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Bridging who they are with who they thought they'd be: The effects of Gen Zers' subjective well-being on their boycott responses to online and offline unethical situations

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

*Published Version:*

Bridging who they are with who they thought they'd be: The effects of Gen Zers' subjective well-being on their boycott responses to online and offline unethical situations / TUAN, ANNAMARIA; VISENTIN, MARCO; DI DOMENICO, GIANDOMENICO. - In: JOURNAL OF INTERACTIVE MARKETING. - ISSN 1520-6653. - ELETTRONICO. - 58:2-3(2023), pp. 248-267. [10.1177/10949968221136862]

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/910150> since: 2023-02-13

*Published:*

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1177/10949968221136862>

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This is the final peer-reviewed accepted manuscript of:

Tuan, A., Visentin, M., & Di Domenico, G. (2023). Bridging Who They Are with Who They Thought They'd Be: The Effects of Gen Zers' Subjective Well-Being on Their Boycott Responses to Online and Offline Unethical Situations. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/10949968221136862>

The final published version is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10949968221136862>

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# **Bridging who they are with who they thought they'd be: The effects of Gen Zers' subjective well-being on their boycott responses to online and offline unethical situations**

## **Abstract**

This research investigates the role of subjective well-being in Gen Zers' response to unethical situations that are encountered online versus offline. It empirically supports a model that incorporates moral reasoning effects and the aftermath of learning about the situation in either a first-person versus third-person perspective. The findings suggest that Gen Zers are eager to show their values and participate in boycotts when facing an unethical situation. Subjective well-being plays an important role in activating versus inhibiting boycott behaviors as a response to unethical situations encountered both online and offline. Counterintuitively, Gen Zers are less likely to support a boycott when scoring high on well-being, since they are not willing to signal their commitment to gain social legitimacy. In fact, when coping with unethical situations, they are eager to display their true values and to enact the boycott than simply support it.

**Keywords:** *subjective well-being, moral reasoning, Generation Z, boycotting, anti-consumption*

## **1. Introduction**

According to a McKinsey study, 75% of Gen Z consumers (hereafter known as *Gen Zers*, those born between 1997 and 2012) will boycott companies that discriminate against race and sexuality across advertisement campaigns. Furthermore, a recent survey on Tinder reported that users between 18 and 24 are 66% more likely than Millennials to mention issues such as climate change, social justice and gun control in their bio (Luttrell & McGrawth, 2021). Likewise, academic

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research suggests that Gen Zers are increasingly paying attention to social and environmental issues in their consumption behavior, forcing brands to think about the causes they are willing to support. This generation is active in fighting for systemic and transformative societal change; one path to accomplish this is to speak out and stand up for their values when faced with the egregious behaviors of companies, brands or groups (Klein, Smith, & John, 2004; Luttrell & McGrawth, 2021; Palacio-Florencio et al., 2020; Ziesemer, Hüttel, & Balderjahn, 2021). Young adult consumers hold particularly sophisticated skills and critical attitudes toward the marketplace and are quick to use boycotts to challenge the status quo (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010; Palan, Gentina & Muratore, 2010; Ziesemer et al., 2021).

Research has usually analyzed the impact of negative affects (e.g., dislike, hate; Pinto & Brandao, 2020; Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2016) on boycotting behavior. Nevertheless, the role of positive affective states, such as subjective well-being, has largely avoided scrutiny (with the notable exception of Kuanr, Pradhan, Lyngdoh, & Lee, 2021). Furthermore, scholars have widely investigated the cultural and ideological determinants of boycotting, and how these behaviors affect subjective well-being (for a review, see Klein et al., 2004), but there is scarce evidence on how subjective well-being leads consumers (and especially Gen Zers) to boycott (e.g., Kuanr et al., 2021; Makri, Schlegelmilk, Mai, & Dinhof, 2020). Thus, this paper considers subjective well-being as determinant of boycotting behavior, as it represents a factor that likely activates individuals' internal resources to respond actively to an issue (Diener et al., 2018; Pajunen, 2021).

When consumers' ideological beliefs are at odds with a situation or with company's values, people stand in a moral dilemma, wherein they need to choose between the "individual benefit of consumption and the wish of a collective to refrain from consumption so that all received the shared benefits of a successful boycott" (Klein et al. 2004, p. 93). The literature, in fact, generally agrees

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that boycott behaviors are the result of perceiving a moral outrage from a third party (Kuanr et al., 2021; Shim, Cho, Kim, & Yeo, 2021). Consistently, this paper relies on moral reasoning theory to analyze GenZers' boycotting, as this generation seems to be particularly responsive to companies that display questionable behaviors (Gutfreund, 2017; Luttrell & McGrath, 2021). Four domains of moral reasoning stand out when analyzing Gen Zers boycott behaviors. First, *Ethical Idealism* (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021) captures the willingness of Gen Zers to take actions against companies that violate their ethical code. Second, *Individual Self-Congruence* (Xie et al., 2015) accounts for the importance young consumers assign to the congruence between what they say and what they do. Third, *Self-Expression* (Saenger, Thomas, & Johnson, 2013) measures the intrinsic rewards of boycotting participation beyond the collective gains that a boycott can bring. Finally, as Gen Zers actively fight for systemic and transformational social change (Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2010; Luttrell & McGrath, 2021), ethical dilemma may galvanize their *Willingness to make a difference* (Klein et al., 2004).

Finally, the literature suggests that young people tend to fluidly switch between different online and offline behaviors (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Wang, Mo, & Wang, 2022; Harris, Win, & Younes, 2010). Likewise, an unethical situation experienced in person vs. learned from others may elicit different salient evaluations and, by extension, different behaviors (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2014; Lu, Xie, & Xu, 2013; Prensky, 2001).

Thus, the present study strives to illuminate the determinants of boycotting behaviors by advancing a model where Gen Zers' inclination to boycott stems from their (1) subjective well-being, (2) individual moral reasoning, and (3) the characteristics of the unethical situation (i.e., online vs. offline, as well as first- versus third-person experience).

## 2. Theoretical framework

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## *2.1 Boycott behaviors and Gen Zers*

Among the generational cohorts, Gen Zers are the ones most likely to embrace boycotts: Not only by signing petitions online (Graj, 2020), but also by playing an active role in changing the status quo (Ziesmer et al., 2021). Being digital natives, Gen Zers are well informed and constantly exposed to global events. This wide exposure has made them socially aware and cultivated values such as respect for others, sincerity and honesty (Azimi, Andonova, & Schewe, 2021). In this sense, hashtag activism is very popular among this generation, as it is a way to present their beliefs and speak up for social injustice (Luttrell & McGrawth, 2021). However, Gen Zers like to bridge their online and offline identities—and that extends to activism. Their strong desire to contribute to ethical, social and environmental issues (Ziesemer et al., 2021) is reflected in their everyday consumption behaviors, through which they signal their identity (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022; Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

Consequently, Gen Zers are likely to take actions “against consumption” (Lee, Fernandez, & Hyman, 2009). Anti-consumption phenomena include consumer activism (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004); a reduction in consumption driven by ethical/moral or sustainability reasons (Shaw & Newholm, 2002); individual, group, or organizational boycotting; societal- or nation-level trade sanctions (Yuksel, Thai, & Lee, 2019), and product category and brand avoidance (Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009). Despite their different iterations, these behaviors all involve a common goal of intentionally reducing or rejecting some aspects of the consumption process (Zavetoski, 2002). As a form of consumer protest in response to brand misconduct (Yuksel, 2013), boycotts are particularly problematic for brands because they can compel consumers to abandon their relationship with the brand (Yuksel, Thai, & Lee, 2019).

Together with brand avoidance, boycotts represent acts of brand subversion, where consumers try to undermine the success of the brand’s marketing activities (Wilson et al., 2021). Though they

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might appear similar, brand avoidance and boycotting present subtle differences. Brand avoidance refers to the deliberate and long-lasting (Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009) avoidance of specific brands and products due to a lack of congruence, negative associations with the brand, or negative user stereotypes (Hogg et al., 2009). Boycotting is instead driven by an ideological discontent stemming from specific brands' misconduct (Yuksel, 2013). In this sense, boycotters form an implicit commitment to re-enter the relationship with the brand once specific conditions are met (Lee, 2022). Therefore, while brand avoidance is a profound act of anti-consumption, often driven by brand hate (Pinto & Brandao, 2020), boycotts are more likely to end if the brand redeems itself.

Among the many forms that anti-consumerism can take (Pecot, Vasilopoulou & Cavallaro, 2021), boycotting represents an active participation in or support for a protest against a company (Bennett, 2007; Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010; Palacio-Florencio et al., 2021; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Given the above, one can say that consumers intend to *enact boycotting* when they envision a specific strategy to harm a service or product provider (Kristofferson, White, & Pelozza, 2014; Palacio-Florencio et al., 2021; Xie & Bagozzi, 2019), whereas they *support boycotting* when they express a desire to avoid buying from a company (Klein et al., 2004; Palacio-Florencio et al., 2021). On this basis, it is important to separately investigate the determinants of *Enact boycott* and *Support boycott*.

## 2.2 The determinants of boycotting behavior

Several factors can compel boycotting behavior. A prominent one is Subjective Well-being, which can increase personal inner resources and activate individuals' attainment of their goals and preferences (Akyurek et al., 2018; Pajunen, 2021). Nevertheless, the literature says little about subjective well-being as a determinant of consumers' reactions to egregious behavior, especially when considering younger generations. As a notable exception, the recent study by Kuanr, Pradhan,

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Lyngdoh, and Lee (2021) found that well-being improves individuals' stability and allows them to avoid brands that have transgressed moral or ethical norms. In this way, consumers sacrifice short-term satisfaction in favor of being consistent with their values.

Additionally, people use moral reasoning to envision the likely consequences and experiences associated with a certain behavior, which shapes their intention to act (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In other words, individuals mentally perform a relatively complete cost-benefit analysis on the possible consequences of behavioral alternatives (Ajzen, 1991). For example, Dovidio et al. (1991) applied a cost-reward model to investigate the motivation to help a person in distress, while Klein et al. (2004) extended this approach to analyze people's boycott motivations. Because boycott behaviors imply a dilemma between one's individual benefit and adherence to a collective impulse (Sen et al., 2001), it is possible that consumers will evaluate the expected costs and benefits of such behaviors in response to an unethical situation (Klein et al., 2004). This paper considers four domains of these subjective evaluations: First, it is likely that individual Gen Zers will strive for consistency between their perceived self and boycotting as a coping behavior (i.e., *self-congruity*, Furchheim et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2015). Second, individuals will develop an extensive evaluation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. On the one hand, intrinsic motivations are likely to activate boycotting behaviors because they are personally rewarding and reflect fundamental concerns for other people or the environment. In particular, *ethical idealism* (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021) captures consumers' concern about the possible adverse effects of their personal conduct on others. On the other hand, extrinsic motivations are likely to activate boycotting behaviors insofar as consumers believe that boycotting will stimulate positive evaluations from their social referents. In particular, *self-expression* (Saenger et al., 2013) represents consumers' willingness to share their individual behavior with others. Finally, this paper argues that consumers will evaluate the extent to which boycott behaviors effectively signal the

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necessity for appropriate conduct. To this end, *make a difference* (Klein et al., 2004) captures the instrumental value of boycotting as a means of provoking a positive change.

Lastly, it is likely that the situational characteristics of unethical situations affect the intention to boycott. First, the literature suggests that online and offline consumer activism may take different forms and be motivated by different factors (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2013). In particular, Gen Zers easily switch between the two contexts, even though they display different behaviors in each (Palley, 2012; Prensky, 2001; Taylor & Keeter, 2010; Ward & de Vreese, 2011). Second, scholars recognize that thinking about the self (vs. others) is attached to feasibility (vs. desirability) (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Lu, Xie, & Xu, 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010). This paradoxically suggests that experiencing an unethical situation first-hand might inhibit boycott intention compared to a situation learned *de relato*. This paper formalizes this point by considering the effect of a *first-* versus *third-*person perspective.

The following figure graphically depicts the theoretical framework:

-- Insert Figure 1 about here --

### **3. Hypotheses development**

#### *3.1 Subjective well-being and boycotts*

Subjective well-being reflects a person's self-evaluation of their own quality of life (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2018); this encompasses not only cognitive evaluations of one's life events, but also positive and negative affective states (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Notably, subjective well-being can be considered from both a hedonic perspective (related to pleasure, happiness and life satisfaction) and a eudemonic perspective (related to an individual's perception of a meaningful life

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and self-realized lifespan growth) (Balderjahn et al., 2020). Overall, the literature is inconsistent in measuring subjective well-being, but displays a prevailing view of well-being as an *outcome* of individuals' behaviors, cognitions and emotions (Diener et al., 2018; Diener et al., 2009). This has led to conflicting results: On the one hand, a growing body of literature supports a positive relationship between boycotts and subjective well-being (Lee & Ahn, 2016; Zieseemer, Hüttel, & Balderjahn, 2021). On the other hand, boycotting requires sacrificing and thus might negatively affect subjective well-being (Balderjahn, Lee, Seegebarth, & Peyer, 2020; McGouran & Prothero, 2016). In this case, individuals striving for consistency might experience a value conflict (Furchheim et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, some scholars adopt the opposite perspective: that subjective well-being is a *determinant* of people's goals, attitudes and preferences. Because well-being can increase personal inner resources (Akyurek et al., 2018), it "determines to a large extent that person's ability to act in the world" (Pajunen, 2021, p. 111). Happy individuals might attach less importance to risks and problems compared to unhappier individuals, making them more eager to take action to cope with those problems (Diener et al., 2018; Ouweneel & Veenhoven, 2016). Further, there is empirical support for the traditional "happy worker hypothesis" when subjective well-being is assumed to be a determinant of job performance (e.g., Luna-Arocas & Danvila-del-Valle, 2021). Positive emotions foster psychological, physical, and social resources (Friedrickson, 2013; Garland & Friedrickson, 2019) that predict people's motivation to pursue a goal (e.g., boycotting a brand; Heckhausen et al., 2019; Kuanr et al., 2021). This is especially true among young people (Haase et al., 2021): There is evidence that, when in a positive mood, young adults show better social skills and more self-confidence, but when they are low in life satisfaction, they are less likely to be prosocial and more likely to be victimized (Kazdin, Esveldt-Dawson, & Matson, 1982; Martin, Huebner, & Valois, 2008). Relatedly, there seems to be a correlation between life satisfaction and a lower risk of

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Internet addiction (Benvenuti & Mazzoni, 2018; Mazzoni, Baiocco, Cannata, & Dimas, 2016). Moreover, young adolescents with positive emotions have fewer strenuous relationships later in life (Kansky, Allen, & Diener, 2019). Generally speaking, happy people have supportive social relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Oishi et al., 2007) since positive affect is associated with extraverted characteristics such as sociability and affiliation (Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000). Overall, positive mood causes people to feel more sociable and behave more socially, and is thus associated with higher-quality relationships (Diener et al., 2018). On the other hand, negative affective states (such as sadness or depression) are detrimental to the development of the aforementioned resources and instead promote goal disengagement (Kunzmann et al., 2014). Due to growing up in tumultuous circumstances, Gen Zers are more prone to psychological distress, anxiety and depression than earlier generations (Twenge et al., 2018), which make them appear as apathetic (Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2010). Nevertheless, those circumstances provided them new stimuli and new sources of arousal (Raggiotto & Scarpi, 2021). At the same time, Gen Zers stand up for what is right and are eager to engage in unconventional forms of participation (Harris et al., 2010; Luttrell & McGrath, 2021; Palan et al., 2010; Ziesemer et al., 2021). Consequently, well-being constitutes a resource that helps young adults engage in important goals and social activities, such as boycotting behaviors, that aim to bring a positive change to the world. Therefore, we expect that high levels of subjective well-being determine Gen Zers' intentions to boycott in response to an unethical situation:

*H1: Subjective well-being positively affects the intention to (H1a) enact boycotts and (H1b) support boycotts.*

### *3.2. Moral reasoning and boycotts*

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### *Ethical idealism and boycotts*

Previous literature suggests that the decision to boycott a product or service is a way of practicing ethical consumer behavior, and as such, it might be influenced by one's moral values (Burroughs & Rindfleish, 2002; Fernandes, 2020; Furchheim et al., 2020; Pinna, 2020; Shim et al., 2021). People use different systems of moral reasoning to derive their assessments about the morality of a certain action (Forsyth, 1980), although they may not consciously understand their own reasoning (Fernandes, 2020; Haidt, 2001). Nonetheless, consumers' identification with a social or environmental cause may lead them to express their moral values through boycotting. Ethical idealism represents a type of moral value that reflects an individual's attitudes toward the consequences of an action and how they will impact others' welfare (Forsyth, 1980; Palacio-Florencio et al., 2019). The assumption is that people who are highly idealistic in their moral orientation are committed to not harming others and are more likely to recognize morally questionable behaviors (Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999), whereas those who score low assume that harm is sometimes necessary to produce good.

With regard to boycotts, Palacios-Florencio et al. (2020) recently proposed ethical idealism as a precursor of the attitude toward boycotting. Indeed, the authors found that people with strong scores in ethical idealism try to avoid behaviors that are harmful to others, and as such, they will likely hold a negative attitude toward boycotts and refrain from supporting them. However, when consumers are asked to not only support, but also partake in a boycott, consumers may be inclined to join the collective action in order to protect and promote their moral values (Fernandes, 2020; Haidt, 2001). Indeed, research suggests that enacting a boycott can represent a complex emotional expression of self-realization (Klein et al., 2014; Kozinetz, Handelman, & Lee, 2010). Thus, responsible consumers tend to act ethically because it is the right thing to do and they expect to feel guilt for failing to take action (e.g., Furchheim et al., 2010; Pecot et al., 2021; Shim et al., 2021).

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In order to avoid those feelings, consumers tend to adopt a moral obligation, which is associated with a positive intention to purchase ethically (e.g., Pelozo, White, & Shang, 2013). While Gen Xers were raised in an environment that made them pragmatic and ambitious (Herbig, Koheler & Day, 1993), Gen Zers grew up in affluent conditions (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021) and in a technology-advanced world (Martin & Gentry, 2011). These factors have reshaped the priorities and values of the Gen Z cohort, making them more oriented towards incorporating their moral values in their lifestyle (Djafarova & Fooks, 2022). Gen Zers are a highly idealistic generation and their personal ethics strongly influences their judgment in ethically challenging situations (Harris et al., 2010; Wood, 2013). Gen Zers value the “people first, then profit” ethos in their lives and consumption behaviors (Gutfreund, 2017), and thus seek products and services that promote environmental protection and social values, such as support for employees and local communities (Dabija & Bejan, 2017). In tandem, Gen Zers are keen to take actions to punish organizations that violate their ethical code, and this extends beyond just liking a campaign. In this sense, ethical idealism feeds their need to fight for change and should lead them to enact boycotts. Conversely, given the high importance of ethical values in Gen Zers’ life, we hypothesize that ethical idealism negatively affects the intentions to support a boycott, but not enact one. Formally:

*H2: Ethical idealism positively affects the intention to (H2a) enact boycotts and negatively affects the intention to (H2b) support boycotts.*

#### *Self-congruence and boycotts*

Social identity theory suggests that individuals choose and support activities that are congruent with salient aspects of their identity (Tajfel, 1982). Through both consumption and anti-consumption activities, consumers construct and communicate their self-concepts (e.g. Klein et al., 2014). For

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decades, marketing research has used identity theory to understand why consumers perceive a product as “me” or “not me” (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995) in order to examine the congruence between individuals and their social referents (Belk, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). In this same vein, research on organizational identity suggests that the value congruence between individuals and organizations is central to cognitive social identification (Edwards, 2005). The same applies to consumers’ reactions to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which are contingent on the amount of congruence or overlap they perceive with the company’s character (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Notably, self-identity also motivates consumers toward ethical behaviors (e.g., Confente, Scarpi & Russo, 2020; Barbarossa & De Pelsmacker, 2016; Sparks & Shepherd, 1992) because such consumers have incorporated ethical issues into their self-identity. For example, people who identify themselves as “recyclers” are more likely to recycle than those who do not identify as such (e.g., Mannetti, Pierro, & Livi, 2004). Because Gen Zers are highly idealistic, their consumption behaviors shape their identities (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022), but at the same time, their identities (both online and offline) also influence their consumption habits (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). In this sense, Gen Zers are expected to assign importance to the congruence between what they say and what they do (Furchheim, Martin, & Morhart, 2020; Kozinetz, Handelman, & Li, 2010; Wood, 2013; Ziesemer et al., 2021). Thus, we expect Gen Zers to respond to unethical situations with boycotting in order to be consistent with their strong ethical values. Formally:

*H3: Self-congruence positively affects the intention to (H3a) enact boycotts and (H3b) support boycotts.*

*Self-expression and boycotts*

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The literature suggests that people not only strive for self-consistency; they also want to express it by spreading word of mouth about their self-congruent consumption activities (Saenger, Thomas, & Wiggins Johnson, 2013). People's motivations include the desire to gain social status in the eyes of others (Robertson & Gatignon, 1986) or achieve approval (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Thus, individuals might be interested in self-expressing in order to be heard, to express who they are, or to simply inform others about their behaviors regardless of its potential influence (Saenger, Thomas, & Wiggins Johnson, 2013). Even though Gen Zers have been considered passive consumers, their extensive use of digital technologies and their connected and globalized world enriched their sources of stimulations and arousal, making them "energetic and strongly oriented toward self-improvement and challenges" (Raggiotto & Scarpi, 2021, p. 283). In the context of boycotting, self-expression is a relevant antecedent because consumers need to realize the intrinsic rewards of boycott participation (e.g., potentially maintaining or boosting self-esteem) beyond the collective gains that a boycott can bring (Sen et al., 2001). Because Gen Zers grew up in a digital environment where people have unfiltered access to celebrities and influencers via social media (Jacobson, 2020), they likely recognize the importance of expressing their identity to an "always-on" audience. However, because of Gen Zers' fluidity between the online and offline realms, their expressions on digital channels may also manifest in the real world. Gen Zers, are autonomous, use unconventional forms of participation to social life to express and construct their identities (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Wang, Mo, & Wang, 2022; Harris, Win, & Younes, 2010). In this sense, social participation through boycotting is also a mean for self-expression. Therefore, self-expression is expected to positively influence the intention to enact and support boycotts as a reaction to unethical situations. Formally:

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*H4: Self-expression positively affects the intention to (H4a) enact boycotts and (H4b) support boycotts.*

#### *Making a difference and boycotts*

The literature sees boycotting as a trade-off between the individual benefits of consumption and the collective benefits that a boycott can entail (e.g., Sen, Gurhan-Canli, & Morwitz, 2001). Therefore, boycotts represent not only an individualistic anti-consumption behavior to enhance the self but also a collective action that aims to benefit also other people (Klein et al., 2014; Sen et al., 2001).

Boycott participation is indeed “prompted by the belief that a firm has engaged in conduct that is strikingly wrong and that has negative and possibly harmful consequences for various parties” (Klein et al., 2014, p. 96). This strong belief in the collective welfare is one of the characteristics of Gen Zers, who score high in the dimensions that support enhancement of others by transcending selfish interests (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021; Schwartz, 2012). In particular, recent findings suggest that parents played an incremental role in instilling a set of values related to respect, justice, fairness, equal rights and they are indeed raised with the mentality of doing good and being kind to others (Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). Extant research also suggests that Gen Zers score high in the desire to fight for systemic and transformation social change through their actions (Harris et al., 2010; Luttrell & McGrath, 2021), which is firstly reflected in their workplace behavior. Gen Zers look for companies that fit their cultural values, where they can be in a position to truly make a contribution (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Gen Zers possess unique abilities and skills that make them more productive in the workplace (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Therefore, they are self-confident and aware of their skills. This self-confidence transcends the boundaries of the workplace and impacts other aspects of life. Thus, when facing ethical dilemmas, Gen Zers are confident that their actions have the power to make an impact toward a desired change (Braunsberger & Buckler,

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2011). Therefore, it is expected that Gen Z will use boycotting as part of a bid to induce social change. Formally:

*H5: The willingness to make a difference positively affects the intention to (H5a) enact boycotts and (H5b) support boycotts.*

### *3.3. Situational characteristics and boycotts*

#### *The role of online versus offline context on boycotts*

The social context in which individuals operate plays a fundamental role in shaping their behaviors (Ashworth, Darke, & Shaller, 2005; Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2013). Most research has investigated the online and offline contexts separately, but only a few scholars have sought to compare the two (e.g., Chayinska, Miranda, & González, 2021; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Recent research on activism suggests that studying the interaction between the online and offline contexts is more useful than relying on the simplistic reasoning associated with the popular concept of slacktivism (Greijsdanus et al., 2020; Kristofferson et al., 2014).

Recently, Lieberman and Schroeder (2020) analyzed the structural characteristics across the two contexts as determinants of social outcome. The present study takes special interest in two features that are specific to the online context: greater anonymity and wider information dissemination. Regarding the former, the greater anonymity of online contexts is associated with disinhibiting and aggressive behaviors, which can encourage moral outrages and social conflicts (Brady & Crockett, 2019; Crockett, 2017). In this vein, “psychologists have called for closer examination of the consequences of digital communication among adolescents” (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020, p. 17; see also Underwood & Ehrenreich, 2017). Regarding the latter, individuals have access to larger audiences when online, which can help them achieve their communication or sharing goals more

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easily and quickly (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020). For this reason, online contexts may be an especially effective tool for organizing social groups or movements (Theocharis, Lowe, Van Deth, & García-Albacete, 2015). Relatedly, online contexts give activists more opportunity to distance themselves from other participants (Greijdanus et al., 2020; LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2018).

Furthermore, the literature indicates that younger (vs. older) people engage in collective action more often when online (vs. offline) (Greijdanus et al., 2020; Hoffmann & Lutz, 2021). In particular, differences between the two contexts can be found when investigating boycotting behaviors of youngers (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010; Ward & de Vreese, 2011). Gen Zers have a distinct ability to seek information online and form networks around issues that matter to them (Ward & de Vreese, 2011). However, the online context has a particular relevance for Gen Zers since they are constantly under the spotlight on-line (Davies, 2020). Consequently, they are eager to express themselves through online social participation (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021; Palley 2012; Taylor & Keeter, 2010). In fact, Gen Zers also use hashtag activism on social media to present their beliefs and values in supporting a cause, suggesting that they build an online presence to complete their identities beyond their offline activities (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021). Moreover, studies suggest that close to 60% of Gen Zers reports that social life begins online where they feel more comfortable talking about their personal life rather than in real life (Palley, 2012; Taylor & Keeter, 2010). Consequently, we might expect that, when exposed to an online unethical situation they will be more likely to take an action, compared to an offline context. Formally:

*H6: An online context positively affects the intention to (H6a) enact boycotts and (H6b) support boycotts, compared to an offline context.*

*First- versus third-person perspective on boycotts*

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People tend to apply universal moral rules in their judgments when thinking from a third-person perspective, but attenuate their moral stances when thinking from a first-person perspective (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008; Trope & Liberman, 2010). According to Construal Level Theory (CLT; Liberman & Trope, 2014; Trope & Liberman, 2003), these differences in perspective represent a cognitive construct known as social distance, which reflects how people subjectively experience moral outrages in a consumption context in reference to the self. With the notable exception of Lo, Tsarenko, and Tojib (2019), the literature has neglected to study the impact of social distance on consumers' moral judgments. However, this effect could be especially relevant among Gen Zers, who are more likely to associate everyday consumption behaviors with their personal identities (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022; Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Luttel & McGrawth, 2021; Ziesemer et al., 2021).

According to CLT, individuals who are making a decision attach *desirability* to high-level representation of concepts (corresponding to abstract thinking) and they attach feasibility to low-level representations (corresponding to concrete thinking) (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Lu, Xie, & Xu, 2013). In other words, thinking about an unethical situation in first-person might be associated with feasibility (thereby inhibiting subsequent behaviors), while thinking about the same situation from a third-person perspective (i.e., learned from others) may induce desirability (thereby encouraging response behaviors) (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Lu, Xie, & Xu, 2013). Consequently, consumers may be less likely to boycott when they experience an unethical situation from a first-person rather than a third-person perspective. Formally:

*H7: A first-person experience of an unethical situation positively affects the intention to (H7a) enact boycotts and (H7b) support boycotts, compared to an indirect, third-person unethical situation.*

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## 2.6. Control variables

In addition to the above hypotheses, this paper includes two control variables in the analysis: namely, *Collectivism* and *Masculinity* (Hofstede, 1984, 2011). These individual traits are embedded in a socio-cultural context and help to explain cultural differences in people's values, behaviors and attitudes.

As Hofstede suggests (e.g., Hofstede, 2011), people scoring high on *Individualism* emphasize “I” over “we”, are concerned about privacy, and react to transgressions of norms with guilt feelings rather than shame. Meanwhile, people who score high in *Collectivism* are likely to give priority to group goals and have their social behavior less determined by internal processes (Triandis, 2001; Youngdahl et al., 2003).

The analysis also controlled for *Masculinity* given the clear link between ethical behaviors and psychological gender identity (masculinity and femininity) (Pinna, 2020). Masculinity traits are often associated with a weaker ethic of care (Zelezny, Chua & Aldrich, 2000) and less concern for health and safety issues than femininity traits. Moreover, *Masculinity*-oriented cultures tend to adopt a moralistic attitude and “show a gap between men's values and women's values” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 12).

## 3. Methodology

To test the above propositions, we designed a survey including 2 (online vs. offline) x 2 (first-person vs. third-person perspective) experimental conditions using eight scenarios. In particular, consistent with hypothesis H6, we manipulated four empirical contexts – namely: fake news, body shaming, food delivery and fashion purchase – by presenting each context in a possible online vs. offline situation. Moreover, fashion purchase and fake news were presented as if the subject heard

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about them, while body shaming and food delivery were presented as if they were directly experienced (consistent with hypothesis H7; Liberman & Trope, 1998; Lu, Xie, & Xu, 2013). Care was taken to ensure the scenarios were concise (between 100 and 120 words), avoided any reference to gender, age or nationality, and always used the preposition “you”. All scenarios indicated that an unethical situation had occurred and—in order to simplify the attribution step in moral reasoning—clarified that the actor in the scenario was to blame (e.g., Shim, Cho, Kim, & Yeo 2021). Table 1 depicts a taxonomy of the scenarios:

-- Insert Table 1 here --

The eight scenarios were included in a questionnaire implemented on Qualtrics. The questionnaire featured measurement scales about *Subjective Well-being* (8 items adapted from Diener et al., 2009); *Collectivism* (6 items adapted from Youngdahl et al., 2003) and *Masculinity* (4 items adapted from Youngdahl, Kellogg, Nie, & Bowena, 2003). Respondents read one of the eight scenarios and then completed the scales on the *Enact Boycott* (3 items adapted from Xie & Bagozzi, 2019), *Support Boycott* (3 items adapted from Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021), *Individual Self-Congruence* (5 items adapted from Xie et al., 2015), *Ethical Idealism* (8 items adapted from Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021), *Self-Expression* (6 items adapted from Saenger, Thomas, & Wiggins Johnson, 2013), and *Make a difference* (3 items adapted from Klein et al., 2004). Finally, respondents reported their sex and age before being quickly debriefed and thanked. It is worth noting that the items of the measurement scales (*Subjective Well-being*, *Masculinity* and *Collectivism*) presented *before* a scenario were casted to avoid any possible mention of the scenario and boycotting. Meanwhile, the items related to *Support boycott* and *Enact boycott* included an explicit reference to the actor responsible for the unethical situation presented in the scenario. Lastly, the items related to

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*Individual Self-Congruence, Ethical Idealism, Self-Expression and Make a difference* explicitly mentioned boycotting the actor mentioned in the scenario.

We implemented a set of preventative measures to mitigate method biases (e.g., Henseler et al., 2015; MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff et al., 2012; Richardson, Simmering & Sturman, 2009). First, the questionnaire assured respondents that they would remain anonymous, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that data would only be used for research purposes. Second, there were brief paragraphs between questionnaire pages to cue respondents' attention without influencing their responses, as well as to illustrate the scale range. Third, the survey initially presented the two dependent variables, followed by the independent variables, and finally the control variables and socio-demographics. Finally, we took care to reverse some items and separate pages in order to reduce information overload and feature fatigue.

The survey was active in late December 2021, and it involved a panel of 400 participants provided by Prolific (age range between 18 and 25; fluent in English). We obtained 338 usable questionnaires, randomly assigned to the eight scenarios. In detail, respondents were 49.1% females (seven preferred not to disclose their sex) with an average age of  $M=21.94$  years ( $SD=2.18$ ). Furthermore, 169 out of 338 questionnaires were collected within online scenarios and 170 were related to the "third-person perspective" scenario. In addition, the fake news and fashion scenarios received 85 observations each, while body shaming and food received 84 observations each (Table 1 reports the size of each experimental cell). Overall, the sampling procedure provided a balanced experimental cell. Age was homogeneous between the online vs. offline conditions ( $p(t=-.225, df=334.63)=.822$ ), as well as between the first- vs. third-person experienced vs. heard about that condition ( $p(t=.877, df=333.93)=.381$ ). There were more females than males in the offline condition and the opposite in the online condition ( $p(\chi^2=6.68, df=1)=1e-02$ ); however, there were no sex differences between the first-person vs. third-person perspectives ( $p(\chi^2=.15, df=1)=.7$ ).

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### 3.1. Pre-Scenario Variables

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) on the data revealed three factors accounting for 56% of total variance (factor loadings: *Subjective Well-being* .6 – .79; *Collectivism* .59 – .79; *Masculinity* .73 – .88) and with Cronbach's alphas above .8. The results of a CFA (LISREL 8.80; Jöreskog & Sörbrom, 2003) showed a satisfactory fit ( $\chi^2 = 238.53$ ,  $df = 112$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.058$ ,  $p(RMSEA < 0.05) = 0.1$ ;  $NFI = .95$ ;  $NNFI = 0.97$ ;  $CFI, IFI = 0.98$ ;  $SRMR = 0.054$ ;  $GFI = 0.92$ ;  $AGFI = 0.89$ ). Table 2 reports the survey items, factor loadings and Cronbach's alphas.

- Insert Table 2 about here -

A one-factor EFA did not indicate any common variance (variance explained 30.8%). Meanwhile, the data indicated AVEs above .5 (*Subjective Well-being*: .52; *Collectivism*: .52; *Masculinity*: .68) and high CR (*Subjective Well-being*: .9; *Collectivism*: .87; *Masculinity*: .86). Moreover, the factors demonstrated a small inter-factor correlations (min: .10 – max: .24) and possessed discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

In addition, the three variables were homogenous with respect to the two experimental conditions (i.e., online vs. offline and first- vs. third-person perspective) since all t-tests provided p-values above .5. These analyses substantiated the viability of the two factors related to *online vs. offline context* and *first- vs. third-perspective*.

### 3.2. Post-Scenario variables

After factor purification, the final EFA resulted in a six-factor solution that accounted for 63% of total variance (factor loadings: *Enact Boycott* .48 – .73; *Support Boycott* .82 – .86; *Individual Self-*

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*Congruence* .62 – .8; *Ethical Idealism* .55 – .7; *Self-Expression* .73 – .9; *Make a Difference* .65 – .88) and with Cronbach's alphas above .8.. The results of a CFA (LISREL 8.80; Jöreskog & Sörbrom, 2003) showed a satisfactory fit ( $\chi^2 = 553.30$ ,  $df = 282$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.053$ ,  $p(RMSEA < 0.05) = 0.19$ ;  $NFI = 0.95$ ,  $NNFI$ ,  $CFI$ ,  $IFI = 0.97$ ;  $SRMR = 0.065$ ;  $GFI = 0.89$ ;  $AGFI = 0.86$ ). Table 3 reports the survey items, factor loadings, and Cronbach's alphas.

- Insert Table 3 here -

A one-factor EFA did not indicate any common variance (variance explained 30.8%). Meanwhile, the data indicated almost all AVEs above .5 (*Enact Boycott* .68; *Support Boycott* .73 – .86; *Individual Self-Congruence* .65; *Ethical Idealism* .41; *Self-Expression* .72; *Make a Difference* .73) and high CR (*Enact Boycott* .68; *Support Boycott* .73; *Individual Self-Congruence* .76; *Ethical Idealism* .57; *Self-Expression* .83; *Make a Difference* .73). Furthermore, the inter-factor correlations were small (between .02 and .12) and possessed discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

#### 4. Results

Figure 2 graphically reports the summary statistics of the dependent and independent variables resulting from the factor analyses.

- Insert Figure 2 here -

Our hypotheses argue that *Subjective Well-being* (H1) and four variables related to moral reasoning – *Ethical Idealism* (H2), *Self-Congruence* (H2), *Self-Expression* (H4) and *Make a Difference* (H5) – affect inclinations toward boycotting (*Enact Boycott* and *Support Boycott*). We also included the

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effect of two control variables (*Collectivism* and *Masculinity*) and two experimental indicators (*Online* and *Perspective*). For each dependent variable, we calculated partial model estimates (Models 1–5) prior to running the full model (Model 6). Partial models included the intercept model, taken as a base model for further comparisons (Model 1), and models using the five independent variables (Model 2), the two controls (Model 3), the independent variables and controls (Model 4), and the two experimental indicators (Model 5). Overall, the data support this paper's conceptual framework.

#### **4.1. The determinants of *Enact Boycott***

All models using *Enact Boycott* as a dependent variable were significantly different from the intercept model (Model 1), as indicated by the F-statistics tests. Model 6 also differed significantly from sub-models 2–5 (all  $P(F) < 1e-03$ ), indicating that the model with all the independent variables better explained *Enact Boycott* than partial models (see Table 4). In the full model (Model 6, Table 4), the coefficient of *Subjective Well-being* was positive and statistically significant, indicating that higher subjective well-being corresponds to a higher intention to enact boycotting. Thus, the data support hypothesis H1a. These effects were robust in the sub-models (Models 2 and 4, Table 4). Interestingly, *Ethical idealism* reported a positive and significant coefficient, suggesting that it positively influences the intention to *Enact boycott*, supporting H2a. The coefficients of *Self-Congruence* and *Make a Difference* were both positive and statistically significant, supporting H3a and H5a. Finally, there was no significant effect for the *Self-Expression* variable and thus no support for hypothesis H4a. This result is also consistent in Model 2 and Model 4. It is worth noting that *Self-Congruence* reported the highest effect size, possibly underscoring the strong influence of Gen Zers' willingness to communicate their self-identity through anti-consumption behaviors. Notably, and contrary to our expectations, the full model (Model 6, Table 5) provided a significant,

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but negative effect of the online context, which leads to the rejection of H6a. Consistent with our expectations, Model 6 reported a negative and significant effect of the first-person *perspective*, supporting H7a. Finally, no effects were found for *Collectivism* and *Masculinity*.

- Insert Table 4 here -

#### **4.2. The determinants of *Support Boycott***

The models for *Support Boycott* paint a different picture. As indicated by the F-statistics tests, all models using *Support Boycott* as a dependent variable were significantly different from the intercept model (Model 1). Model 6 also differed significantly from sub-models 2–5 (all  $P(F) < 1e-03$ ), indicating that the model with all the independent variables better explains *Support Boycott* than partial models (see Table 5). In the full model (Model 6, Table 5), the coefficient of *Subjective Well-being* coefficient was negative and statistically significant. In the contrast to the situation with *Enact Boycott*, this finding indicates that Gen Zers scoring high in *Subjective Well-being* are less likely to *Support Boycott*. These effects were robust in the sub-models (Models 2 and 4, Table 4). Thus, the data do not support hypothesis H1b. The coefficients of *Self-Congruence* and *Make a Difference* were both positive and statistically significant, supporting H3b and H5b, respectively. However, the data lack support for the effects of *Ethical Idealism* and *Self-Expression*, leading to the rejection of H2b and H4b. Notably, the size effect of *Self-Congruence* did not surpass the other effects, which contrasts the case of *Enact Boycott*. Surprisingly, the online vs offline context had no significant effect on *Support Boycott*—a rejection of H6b. Consistent with our expectations, Model 6 reported a negative and significant effect of the first-person *perspective*, supporting H7a. Finally, *Masculinity* produced a significant and negative effect, while *Collectivism* did not.

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- Insert Table 5 about here -

## 5. Discussion

While scholarship has widely investigated the effects of different factors on subjective well-being, less is known about the effect of well-being on consumer behaviors (Diener et al., 2018). This is especially true when considering young generations, like Gen Z. That said, there is some evidence that young consumers with high subjective well-being are better able to utilize the digital environment without becoming addicted (Mazzoni et al., 2019). Other studies suggest that subjective well-being can influence the behaviors of consumers who are confronted with unethical situations (Kuanr et al., 2021). Moreover, it is clear that some aspects of well-being play different roles in stimulating or inhibiting individuals' behavioral responses.

Overall, the results of this study support the notion that young consumers display their true values and act accordingly when exposed to an unethical situation. Indeed, the data affirm the claim that Gen Zers are the “true generation” (Francis & Hoefel, 2018): They are not apathetic, as some believe (Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2010), but instead struggle for self-consistency while trying to build their own identities through unconventional forms of consumerism. As the results suggest, Gen Zers appear to be ready to “stand up and sit-in or die-in for their causes [...] just as many late baby boomers and early Gen Xers have done in the past” (Luttrell & McGrath, 2021, p. 32). In fact, when they score high on subjective well-being, they can mobilize internal resources to cope with a moral outrage by enacting boycotts. Consistently, they do not feel the need to express themselves just by supporting boycotts with social media likes or word-of-mouth. In fact, they appear to be aware of their individual role in the market arena and choose to make independent decisions to positively influence the future, rather than merely express themselves for the sake of social recognition.

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In this vein, Gen Zers differ from other generations in the degree to which they lean on their moral reasoning when making consumption choices (Atanasova & Eckardt, 2021; Strenze, 2021). This distance from the materialism of older generation deserves a cultural explanation that can transcend the common approach of Hofstede (2011), given that the two indicators of collectivism and masculinity did not add much information to our models. In this regard, the literature suggests the necessity of weighing the balance between materialistic values (whereby consumption is critical to achieving the right social image) and post-materialistic values (whereby people reduce or rethink individual consumption for the sake of others' well-being and the environment) (Atanasova & Eckardt, 2021; Furchheim et al., 2020; Inglehart, 2008). In the end, the resulting lack of a clear behavioral guidance might activate the inhibition system in the brain, provoking a lower intention to boycott. Nevertheless, the sociological literature suggests that the prevailing of post-materialism on materialism is likely to galvanize unconventional political action, such as boycotting or protesting (Vassallo, 2020). In fact, post-materialism is connected to a greater demand for values satisfaction, quality of life, and self-expression, in opposition to the narrow focus of materialism on achieving satisfaction and status through the consumption and possession of goods (e.g., Atanasova & Eckardt, 2021; Inglehart, 2008; Kasser et al., 2004). Fittingly, post-materialism is prevailing in young generations (Delistavrou, Krystallis, & Tilikidou, 2019; Islam, Sheikh, Hameed, Ullah Khan, & Azam, 2017; Strenze, 2021), who are more likely to enact their individual values in the form “of informal, individualized and everyday activities” (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010, p. 10). Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, and Kasser (2014; see also Watson, 2021) found a robust negative relationship between materialism and well-being suggesting a poor satisfaction of psychological needs at the top of the Maslow hierarchy. Thus, since post-materialism values are connected to the eudemonic component of subjective well-being, people are more likely to support and participate in social

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actions related to human rights, freedom of speech, and environmental conservation in post-materialism cultures.

## **6. Conclusion**

### *Theoretical implications*

These results contribute to the literature in several ways. First, they add to the literature on subjective well-being by treating it less as an outcome and more as a factor that can activate or inhibit response behaviors to unethical situations within a specific cohort of consumers—namely, Gen Zers. As the first generation of digital natives who can fluidly navigate the online and offline contexts, they may spend a lot of time in their social media interactions, developing different selves or personalities in order to align their identities with the requirements of each community (Furchheim et al., 2020; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Conversely, our results are consistent to a view of Gen Zers feeling good with themselves and their lives that translates into similar moral reasoning and subsequent actions consistently across online and offline contexts. Second, we contribute to the literature on boycotting (e.g., Fernandes, 2020; Klein et al., 2014) by expanding the current understanding of how Gen Z confronts a moral outrage. In particular, the results confirm that Gen Zers seek to be congruent with their own values and make a difference through their behaviors, and thereby maintain their identity as people who transcend selfish interests (Bolton & Reed, 2004; Oyserman, 2009).

Furthermore, the paper adds empirical support to the Construal Level Theory literature by focusing on social distance in the context of ethical transgressions. So far, only Lo, Tsarenko, and Tojib (2019) have investigated the impact of social distance on consumers' moral judgments. The present study adds to this literature by affirming that unethical situations experienced from a third-person perspective (i.e., reported by others) foster a high-level construal (as in our scenarios about

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fake news and the environmental impact of fashion companies), which then stimulates moral stances rooted in good intentions. Meanwhile, the results cast some doubts on whether actual boycotting behaviors will follow. Conversely, when people learn about the unethical situation in first person (such as in our scenarios about body shaming and food delivery), they experience a low-level construal that attenuates moral stances. This finding is consistent with the CLT prediction that feasibility prevails over desirability (Lo et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Overall, a form of the “not in my backyard” effect seems to also apply to Gen Zers, which deserves further investigations.

As a final point, the results exhibited no effect or marginal explanatory power of the culture-related control variables (namely, *masculinity* and *collectivism*; Hofstede, 2011). Against the popular perspective of Hofstede’s conceptualization of cultural dimensions, there is a nascent and fruitful stream of literature on post-materialism that may provide a more compelling explanation of our results. From this perspective, the effect of Gen Zers’ subjective well-being on their boycott responses is rooted in their emphasis on post-materialism (with its focus on quality of life, social and environmental welfare) rather than traditional materialism (with its focus on obtaining higher status through the possession and consumption of goods) (Inglehart, 2008). Given the prevailing attention on materialism among scholars (Atanasova & Eckardt, 2021; Longmire, Chan, & Lawry, 2021), the implied impact of post-materialism merits further research from marketing scholars.

### *Managerial implications*

For managers, a more granular exploration of Gen Zers’ boycotting behaviors can help to illuminate how this generation is shaping the future of consumption.

Brands that aim to target Gen Zers need to be aware that young people display a high level of ethicality, which leads them to support and buy from brands that are aligned with their own values.

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Because activism is part of Gen Zers' identity, organizations that want to attract and retain these consumers—as well as avoid boycotts—need to seriously rethink how they deliver value and “walk the talk” (Schoeneborn et al., 2019). As digital natives who move seamlessly between the online and offline domains, Gen Zers will rapidly detect any misalignment between what brands say and do. Thus, managers who want to avoid conflicts need to embrace authentic communication strategies and engage in continuous social media listening. Indeed, authenticity is “one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing” (Brown, Kozinetz, & Sherry, 2003 p. 21. See also: Nunes, Ordanini & Gianbastiani, 2021) and this should be especially true for Gen Z.

In comparison to Millennials, who have been defined as the “me” generation, Gen Zers see consumption as an expression of individual identity and ethical concern. Therefore, they expect brands to make a step forward from corporate social responsibility stances and “take a stand” on controversial social and political issues (e.g., Mukherjee & Althuizen, 2020) that are consistent with their values.

Moreover, for Gen Zers who are always online, the online–offline boundary is fuzzy. Consequently, brands should devote particular attention to creating a coherent image and communication activity in both realms. This could be particularly relevant for social media platforms. In fact, we live in a world where unethical behaviors (e.g.: bearing false identities, body shaming, insulting, sharing misinformation) that are punished or socially blamed offline do not receive the same treatment online: Gen Zers, as digital natives and fluidly switching between online and offline contexts, should be engaged by platforms to develop tools to attenuate or eliminate unethical behaviors that are polluting so much the internet. We suggest that managers invest in drawing young adults into online brand or product communities, as this could increase their support for the companies' activities.

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The present paper also supports the idea that Gen Zers will be increasingly interested in making a difference and contributing to society through their work, especially in marketing-related roles (e.g., Good, Hughes, & Wang, 2022). At the same time, many firms will need to sharpen their ability to address grand challenges if they want to remain profitable (Chandy, Johar, Moorman, & Roberts, 2021; de Ruyter et al., 2021). Thus, firms should seriously consider how to create a forward-looking marketing practice that resonates with Gen Zers' shift in personal values compared to past generations. Consistently, research needs to determine how young people's subjective well-being will guide their consumption choices, educational routes, and future positions in companies.

Finally, educational institutions are encouraged to add courses on ethical business conduct in order to boost young consumers' awareness of companies' behaviors and help them refine their critical thinking skills as adult consumers.

#### *Limitations and future research avenues*

Despite this study's theoretical and managerial contributions, it features some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the paper focused on Gen Zers and neglected a comparison with other generational cohorts. Future research might complement the results by analyzing how subjective well-being changes over the lifespan and affects boycotting intentions. Moreover, it would be interesting to analyze actual boycotting behavior through field experiments. Future research could also achieve more nuance by applying content analysis techniques to social media posts or interviews with generational members. Furthermore, scholars could glean interesting insights from investigating the relationship between perceived social distance, moral stances and subjective well-being. Finally, this paper focused on collectivism and masculinity as possible cultural effects, but disregarded other relevant cultural dimensions (namely, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long- versus short-term orientation, indulgence versus restraint; e.g.,

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Hofstede, 2011). Even though, in light of the results, future studies should be more profitable and conclusive by including materialism versus post-materialism.

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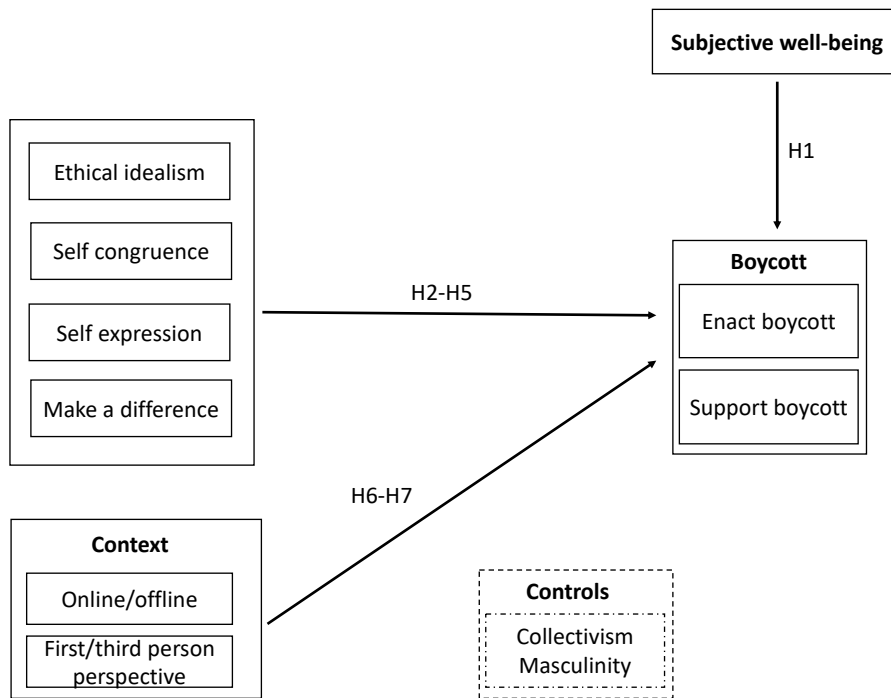
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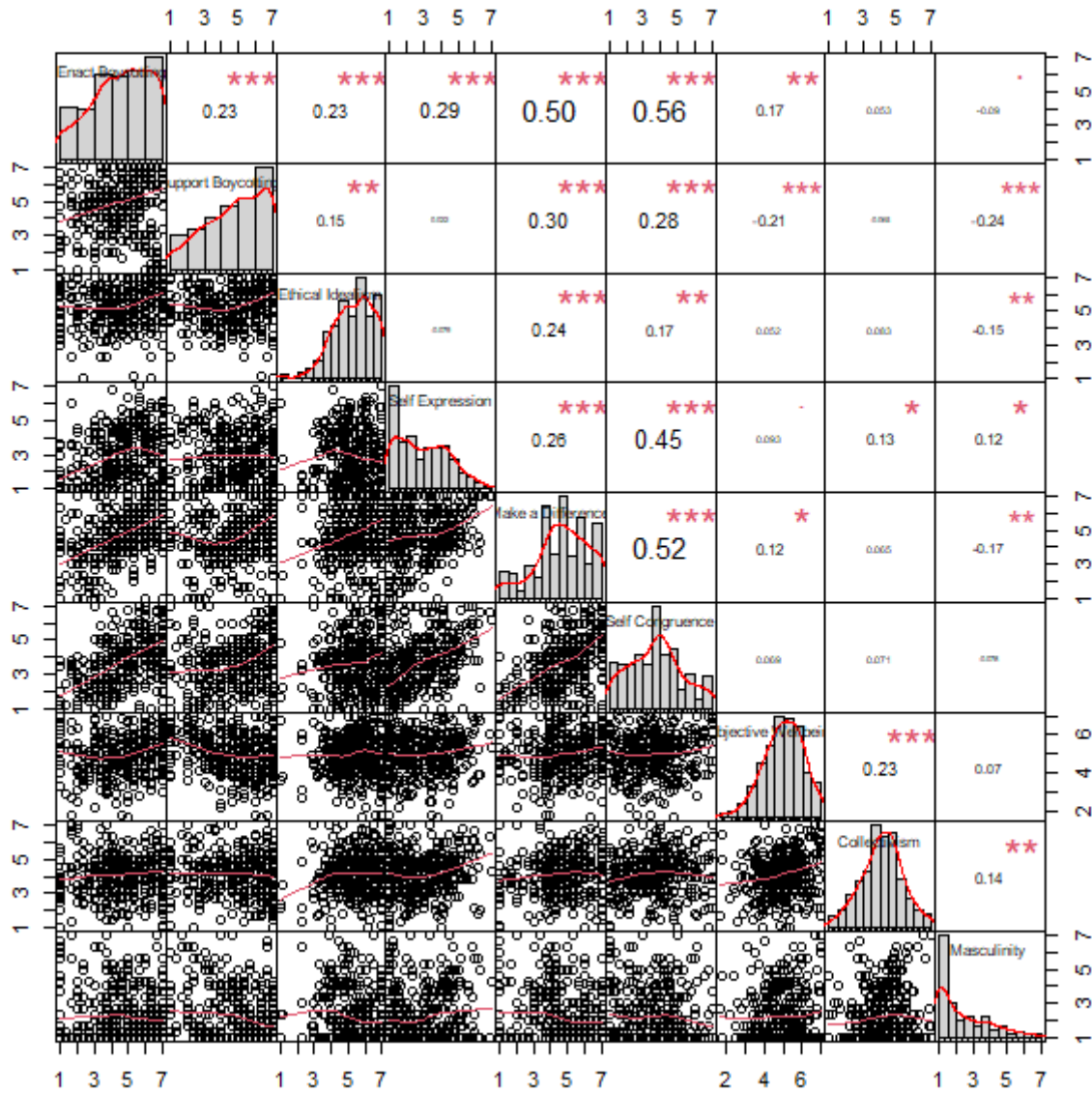
**Figure 1: Theoretical Model and Hypotheses**



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**Figure 2: Summary Factor Statistics**



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Table 1. The taxonomy of the scenarios

Context	Perspective	Description of the online case (actor to boycott)	Description of the offline case (actor to boycott)	Size of the experimental cell Online – Offline
Food	First-person perspective	Waste sorting of packaging <i>(boycott the restaurant)</i>	Food waste disposal <i>(boycott of the restaurant)</i>	41 – 43
Fashion	Third-person perspective	Dangerous materials used in clothes <i>(boycott the fashion brand)</i>	Incineration of waste clothing <i>(boycott the fashion brand)</i>	43 – 42
Body shaming	First-person perspective	Social media influencer body shamed <i>(boycott the social media platform)</i>	Athlete body shamed by instructor <i>(boycott the gym)</i>	42 – 42
Fake news	Third-person perspective	Fake news about a brand on a social media <i>(boycott the social media platform)</i>	Fake news about a technology in a newspaper <i>(boycott the newspaper)</i>	43 – 42

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Table 2. Pre-scenario variables

Factors (Number of items)	Item	Inter-item Correlation (Min-Max)		Cronbach alpha
Subjective Wellbeing (8) <i>Adapted from Diener et al. (2009)</i>	I lead a purposeful and meaningful life	.41	.64	.89
	My social relationships are supportive and rewarding	.43	.59	
	I am engaged and interested in my daily activities	.37	.64	
	I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others	.47	.59	
	I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me	.42	.59	
	I am a good person and live a good life	.48	.67	
	I am optimistic about my future	.43	.67	
	People respect me	.37	.49	
Collectivism (6) <i>Adapted from Youngdahl, Kellogg, Nie and Bowena (2003)</i>	Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group (either at the school or work place)	.42	.58	.86
	Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties	.38	.58	
	Group welfare is more important than individual rewards	.52	.63	
	Group success is more important than individual success	.38	.63	
	Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group	.40	.67	
	Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer	.45	.67	
Masculinity (3) <i>Adapted from Youngdahl, Kellogg, Nie and Bowena (2003)</i>	It is more important for men to have a professional career than it is for women	.61	.65	.85
	Men usually solve problems with logical analysis; women usually solve problems with intuition	.61	.74	
	Solving difficult problems usually requires active forcible approach, which is typical of men	.65	.74	

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Table 3. Post-scenario variables

Factors (n. items)	Item	Inter Item Correlation (Min-Max)		Cronbach alpha
Enact Boycotting (3) <i>adapted from Xie &amp; Bagozzi (2019)</i>	I will stop using a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.51	.83	.84
	I will ask my friends and relatives to stop using a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.59	.83	
	I will report to the authority a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.51	.59	
Support Boycotting (3) <i>adapted from Palacios-Florencio et al. (2021)</i>	I like the idea of participating in a boycott of a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.69	.76	.89
	I wouldn't feel guilty if I participated in a boycott of a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.69	.73	
	I wouldn't never take part in a boycott of a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.73	.76	
Individual Self-Congruence (5) <i>adapted from Xie et al. (2015)</i>	It would make me feel good to be a person boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.55	.62	.90
	Being someone boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news is an important part of who I am	.61	.74	
	I would be ashamed to be a person who does not boycott a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.55	.70	
	Boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news is very important to me	.61	.74	
	I strongly desire to boycott of a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.59	.74	
Ethical Idealism (6) <i>adapted from Palacios-Florencio et al. (2021)</i>	People should make certain that fake news on social media never intentionally harm another, even to a small degree	.24	.58	.80
	Risks related to fake news on social media should never be tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be	.26	.58	
	The existence of potential harm related to fake news on social media is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained	.24	.52	
	Fake news on social media should never psychologically or physically harm another person	.33	.52	
	Fake news on social media should not threaten the dignity and welfare of others in any way	.39	.49	
	If fake news on social media could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done	.35	.46	
Self-Expression (6) <i>adapted from Saenger Thomas and Wiggins Johnson (2013)</i>	I like to talk about me boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news so people can get to know me better	.59	.74	.94
	I like the attention I get when I talk to people about me boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.61	.81	
	I talk to people about me boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news to let them know more about me	.67	.81	
	I like to communicate me boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news to people who are interested in knowing about me	.68	.84	

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	I like the idea that people want to learn more about me boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.59	.77	
	I like it when people pay attention to what I say about me boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news	.65	.77	
Make a Difference (3) <i>adapted from Klein et al. (2004)</i>	Boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news is an effective mean to make a social media platform change its actions.	.63	.77	.88
	Everyone should take part in the boycott of a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news because every contribution, no matter how small, is important	.63	.76	
	By boycotting a social media that does not control for the diffusion of fake news, I can help change social media platforms' decision.	.76	.77	

*All items are related to the scenario "fake news, online context, third-person perspective". Text in the survey has been adapted for each scenario.*

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Table 4. The determinants of *Enact Boycot*

		<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
		Enact Boycott					
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
H1a	Subjective Wellbeing		0.166** (0.071)		0.176** (0.072)		0.168** (0.070)
H2a	Ethical Idealism		0.151** (0.066)		0.153** (0.067)		0.170*** (0.064)
H3a	Self Congruence		0.419*** (0.061)		0.417*** (0.062)		0.458*** (0.060)
H4a	Self Expression		0.067 (0.057)		0.073 (0.058)		0.055 (0.056)
H5a	Make a Difference		0.279*** (0.058)		0.277*** (0.058)		0.225*** (0.057)
H6a	Online Context					-0.523*** (0.183)	-0.586*** (0.145)
H7a	First-person perspective					-0.707*** (0.183)	-0.509*** (0.146)
Controls	Collectivism			0.096 (0.078)	-0.039 (0.065)		-0.046 (0.062)
	Masculinity			-0.114* (0.063)	-0.013 (0.052)		0.003 (0.050)
	Constant	4.597*** (0.094)	-0.091 (0.500)	4.470*** (0.349)	0.034 (0.538)	5.210*** (0.158)	0.671 (0.534)
Observations	338	337	338	337	338	337	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.000	0.390	0.013	0.391	0.064	0.439	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.000	0.381	0.007	0.378	0.059	0.423	
Residual Std. Error	1.729 (df = 337)	1.362 (df = 331)	1.724 (df = 335)	1.365 (df = 329)	1.678 (df = 335)	1.315 (df = 327)	
F Statistic		42.328*** (df = 5; 331)	2.121 (df = 2; 335)	30.161*** (df = 7; 329)	11.482*** (df = 2; 335)	28.392*** (df = 9; 327)	

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

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Table 5. The determinants of *Support Boycott*

		<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
		<i>Support Boycott</i>					
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
H1b	Subjective Wellbeing		-0.396*** (0.082)		-0.373*** (0.083)		-0.382*** (0.082)
H2b	Ethical Idealism		0.093 (0.076)		0.076 (0.076)		0.082 (0.076)
H3b	Self Congruence		0.239*** (0.071)		0.228*** (0.070)		0.248*** (0.070)
H4b	Self Expression		-0.125* (0.066)		-0.088 (0.066)		-0.096 (0.066)
H5b	Make a Difference		0.264*** (0.067)		0.233*** (0.067)		0.203*** (0.067)
H6b	Online context					-0.205 (0.187)	-0.234 (0.171)
H7b	First-person perspective					-0.496*** (0.187)	-0.384** (0.172)
Controls	Collectivism			-0.044 (0.077)	-0.025 (0.074)		-0.028 (0.073)
	Masculinity			-0.275*** (0.061)	-0.188*** (0.059)		-0.176*** (0.059)
	Constant	4.825*** (0.095)	4.534*** (0.580)	5.656*** (0.342)	5.131*** (0.615)	5.174*** (0.163)	5.528*** (0.629)
Observations	338	337	338	337	338	337	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.000	0.188	0.061	0.213	0.024	0.229	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.000	0.176	0.055	0.196	0.018	0.208	
Residual Std. Error	1.738 (df = 337)	1.580 (df = 331)	1.689 (df = 335)	1.560 (df = 329)	1.722 (df = 335)	1.549 (df = 327)	
F Statistic		15.317*** (df = 5; 331)	10.790*** (df = 2; 335)	12.725*** (df = 7; 329)	4.064** (df = 2; 335)	10.786*** (df = 9; 327)	

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

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