a particular product or from a particular marketer may be an individual’s personal response to an issue that they find offensive in some manner, or the boycott may be organized among specific groups of consumers with the goal of punishing marketers that the groups view as engaging in unacceptable behavior. Whether the focus is on an individual consumer or a reference group, there are a multitude of reasons as to why these consumers may choose to boycott a particular marketer. As such, this research addresses the reasons why consumers engage in anti-consumption behavior as a form of economic punishment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Unlike the vast majority of research on consumer behavior, rather than examining why people choose to purchase a product or brand, this research will focus on why they reject a particular product or brand. This rejection may be via a singular personal decision or as part of a group action based on reference group influence. The act of rejecting a specific product, or a particular brand, is termed *anti-consumption*. Whereas the decision to make a purchase is essentially rewarding a company that projects a brand personality and/or a company philosophy that is congruent with the consumers’ values, anti-consumption is viewed as a way of punishing an organization engaged in and/or supporting behavior deemed unacceptable by the consumer (Sudbury-Riley, Kohlbacher, 2018; Friedman, 2002; Smith, 1990). As articulated by Nebenžahl, Jaffe, and Kavak (2000), consumers can choose to reward or to punish marketers with their own purchase behavior. The extant literature is replete with examples of anti-consumption.

Consumers tend to make informed decisions regarding the products that they purchase; however, they often have an agenda that excludes some products from their evoked set of acceptable alternatives. In many regards, younger consumers, namely Millennials and Gen Z, appear to be more issue-driven; therefore, they tend to possess more of a collectivist mindset as opposed to a

more individualistic perspective. In fact, Generation Z has been characterized as the most “socially-driven generation;” this phenomenon was especially evident as it related to recent global protests regarding perceived social injustices in the aftermath of George Floyd’s death at the hand of Minneapolis police (Davis, 2020). From an anti-consumption perspective, it has been stated that Generation Z is “focusing on consumerism as a channel for change” and that “more than 67 percent have stopped purchasing or would consider doing so if the company stood for something or behaved in a way that didn't align with their values” (Joker, 2018, p. 4). For example, from an environmental standpoint, research has shown that sustainability is more important to Gen Z than it is to any other generational cohort group. Consequently, members of that age group are more inclined to reject certain products in favor of more sustainability-focused options (Fullerton, 2019). Given this reality, it is reasonable to presume that anti-consumption behavior is likely to be related to other demographics as well. As such, the primary focus of this study is the rationale – that is to say the reasons – why a consumer rejects one or more marketers because those marketers employ what the consumer deems to be unacceptable business tactics. It concurrently assesses how these attitudes are related to a number of demographic considerations.

A thorough examination of the extant literature provided the opportunity to identify myriad reasons for anti-consumption. It concurrently provided insight into the rationale for developing a deeper stream of research on the topic. As noted earlier, anti-consumption represents a consumer’s effort and intent to achieve certain goals by asking individual consumers to refrain from patronizing a marketing organization that is perceived to be acting in a manner contrary to some subset of society’s goals (Friedman 1985). So, just what are these societal goals that permeate the consumers’ mindset? The answer to that question emerges from a thorough literature review.

The issue of *sustainability* is the most common area for research that addresses the refusal to buy from a particular marketer (Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher, 2019; Cherrier, 2009). For example, because McDonald’s has (rightly or wrongly) been accused of contributing to deforestation, many consumers are concerned about what they believe to be a breach of sustainability; as a consequence, these consumers may refuse to dine at McDonald’s Restaurants (Kuo and Means, 2018) while encouraging other consumers to likewise boycott McDonald’s. Concerns regarding sustainability precipitated a call for Swedish consumers to boycott air travel (Pallini, 2020). Similarly, Royal Dutch Shell has been the target for numerous consumer boycotts; one of the more recent was Greenpeace’s call for a boycott due to oil drilling practices that created environmental concerns (Donovan, 2015). It has been stated that sustainability-rooted anti-consumption leads to a greater propensity to engage in consumer boycotts of those companies deemed to be engaged in non-green behavior than do other concerns on the part of consumers and a plethora of watchdog groups (Seegebarth, Peyer, Balderjahn, and Wiedman, 2016).

From a *political* perspective, a modest amount of research has shown that some consumers will refrain from purchasing products when they believe the marketer has a political agenda that is incongruent with their own (Sandikci and Ekici, 2009). In the politically-polarized United States today, it is logical to presume that a company’s overarching political philosophy may lead to a backlash on the part of opposing segments of consumers (Hydock, Paharia, and Weber, 2019).

An example of this phenomenon is consumers who refuse to stay at a Trump-branded resort because of political beliefs that conflict with their own. From a similar perspective, at the height of the contentious 2020 presidential campaign in the United States, there was a call for a boycott of Hobby Lobby because of the appearance of a display at one of their stores that encouraged Americans to vote to re-elect President Trump (Tyko, 2020a). The call for a boycott was made even though there was no evidence as to whether it was a store employee or a customer who created the display using moveable letters on a sign board.

The third consideration to surface was the boycotting of companies that support or even abide by a company policy that adheres to a recognizable *religious philosophy*. For example, Hobby Lobby and Chick-fil-A close on Sunday for religious reasons. Many consumers take issue with this religion-oriented decision (Swimberghe, Woolridge, Ambort-Clark, and Rutherford, 2014). Adherence to Muslim, Jewish, Mormon, and many other religious faiths may lead companies to make a number of tactical decisions that fall within their faith but outside of the mindset of the mainstream, or at least some segment of the market. Consumers often exhibit their disdain for these companies by boycotting the products they do sell on the days that they are open (Malek, Umberger, and Goddard, 2019; Dekhil, Jridi, and Farhat, 2017). There may also be religious mandates that require those individuals who abide by a particular religious doctrine to refrain from engaging in certain consumption behaviors. Pork, beef and non-Halal products are prohibited by certain faiths. As such, this refusal to purchase and consume these products represents a form of anti-consumption that is predicated upon religious underpinnings.

When the focus shifts to *Country-of-Origin (COO)*, research has shown that consumers with a home country bias will often boycott foreign products (Hoffmann, 2013). Boycotts predicated upon COO concerns have been linked to the potential of saving domestic jobs thereby having a positive impact on the domestic economy (Hoffmann, 2011). In the United States, members of automotive labor unions have long been discouraged by their union and their peers from buying cars that are not domestically produced (McGough, 2010). An example that goes beyond reference group pressure is the fact that Ford employees who drive foreign cars may be required to park in designated lots that are significantly more distant from their workspace than are the lots for U.S.-sourced cars (Popely and Mateja, 2006). Likewise, there are anti-American sentiments in some countries that have led to boycotts of noteworthy American brands such as McDonald's, Starbucks, and Levi Strauss (Al-Shebil, Rasheed, and Al-Shammari, 2011). Similarly, some American consumers have recently expressed a desire to boycott Chinese products in retaliation for their presumed role in the Covid-19 pandemic (Zhao, 2020). Consumers appear to be very willing to participate in such COO-based boycotts (Hoffmann and Müller, 2009), and as noted, this response is not just an American phenomenon. For example, one study reported that 56% of German consumers expressed a willingness to boycott Nokia after the marketer moved its German-based subsidiary to Romania (Weber, 2008).

Social deterrents have been shown to contribute to anti-consumptive behavior (Zavestoski 2002; Sen, Gurhan-Canli and Morwitz, 2001). Two recent examples of socially-driven consumer boycotts are consumers who refuse to frequent Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby because of these companies' emotional and financial contributions to entities that are perceived to foster an *anti-LGBTQ* mindset. "Marketing the Rainbow" is a gay rights organization that has characterized

boycotts as a way of dealing with companies that “negatively dealt with gay issues” (Anonymous, 2020c). Among their calls for boycotts were Coors and Florida Orange Juice. Ironically, consumer boycotts may address either side of this phenomenon; a consumer may boycott because of anti-LGBTQ sentiment whereas other consumers might be inclined to boycott because of positive-LGBTQ support (Flores and Flores, 2020; Anonymous, 2020c).

The sixth consideration identified in the literature is the *size of the organization*. Interestingly, some consumers refuse to buy from small companies such as mom-and-pop shops because of concerns about inferior customer service, whereas the more common outcome occurs when consumers refuse to buy from large companies because of myriad concerns. These concerns include the perceived lack of personal attention, the belief that large companies do not contribute to the local community-at-large, and that their sheer size-based power may be deemed anti-competitive and detrimental to small local businesses. They are also often perceived to be unduly influencing governmental policies and decisions (Beck, 2018). For example, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg contributed \$350 million to fund political activities and staffing considerations that were seen as focused on benefitting Democrat candidates in the 2020 election (Goerg, 2020). In light of such concerns, large marketers such as Walmart or Amazon may be targeted (Waddock and Graves, 1997). Some research has characterized these size-driven boycotts as a mentality of favoring the underdog (McGinnis, Gao, Jun and Gentry, 2017; Prell, 2011; Zavestoski, 2002).

The seventh issue identified was the *use of celebrity endorsers* that are disliked by a segment of the consumer market (Odoom, Kosiba, Christian, and Narh, 2019; Hue, Lim, Won, and Kwon, 2018). In such cases, it is the disdain for the spokesperson that drives consumers to boycott the marketer. This spokesperson could be any well-known celebrity, but the most common are athletes, actors, musicians, politicians, and even royalty among others (Fullerton, 2017). But some celebrities are hated. This hatred can be related to any number of reasons including some of the six issues that were previously mentioned. For instance, a celebrity may be known for supporting a particular political candidate (Kid Rock) or for adhering to a religious doctrine that the consumer dislikes (Tom Cruise). But it could be a less imposing reason; the consumer may hate an athlete that plays for a rival team or one who abandoned their favorite team as a free agent (Tom Brady). Irrespective of the reason, the outcome is the same. The consumer dislikes the celebrity endorser; consequently that individual refuses to buy the product that the celebrity endorses. It is when that dislike is common among a large group of individuals that the collective boycott potentially becomes problematic.

The next issue identified in the literature review is that of *using offensive marketing tactics*. Though advertising is at the forefront of this phenomenon, there are many other marketing tactics that can foster consumer contempt. It could be the product itself or a decision specific to pricing, distribution, or a target marketing concern. One of the most commonly disliked tactics is sex in advertising (Knittel, Zana, Karolin Beurer, and Adele Berndt, 2016). For example, Hardee’s and Carl’s Jr. were roundly criticized for advertising using a bikini-clad Morgan Fairchild and messages that exuded sexual innuendo (Johnson, 2018). The roles portrayed by women in advertising have also resulted in a backlash to the extent that companies such as Dove have instituted so-called *femvertising* as a way of highlighting a positive image of women (Feng,

Chan and He, 2019). Such initiatives have, in fact, resulted in boycotts with consumers expressing a sincere desire to purchase products from marketers such as Bumble, Secret, L'Oréal, and Microsoft, companies whose advertising is seen as portraying women and younger girls in positive roles (Anonymous, 2020a). Among other offensive marketing tactics that have precipitated action are exclusionary target marketing practices such as “redlining” in the insurance industry; this strategic initiative led to boycotts by black consumers who were negatively impacted by the practice (Rahman, 2018).

The ninth consideration documented in the literature is that of animal cruelty. Although much of the concern in this regard has been focused on the use of *live animal testing* in the research and development of a marketer's products (Cambefort and Roux, 2019), other issues have been brought to the forefront over time. For years, boycotts have been called against circuses for perceived abuses in the training of animals (Shani and Pizam, 2008). More recently, a boycott was called against the Chaokoh brand of coconut milk because of reports of abuse of the so-called “monkey labor force” that is used to climb trees and harvest coconuts. The reports even caused Costco to remove the brand from their store shelves (Tyko, 2020b). Backlashes against companies that use live animals in their product testing protocols have led some companies such as Body Shop International to extoll the virtues of their philosophy of not engaging in this practice (Dobson, 2018; Hartman and Beck-Dudley, 1999). But for those who do use live animal testing, the backlash among critics and activists can be loud, and it can be significant. And it is more pronounced today than in the past. For these reasons, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has encouraged consumers to boycott companies such as Estee Lauder, Mary Kay, and Victoria's Secret because they still use live animals in their tests of cosmetics and other health and beauty products (Anonymous, 2020b). As a consequence, many firms have abandoned animal testing in their efforts to better appeal to the concerned citizenry.

The tenth consideration for anti-consumption that was identified in the examination of the secondary data was that of *perceived violations of basic human rights* (Zollo, Yoon, Rialti, and Ciappei, 2018; Ishak, Khalid, and Sulaiman, 2018; Brearton, Bhyat, Fernandez, Gross, Sosa, Ranney, and Palardy, 2007). Advocates of human rights organize and support boycotts of companies they deem to be guilty of violating the rights of their workforce, even if the workers do not work directly for the company being boycotted. This issue is particularly noteworthy as it often relates to the manufacturing labor forces in countries such as Vietnam and China. For example, Nike has long been the target of consumer boycotts because of perceived labor abuses in Vietnam (Bauer and Umlas, 2017; Chylinski and Chu, 2010). The concerns articulated typically include low compensation, child labor, forced overtime, and the lack of adequate restroom breaks.

The penultimate consideration on the list is the use of a *non-unionized work force*. This issue is particularly relevant in North America and Western Europe. While it typically involves workers at manufacturing facilities, it may also involve the retail work force. Those engaging in this type of boycott are generally union members (Hyman and Curran, 2000); they may also engage in boycotts whereby union members are encouraged to buy products and shop at retailers where the labor force is unionized. So, while American union members may have long embraced Budweiser beer, they long boycotted the non-unionized Coors brand (Savan, 1989).

The final rationale for anti-consumption that surfaced during the literature review is *discrimination against employees and prospective employees* based on demographic considerations (Lee, Kim, and Jeong-Nam, 2019). While the more common demographic variables that are associated with this form of discrimination are gender and race, other issues are documented in the literature. Among the additional variables are age and marital status. Discrimination may mean that certain individuals may not be considered for promotion, or even being hired, by company decision makers. When such discrimination comes to light, boycotts are often implemented. Two of the many examples identified in the literature are the called boycotts of Nordstrom’s for its alleged discrimination against black employees (Rizzo, 2002) and Pinterest’s alleged discrimination against female employees (Burroughs, 2020).

The literature review resulted in 12 specific potential considerations for engaging in anti-consumption behavior – or boycotts. The list is likely neither mutually exclusive nor collectively exhaustive. Yet, while there may well be more reasons for anti-consumption, these 12 were the most prevalent, thus deemed to be the most relevant as well as the timeliest for the current project. The 12 considerations that were identified along with a brief rationale for anti-consumption for each are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. 12 Considerations Leading to Anti-consumption and Potential Rationale for Each

Consideration	Potential Rationale for Punishment
Sustainability	Harming the Environment; Global Warming
Political	Company Politically Oriented in Different Direction
Religion	Religious Platform Runs Counter to Mainstream/Segment
Country-of-Origin	Ethnocentricity; Domestic Economic Impact; Adversary
Anti-LGBTQ	Viewed as Discriminatory Based on Sexual Orientation
Size of the Organization	Large Companies Viewed as Detriment to Small Business
Disliked Celebrity Endorser	Dislike of Spokesperson Translates to Dislike of Marketer
Offensive Marketing Tactics	Any Element of Marketing Mix such as Sexy Advertising
Animal Abuse and Testing	Backlash for Cruelty & Live Animals for Product Testing
Basic Human Rights Violations	Concern, Particularly for Foreign Manufacturing Workers
Non-union Workforce	Backlash against Companies with Non-unionized Labor
Employment-related Discrimination	Workforce Discrimination against a Demographic Group

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives associated with this initial component of a much larger project are fourfold. First is that of determining the extent to which members of Generation Z feel that a number of potential reasons to engage in a boycott are appropriate for consumers to take into consideration when making a decision to participate in a boycott of a particular marketer. Second is the determination of the extent to which each of the 12 issues under scrutiny impacts their own personal purchasing behavior. The third objective is the identification of relationships between commonly used demographics and the two dependent variables for each consideration that were measured in this study (appropriateness and personal use). The final objective is to use the

results to identify glitches in the research instrument while concurrently allowing for the reduction in the total number of items used to measure specific psychographic traits that will be used in the follow-up study. The results emanating from the final objective will provide the opportunity to refine the final survey and prepare it for the larger, more scientifically-selected sample from the United States. It will also provide the basis for planned surveys in South Africa and South Korea along with potential dissemination in New Zealand and Australia.

METHODOLOGY

The literature review was an essential component of the research process. Myriad considerations for consumer boycotts were identified. Though the research team began the process with an eye on four considerations to examine, upon completion of the comprehensive literature review, a total of 12 were ultimately selected for inclusion in the data collection instrument. Specifically, the research addressed:

- environmental concerns (sustainability),
- political orientation,
- religious orientation/affiliation,
- country-of-origin (COO),
- attitudes towards the LGBTQ community,
- (large) size of the marketer,
- use of disliked celebrity endorsers,
- offensive marketing tactics (e.g., sexy advertising),
- animal cruelty and the use of live animal testing,
- perceived violations of basic human rights,
- employing a nonunionized workforce, and
- employment-related discrimination based on demographic considerations.

The questionnaire included two questions for each of the 12 considerations. First was the appropriateness of consumers using each issue as a basis for making a decision to refrain from buying from a particular marketer. Second was the extent to which the respondent personally used each criterion when deciding which marketers they would avoid when making their own purchase decisions. Appropriateness was measured using a forced, balanced, six-point itemized rating scale where each of the six response points was labelled. Personal use was measured using a forced, unbalanced, six-point scale with each point labeled. Demographics were measured using multiple choice response sets. For age, respondents were simply asked to place themselves within one of five age ranges that correspond to the five commonly discussed generational cohort groups. These cohort groups range from the Silent Generation to Gen Z. The final set of questions focused on several multi-item psychographic scales. Their purpose for inclusion in this part of the study was data reduction. This assessment facilitated the identification of the more appropriate scales while eliminating unneeded items from the final survey that will be distributed to a targeted sample of adult (age 18 and older) residents in the United States. The final survey is set for distribution in the United States, South Africa, and South Korea with other countries potentially included.

Students at a large Midwestern university and a smaller Southeastern university completed the survey as part of their course requirements. They were provided a link, and the survey was completed online using the Qualtrics portal. Though students provided their name (in order to receive credit for successful completion of the survey), the data set was provided to a third coauthor who was not involved in teaching any of the students. That individual provided the other two coauthors with a list of students who had successfully completed the survey. Thus, the students were assured anonymity as it related to their professor.

Analyses associated with the first two research objectives were based on simple descriptive statistics. Means and frequency distributions provided the needed metrics. To identify relationships between each of the 12 criteria under consideration and the relevant demographics, measures of association were used. Since the criteria under consideration were intervally-scaled, it was decided that a simple t-test would be used when the demographic variable was dichotomous whereas One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the Scheffé Method of Multiple Comparisons were used when the independent variable had three or more response categories. A measure of significance of .05 or less was required for rejection of the null hypotheses of equal group means across each demographic variable for each analytical procedure.

Objective four involved data reduction of several specific psychographic scales. While those scales were not germane to this part of the study, the use of Principle Components Analysis along with the calculation of Cronbach's alpha for reliability were essential for the next phase of the study which will focus on psychographic considerations. These results will be briefly addressed in the Results section.

RESULTS

The 12 potential reasons for engaging in anti-consumption behavior that were identified in the review of the extant literature were incorporated within the data collection instrument. The initial survey went through 16 iterations among the three coauthors before the final instrument was deemed ready for pretesting. The sample for this portion of the study comprised 175 university students from two universities, one in the Midwest and one in the Southeast United States. In light of the sample focusing on university students, the vast majority of the respondents fell within the Generation Z category (96.0%) as anticipated whereas the gender demographic was more representative of the aggregate population. The breakdown based on gender was 55.4% female and 44.6% male. No respondents identified themselves as gender neutral or binary.

Appropriateness of the 12 Considerations for Others Making Anti-consumption Decisions

This variable was measured using a balanced six-point scale anchored by "Totally Appropriate" (1) and "Totally Inappropriate" (6). Of the 12 potential considerations that might be the rationale behind engaging in anti-consumption by an individual consumer or as a coordinated effort involving groups of consumers, all 12 were deemed appropriate based upon mean scores lower than the scale's midpoint of 3.5. The consideration deemed most appropriate addressed concerns about sustainability; close behind sustainability was perceived violations of the basic human

rights of the firm’s employees. At the other end of the spectrum, though still deemed a relevant consideration, the issue deemed least appropriate to use as a consideration for staging a boycott was the size of the marketer. Specifically, the respondents were fairly neutral regarding the rationale of boycotting large marketers.

Other considerations that were viewed with some trepidation (means > 3.00) were country-of-origin and any religious orientation that is espoused by the marketer. As noted, none of the considerations exhibited a mean greater than 3.50, thus all 12 considerations can be characterized as having some degree of appropriateness in regard to their use as a determinant as to which firms should be targets of personal or consumer group boycotts. An overview of these results is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Perceived Appropriateness of Each Consideration as Basis for Anti-Consumption

Consideration	Mean
Environmental Concerns (Sustainability)	1.64
Perceived Violations of Basic Human Rights	1.67
Employee/Hiring Discrimination Based on Demographics	1.77
Offensive Marketing Tactics (e.g. Sex in Advertising)	1.84
Animal Cruelty/Use of Live Animal Testing	1.89
Attitudes towards the LGBTQ Community	2.49
Political Orientation	2.59
Use of Disliked Celebrity Endorsers	2.95
Employing a Non-unionized Workforce	2.95
Religious Orientation/Affiliation	3.06
Country-of-Origin (COO)	3.12
Size of the Marketer (Large)	3.23

Scale: 1 = Totally Appropriate and 6 = Totally Inappropriate

Personal Considerations in Making Anti-consumption Decisions

The second research objective focused on the determination of the extent to which Gen Z respondents used each of the 12 considerations when making their own personal decision to not purchase products sold by a specific marketer or at a specific retailer. These variables were measured using an unbalanced six-point scale anchored by “Always (1)” and “Never (6)”. Using that six-point scale, three were deemed to be commonly used in the consumers’ decision-making process.

The consideration that the respondents were most likely to personally use when deciding to boycott a particular marketer was perceived violations of one’s basic human rights, in particular the labor force that is involved in manufacturing activities in less-developed countries such as Vietnam. Next on the list were discrimination against some employees based upon their demographic profile and concerns about animal cruelty. The issue least likely to result in a decision to boycott a specific marketer is the use of a nonunionized work force in manufacturing and retail operations. Fully 31.4 percent of the respondents indicated that they always or very frequently considered a company’s record on human rights whereas 48.6 percent of the

respondents indicated that they never used a firm’s nonunionized workforce as bases for boycotting a particular marketer. An overview of these results is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Tendency to Personally Use Each Consideration as a Basis for Anti-Consumption

Consideration	Mean
Perceived Violations of Basic Human Rights	3.31
Employee/Hiring Discrimination Based on Demographics	3.44
Animal Cruelty/Use of Live Animal Testing	3.48
Offensive Marketing Tactics (e.g. Sex in Advertising)	3.66
Environmental Concerns (Sustainability)	3.74
Political Orientation	4.00
Attitudes towards the LGBTQ Community	4.06
Use of Disliked Celebrity Endorsers	4.66
Country-of-Origin (COO)	4.78
Religious Orientation/Affiliation	4.91
Size of the Marketer (Large)	4.93
Employing a Non-unionized Workforce	5.09

1 = Always, 2 = Very Frequently, 3 = Frequently, 4 = Sometimes, 5 = Seldom, and 6 = Never

Demographics

The issues germane to anti-consumption have much in common with ethical judgments on the part of consumers. Given that the literature is replete with examples of how an individual’s ethical mindset is related to demographics, and despite the relative limitation in the distribution of ages across the sample, it was anticipated that differences in one’s beliefs and behaviors regarding anti-consumption would be documented among some, if not all, of the demographic variables under scrutiny. Such was indeed the case as the respondents’ attitudes regarding the appropriateness of using the 12 issues as a basis for anti-consumption were found to be influenced by four of the six demographic variables under scrutiny. The demographic variable that was most frequently found to be related to the 12 boycott considerations was gender. It was related to six of the 12 potential considerations. The consideration that was most commonly impacted by the six demographics under scrutiny was the marketer’s perceived position regarding the LGBTQ community. It was found to be related to three of the six demographic variables: gender, ethnicity and age. Regarding their own use of the 12 criteria when making a purchase decisions, all 12 were found to be related to one or more of the demographic variables. The issues of sustainability, violations of basic human rights, and position regarding the LGBTQ community were all found to be related to two of the six demographic variables. The other nine considerations were each related to a single – and not the same – demographic variable. Regarding *gender*, women deemed six of the 12 considerations to be more appropriate than did their male counterparts. Women concurrently indicated that they personally considered five of the 12 potential reasons for engaging in a personal boycott more frequently than did men when making their own purchase decisions. For none of the 12 considerations under scrutiny were men found to be either more accepting or more likely to use them as bases for punishing a marketer.

Ethnicity was also related to six of the boycott considerations. While only one consideration was deemed to be more appropriate by any ethnic group, five of the 12 considerations were reported to be used more frequently by some individuals making a personal decision to refrain from purchasing a product from a particular marketer. Hispanics were more likely to accept country-of-origin and the marketer’s political inclination as legitimate boycott considerations. Those with an Asian heritage were more likely to reject offerings from companies that employed a non-unionized work force. Consumers who classified themselves as black or African American indicated a greater propensity to take violations of basic human rights, attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, and the dislike of a celebrity endorser into account when making a personal boycott decision.

Household *income* was found to be related to the frequency with which respondents chose to engage in a personal boycott. Those respondents who reported lower household incomes were more likely to use issues germane to sustainability, country-of-origin, and violations of basic human rights as bases for not patronizing a marketer they see as engaged in these unacceptable practices. When the focus shifts to *age*, little difference was expected given the fact that 96 percent of the respondents fell within the Generation Z cohort group. The small composition of the other four age-based cohort groups was expected to make the identification of statistically significant age-based differences difficult. Still, it was determined that Gen Z respondents were more likely to use religion as a basis for boycotting a marketer whereas the combined group of older respondents found the issue of a non-unionized work force to be a more appropriate consideration for boycotting a particular marketer than did their younger counterparts. Respondents who were *working* at least part time were more likely to boycott larger marketers, and they were also more attuned to the idea of rejecting a marketer because of a consumer’s dislike of the marketer’s celebrity spokesperson.

The sole demographic variable that was not found to be related to either the appropriateness of or the frequency with which an individual considered a boycott for any of the 12 reasons under consideration was the respondents’ *marital status*. However, this fact could be attributed to the relatively small subset of married respondents who completed the survey. It should also be noted that despite their obvious differences (large/small, Midwest/Southeast), no statistically significant differences between respondents at the two *universities* were found for any of the 24 dependent variables. An overview of the demographic-based differences is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Number of Significant Relationships with Each of the 12 Considerations

Demographic Variable	Appropriateness	Frequency of Use
Gender	6	5
Ethnicity	1	5
Income	0	3
Age	1	1
Work Status	1	1
Marital Status	0	0

Data Reduction

The data reduction objective associated with this study addressed the need to create a set of valid, yet more parsimonious psychographic scales for the upcoming second phase of this study. There were two potential *Political Inclination* scales and two alternative *Consumer Ethics* scales, thus one of each of these categories needed to be eliminated. Based on Principle Components Analysis (PCA) and Cronbach's alpha measures, the better of each of the two scales in each of the two categories was selected for retention in the final survey. Next, there were four scales that needed to be reduced in terms of the number of items comprising each scale. The results were that *Consumer Cynicism*, *Consumer Ethics*, *Political Inclination*, and *Consumer Coaching* were each reduced to four items by retaining those items that resulted in the highest metric regarding each scale's reliability. This reduction was essential for the composition of the final survey which will initially be distributed to the selected members of the target population of adult heads-of-households in the United States. It should be noted that there are seven additional multi-item scales that will be included in the final survey. However, all of these scales were already based on between three and five items as sought by the researchers, and each of the multi-item scales had been subjected to empirical scrutiny. Thus they were not included in the pretest of the data collection instrument. The results associated with the scales to be retained for the second phase of the study are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Final Composition of the Scales Retained for Phase Two of the Research Study

Scale	Number of Items Retained	Coefficient Alpha
Consumer Coaching	4	.922
Political Inclination	4	.916
Green Inclination	3	.894
Consumer Ethics	4	.885
Consumer Cynicism	4	.856
Anti-consumption	4	.636

DISCUSSION

Some of the 12 issues scrutinized in this study are more disconcerting than others. Sustainability and discrimination have far greater social consequences than do a disliked celebrity endorser or the size of the marketer. Thus, based on the social significance of the issue upon which consumers may act, the number of consumers who engage in anti-consumption will vary significantly for the 12 issues. For example, 17.7 percent of the respondents indicated that they **always** considered a marketer's position as it relates to discrimination against certain groups of employees based on demographic variables as a consideration for boycotting that marketer. Conversely, only 0.6 percent said they **always** refrain whereas 37.7 percent indicated that they **never** refrain from purchasing from a marketer because of its large size. Still, marketers cannot afford to ignore any of the 12 considerations.

The considerations under scrutiny in the current study all potentially create barriers to success for marketers that may find themselves to be targets of consumer boycotts. In response to this dilemma, the marketer typically has three alternatives. They can refrain from engaging in

questionable behavior. For example, Carl's Jr. has dropped its sex-laden advertising in favor of a more wholesome, product-related campaign. Second, the marketer can choose to continue to adhere to their questionable tactics and presume that it will negatively impact only a portion of its target market while being embraced by other consumers. Chick-fil-A continues to close on Sunday for religious reasons, even in airports and sports stadiums, yet it continues to be one of the most favored restaurant chains in America. Finally, the marketer can engage in a campaign designed to change people's opinions of the marketer. Nike addressed criticism that it was disregarding human rights and underpaying workers in manufacturing facilities in Vietnam with a public relations campaign designed to convey a positive perspective in regard to their outsourcing strategy. Thus, there is not just one approach available to the marketer that is faced with the potential of a consumer boycott. That said, it is incumbent upon the marketer to make the determination as to which of the three directions they should take.

CONCLUSIONS

Each of the four research objectives articulated for this study was achieved. A total of 12 considerations for engaging in a boycott were identified. All 12 were deemed to be appropriate for consumers to use when making anti-consumption decisions. The extent to which respondents personally used these considerations in making their own decisions was found to vary significantly with some frequently used and others seldom, if ever, used for personal decisions. Demographics were found to play a role with gender and ethnicity more likely to be associated with the decision to engage in anti-consumption behavior. The multi-item psychographic scales under scrutiny were refined such that more parsimonious sets of items will be included on the follow-up survey which will be directed towards a much more representative sample of consumers residing in the United States with a long-term objective of producing a multinational study by engaging colleagues who are prepared to collect data in their home countries. Data have already been collected in South Africa and funding is being sought for data collection in South Korea. As such, this study represents the tip of the iceberg.

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