Understanding drivers and barriers affecting tourists' engagement in digitally mediated pro-sustainability boycotts

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Abstract
Despite the growing body of research on consumer activism, little is understood about tourists' digitally mediated boycott consumption behaviours in relation to pro-sustainability concerns. Drawing upon research grounded in political consumerism and consumer sustainability behaviour and through a constructivist grounded theory lens via a series of semi-structured interviews, this study set out to fill this gap. Two main themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews: drivers of boycott participation (including self-enhancement, perceived egregiousness, creating change, awareness and personal proximity to the boycott cause) and the barriers to boycott participation (which include counterarguments, ineffectiveness and free-riding). The findings elucidate the vital role of digitally mediated activism in contemporary ethical tourism discourses and reveal that different digital media technologies act as both information sources and mediators of boycott decision-making when it comes to targeting perceived unethical practices. Furthermore, in contrast to how tourists' boycotts are traditionally viewed, the results of this study suggest that participation in sustainability-related boycotting occurs as a process-based continuous practice instead of a one-time boycott participation. Overall, this study provides a deeper understanding of tourists' boycott behavior in the digital age and offers implications for tourism destinations and businesses subjected to boycott targets and upstream social marketing. As a result the article provides significant avenues for further research.

Keywords
Consumer activism; pro-sustainability; tourism boycott; digital activism; political consumerism; social marketing; sustainable tourism

1. Introduction

Consumer activism, or activism performed by consumers through participating in boycotts has become an increasingly common form of political action (Boström et al., 2019; Lightfoot, 2019). While activism traditionally entailed activists meeting and engaging in protests to gain media coverage for their cause or to directly impact their target, the Internet has spawned a growth in web-based social and political activism (Gretzel, 2017, Chen, 2020), particularly as it has enabled international audiences to engage in intermestic issues, such as the environment and human rights (Hall, 2005). The emergence of social media platforms has increased connectivity to capture public interest, which has become crucial for contemporary tourism businesses and destinations, but also makes them subject to consumer and interest group driven networks that can engage in political and social marketing (Hall, 2016; Gretzel, 2017; Mknono, 2018).

Research has shown that tourism can be a significant arena for 'political consumer actions' and consumer activism (Boström et al., 2019; Seyfi & Hall, 2020) which makes it highly sensitive to consumer boycotts (Shaheer et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2020; Yousaf et al., 2021). Traditionally, tourism boycotts were primarily determined by geopolitical positions or political differences, although these may be connected to concerns such as human rights (Shaheer et al., 2021). In their review of tourism-related boycotts, Shaheer et al. (2019) argue that social media has considerably facilitated the rise of boycott practices in tourism and has changed the modern activism landscape.

While the focus of consumer activism, such as the environment or deviation from morally accepted principles (Lamers et al., 2019) has remained relatively constant over the past 50 years, what has changed is the means by which activism is undertaken with digitally mediated activism being as, if not more important, than analogue activism (Seyfi & Hall, 2020). Digital platforms have received increased attention as a prominent tool for launching various forms of digital activism in relation to tourism and this is echoed in the rising boycotting of destinations and attractions (Gretzel, 2017; Mkono, 2018; Shaheer et al., 2019). Nonetheless, despite tourism boycotts seemingly becoming more common, studies undertaken about tourism-related boycotts are relatively scarce and digitally mediated tourist activism has received surprisingly little attention (Gretzel, 2017) and only cursory acknowledgement of broader political participation literature (Hall, 2016; George & Leidner, 2019). Furthermore, digitally mediated boycotts in relation to pro-sustainability tourism concerns have been overlooked, even though they are recognized as an important element of 'bottom-up' and 'upstream' efforts to generate more sustainable forms of tourism and influence its trajectory (Hall, 2016, 2018).

The term pro-sustainability or pro-sustainability agency is used to encapsulate the range of motivations that drive consumers of tourism to encourage what they perceive as more sustainability-oriented behaviours of companies, governments, destinations and, in some cases, even individuals (Force et al., 2018). Such sustainability oriented behaviours run the full range of the social, economic environmental and political dimensions of sustainability, including human rights and social, economic and environmental justice concerns through to climate change and environmental conservation issues (Hall et al., 2015; Rastegar & Ruhanen, 2021). The notion of a pro-sustainability boycott motivation adopted in this study can be defined as a drive that motivates people to refuse to buy or consume products from a firm or destination that is perceived to have negatively affected social (e.g. human rights), economic (e.g. fair wage) and/or environmental

dimensions of sustainability (e.g. pollution, animal welfare) with the goal of expressing discontent and improving the business or destination conduct (Hall, 2018; Seyfi & Hall, 2020; Saarinen, 2021). Yet, the power of the tourism consumer with respect to what they personally decide to purchase (buycotting) or not purchase (boycotting) for pro-sustainability reasons or encourage others to do so is often overlooked (Lamers et al., 2019; Seyfi & Hall, 2020), despite consumption decision-making and digital mobilization being suggested as a potential driver for tourism sector adoption of more sustainable practices (Hall, 2016; Mkono, 2018). Hence, these gaps in extant knowledge point to the focus of the present study.

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014), this research relies on in-depth interviews with consumers (i.e., potential tourists) who have engaged in digitally mediated boycott activities in relation to pro-sustainability concerns and sought to answer two key questions: 1) What drives tourists to engage in digitally mediated pro-sustainability boycotts 2) What are the perceived barriers to tourist boycott participation?

The paper is structured as follows: the next section contextualizes digital activism and tourism boycotts within mainstream political consumerism and discusses motivations and barriers to boycott participation. The main body of the article outlines the methodological approach and findings, before concluding with a synthesis of the key contributions, limitations of the study and future research directions.

2. Literature review
2.1. Digital activism in tourism
In his seminal definition, Kotler (1971) defined consumer activism as "a social movement seeking to augment the rights and powers of buyers in relation to sellers" (p.49). Later, Kotler (2000, p.152) redefined the concept as "an organized movement of citizens and government to strengthen the rights and powers of buyers in relation to sellers". While Kotler frames consumer activism in terms of social movements others, such as Glickman (2004), portray consumer activism in terms of individual consumers "as agents of moral and economic change" (p.893). Similarly, Gretzel (2017, p.3), sees consumer activism as "fundamentally about either creating desired change or halting undesired change related to consumption issues".

Digital activism is a somewhat 'fuzzy term' that covers a broad range of online practices (Kaun & Uldam, 2018; George & Leidner, 2019). Notions of digital activism embrace a range of different fixed and mobile Internet technologies as well as practices, including open source advocacy, hashtag activism, various means of hacktivism, and even denial of service attacks or may be so all embracing as to include the political use by consumers of *all* digital media (Yang, 2016; Gerbaudo, 2016). Nevertheless, while media technological change is important for political activism it is essential, as Gerbaudo (2016) and Kaun and Uldam (2018) emphasize, not to fall into the trap of technological determinism and instead recognise that the ideological and other specific contexts of activism as are important as the digital. From this perspective, online devices and material technologies "enable and extend people's abilities to communicate and share meaning" (Lievrouw, 2011, p.7), while activists and those engaged in political consumption develop particular actions

and practices as they appropriate the material technologies that are themselves embedded in broader civic and political cultures and institutional arrangements (Kaun & Uldam, 2018).

Previous research has shown that digitally mediated activism has dominated the landscape of contemporary activism in tourism (Mkono, 2018; Shaheer et al., 2019, 2021). However, much of what has been written on digital activism in a tourism context has tended to universalize the digital activism experience. For example, Mkono (2018) suggests that tourism research "has not yet caught up with the role of cybermovements" (p.1609), which, while likely true, also implicitly suggests that digital activism is grounded in such movements and potentially fails to acknowledge other forms of online activism. Indeed, although the growth of tourism-related social media activism is now recognised (Gretzel, 2017; Mkono, 2019; Shaheer et al., 2019), the multiplicity of its forms is not, with there being a need for a much more contextualised understanding of such activism, including the political, economic, and societal social and personal norms that frame digital activism (Yang, 2016; Kaun & Uldam, 2018).

2.2. Boycotts in tourism

A boycott can be defined as "the attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases" (Friedman 1999, p.4). From a consumer perspective, Yuksel (2013, p.205) suggests that boycotts "often reflect a concern for the general good" by consumers. Traditionally, boycotting behavior has been conceptualized as a collective effort to coerce corporate or political change (Friedman, 1991; Hawkins, 2010). Contemporary boycotting behaviour often takes the form of anti-consumption behavior in which customers embrace market activism by refusing to buy specific goods and services because their suppliers are associated with specific social, political, ethical, or environmental concerns (Yuksel, 2013; Zapata Campos et al., 2018; Seyfi & Hall, 2020). It has been claimed that boycott campaigns have been fueled by increasing public awareness and attention to corporate social responsibility (Klein et al., 2004; Zapata Campos et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2020) and are therefore often used as a tool for consumers and interest groups to protest against corporations, brands and destinations that engage in practices deemed inappropriate or unethical (Friedman, 1991; John & Klein, 2003; Rössel & Schenk, 2018; Yu et al., 2020). Research emphasis is often placed on boycott movements attempts to gain media's attention in order to affect the reputation of a specific business, destination or a country (Hawkins, 2010). For instance, Yousaf et al's (2021) study of the #BoycottMurree campaign shows how campaign momentum on social media affected Murree which is a popular tourist destination in Pakistan. Nevertheless, such an emphasis may fail to significantly acknowledge the role of individual forms of activism which are arguably enhanced by the increased use of digital media.

Owing to increased political engagement thanks to social networks, Nonomura (2017) argues that many people are increasingly aware of their agency and active role as consumer citizens in society. This can be observed in a variety of ways, including political consumerism and consumers' devotion to ethical issues and boycotting (Micheletti, 2003; Rössel & Schenk, 2018; Boström et al., 2019). In a recent review of tourism-related boycotts, human rights violations, animal welfare concerns, and political and environmental issues were found to be the most common reasons for destination boycotts (Shaheer et al., 2019). Such boycotts are often regarded as being largely

facilitated by digital practices (Mkono, 2018), although Castañeda and Burtner (2010) attributes such a surge in boycotting to the growing use of tourism as a vehicle for social and political change.

In terms of research methods, most studies of tourism-related boycotts are case specific (Herrera & Hoagland, 2006; Hudson, 2007; Castañeda & Burtner, 2010; Luo & Zhai, 2017; Yousaf et al., 2021) and/or study their impacts (Yu et al., 2020), while specific studies of pro-sustainability digital activism are absent from the tourism literature. As a result, there appears to be limited knowledge on underlying motives of tourists participating or not participating in sustainability-related boycott activities. Furthermore, the majority of existing tourism-related boycotts research has focused on assessing boycott intentions rather than investigating actual digital participation in tourism-related boycotts (Parsons & Rawles, 2003; Guo et al., 2016). These gaps point to the present study's focus.

3. *Motivations and barriers to boycott participation*
Despite boycotting often being portrayed as a planned and collective anti-consumption action, a boycott can also be regarded as an intrinsic feature of consumer complaint behavior (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2009). Previous literature has suggested two main research categories explaining consumers boycott motivations. First, the *instrumental* motivation, which represents consumers' rational boycott decisions (Friedman 1991, 1999; John & Klein 2003; Klein et al. 2002, 2004; Yuksel 2013) aiming to pressure the target to change policy. Second, is *expressive* boycotts that focus on consumers' emotional decision-making and is a more generalized form of action to communicate consumer dissatisfaction towards their target (Ettenson & Klein, 2005). While instrumentally motivated boycotters frequently have a high level of perceived effectiveness (John & Klein, 2003), consumers with non-instrumental motives use boycotts as a means of self-expression and self-realization (Yuksel, 2013) and engage in boycott actions so as to express their displeasure with the unjustified actions of the boycott target. Nguyen et al. (2018) argue that the motive for the majority of boycotts is instrumental whereby consumers weigh the perceived costs and benefits of participation. Nonetheless, the decision to engage or not in boycotting activity is typically impacted by individual emotional aspects (motives) rather than merely being an endeavor to achieve collective benefits or avoid personal costs (Makarem & Jae, 2016; Friedman, 1995, 1999; Seyfi & Hall, 2020). As a result, boycotting remains a means for consumers to emotionally express themselves with respect to their deeply-held positions on a range of subjects that relate to sustainability (Hall, 2016).

Understanding why tourists decline to engage in boycotts is also as essential as understanding why they do and can provide insights into consumers' willingness to undertake pro-sustainability actions as well as their wider concerns. The boycott decision represents a 'social dilemma' (Sen et al., 2001) wherein individuals must choose either maximizing their own gain (i.e., continuing to consume) or maximizing the collective benefit by participating in (Sen et al, 2001). While Klein et al. (2004) argue that the absence of reasons to boycott is the cause for non-participation, Yuksel (2013) points out that motives to decline to participate are not always the same as motives to boycott, emphasizing the need of paying specific attention to motives and context. Such information is of key significance for the rationale of a boycott failure (Yuksel, 2013). Understanding consumer willingness to engage in a boycott is critical for both boycott organizers and boycott targets to consider in their strategies. In a study on antecedents of consumers' non-

participation in boycotting CocaCola, Yuksel (2013) reported the importance of the relevance of the cause of a boycott call to their members perceived physical and social distance to the boycott target, and the reactance and perceived threat to one's sense of freedom and counterarguments (skepticism) as major antecedents of boycott non-participation. Previous studies have also identified several other elements that influence boycotting refusal including trust in the boycott target (Hoffmann & Müller, 2009), perceived reputation of the target (Hoffmann, 2013), perceived unlikelihood of success (John & Klein 2003), credibility of the boycott call or the organizer (Sen et al., 2001), constrained consumption (Klein et al., 2004, Hoffmann, 2011). Such variables may lead the boycott to fail, but they are worthwhile as a way to establish boundary conditions for the boycotting phenomenon (Yuksel, 2013).

Overall, research on individuals' motivations to participate or not in boycott calls have been rather general and context-specific, with pro-sustainability boycott motives generally being absent from the tourism literature. The lack of research on boycotting and non-boycotting in relation to sustainability is unfortunate by reason of the existing claims in the literature on growth in tourism-related digital activism (Gretzel, 2017; Mkono, 2018) and ethical consumerism as a significant aspect of the global tourism system (Seyfi & Hall, 2020). Thus, this points to the research space that this study attempts to fill.

3. Methodology
3.1. Research design
A phenomenological research approach is adopted for this study by "studying human experiences based on the idea that human experience itself is inherently subjective and determined by the context in which people live" (Zikmund & Babin, 2007, p.136). As a boycott participation is 'a complex expression of each participant's individuality' and is a 'socially constructed phenomenon' (Charmaz, 2014), a constructivist grounded theory was deemed most appropriate as the guiding data collection and analysis approach. Founded on naturalistic inquiry, constructivist grounded theory is 'grounded' in the participants' own words, perspectives and experiences (Charmaz, 2017). Unlike classic grounded theory, which is characterized by a more positivistic outlook and rigid guidelines (Glaser & Strauss 1967), this interpretive approach recognizes the existence of multiple socially constructed realities and contextually-grounded knowledge (Charmaz, 2014). Thus, rather than claiming an objective and generalizable theory, constructivist grounded theory's major aim is to generate interpretative understandings or narratives of an understudied social phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). The experience of the researchers with boycott movements provided an 'insider's' understanding of the researched milieu (Charmaz, 2014, 2017), allowing the generation of interpretive, contextual knowledge about boycotting practices narrated and shaped by online settings (Yang et al., 2018).

3.2. Data collection
The data collection and analysis were an iterative process similar to most grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014). A non-probability purposeful sampling method was used which allowed the identification of participants who could "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.285). The first author made use of his membership of different petitions on Facebook or other social networks in France to access participants and contact them via direct messages on social media platforms Facebook, Twitter

and Instagram. To be eligible for the study, the participant had to have participated in at least one sustainability-related boycott which had to have a digital component, e.g., information provision, network, online campaign. The profile of the interviewees is summarized in table 1 and participants were allocated codes to maintain anonymity. Those who answered positively to the request for an interview were contacted to explain the structure of the interview and inquire about their availability for a phone, Whatsapp, or Skype interview depending on the comfortability of the interviewees. Using Internet technologies as a research medium in qualitative studies has become well recognised and is regarded as conducive for the participation of some otherwise difficult-to-reach populations (Hanna, 2012). Additional participants were enlisted by snowball sampling, which involved asking people who were first contacted to indicate individuals who would be interested in participating in an interview. This sampling method was deemed most appropriate in obtaining a purposive sample suited for this study (Flick, 2018).

To grasp the distinctiveness of the phenomena being investigated and the uniqueness of its conditions, qualitative research usually focuses on a small and focused sample (Flick, 2018). This research followed the concept of 'data saturation', which refers to the point in the research process by when additional interviews create very little or no new information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study data saturation was regarded as being reached after 32 interviews, and interviewing was considered as completed. The interview questions, as well as the interview style and technique, were tested in a pilot study with five interviewees (Kim, 2011) which helped to refine the interview questions. To ensure consistency, the first author conducted and analyzed all interviews, with the findings cross-checked by the co-authors.

A semi-structured in-depth interview technique was adopted to gather in-depth accounts of respondents' experiences (Flick, 2018). All of the questions were open-ended to encourage more spontaneous opinions and minimize potential bias from confining responses to predetermined categories. The questions were developed considering the purpose of the study and relevant literature (e.g., Klein et al., 2004; Luo & Zhai, 2017; Shaheer et al., 2019; Lamers et al., 2019; Seyfi & Hall, 2020; Yousaf et al., 2021) and modified for the study context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview questions focused on participants' boycott practices and experiences, including with respect to use of digital technologies, the feelings and emotions they experience toward unethical practices, and the barriers to boycott participation. The questions were designed to allow participants to describe their experience in their own words as suggested by constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). The participants were given codes to maintain confidentiality. The initial codes and transcripts were also reviewed by two tourism researchers to ensure correct and consistent interpretation throughout the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews were conducted and transcribed in both French and English and lasted between 30 and 75 minutes with all authors reviewing the transcripts to ensure that they made sense.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

3.3. Data analysis

Instead of following a strict coding technique advised by classic grounded theorists, a flexible approach to coding was utilized in response to the dynamic, interactive, and open-ended character of qualitative research (Goulding, 2005). The study began with *line-by-line* coding, which was

followed by *focused* coding, which selected the most prominent and recurrent codes to synthesize larger portions of data (Charmaz, 2014). *In vivo* coding was employed to better portray participant perceptions, rather than pushing the data into predefined theoretical conceptions. Rather than utilizing axial coding, which employs a preset scheme to organize the relationships, properties, and dimensions of codes and categories, this study therefore employed focused coding to synthesize bigger portions of data (Yang et al., 2018). The author team discussed and confirmed any changes to the coding system to ensure proper and consistent interpretation throughout the data analysis. In accordance with constructivist grounded theory, the practice of memo-taking attends to the researcher's reflexivity rather than removing the researcher from the research (Charmaz 2014). In constructivist grounded theory, special attention is also given to narratives (Charmaz 2014) and rather than speaking on behalf of the participants, this study offered them a voice by presenting the findings in their own words and worldviews, as stated below.

4. Findings

Two main themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews with participants who have participated in digitally mediated boycotts in relation to pro-sustainability drivers of boycott participation and barriers to boycott participation which are classified into different categories and subcategories as explained below.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

4.1. Theme I: Drivers of boycott participation

The interviewees indicated they had a variety of motives and triggers for participating in pro-sustainability boycotting in virtual environments which are summarized as below:

4.1.1 Triggers

Awareness

The analysis of the interviews showed that digital information sources are critical trigger in the initial boycott decision especially when it comes to targeting perceived unethical practices. The majority of interviewees were influenced by social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, Instagram as well as online forums which have been very significant for spreading awareness of a boycott. This underlines the significance of social media along with specific newsgroups and/or online communities as the starting point for boycotting campaigns. Such digital information sources not only promote "public knowledge of the boycott target" (Interview #31), but also influence perceptions of tourism practices in-line with preexisting attitudes and consumer motivations. This was noted by several interviewees:

> I have done many of my boycott decisions through social media. There are different campaigns on social media such as Facebook where information about the environmental awareness about Club Med is shared and I found them very useful when I made my boycott decision (Interview #31).

> When I watched a YouTube video about Myanmar' government violations against Rohingya Muslims, I decided to cancel my trip…. I think I made the right decision (Interview #3)

For me social media and especially Facebook and Twitter are a very useful for gaining information and awareness of boycotts related to environment. When boycott campaigns spread on social media, it will help us to learn about our power in altering the things around us for making the world a better place to live (Interview #29).

Some of participants mentioned that they participated in online campaigns to influence others.

I first noticed a boycott campaign against the Planète Sauvage animal park's dolphinarium which criticised the dolphin captivity. After joining the boycott campaign against this animal park, I began posting it on social media to alert others to such animal cruelty and get them to join boycott campaigns as well (Interview #12).

Interestingly, respondents noted that the extensive use of social media to promote information about boycott campaigns was different from some of their previous offline boycotting since the level of outreach was so high, and they felt that could influence others more:

Facebook and Twitter have really helped me in disseminating information about the boycott calls... In the past, boycott calls were distributed by email list and newsletter, but today such information can be disseminated easily and rapidly in online forums (Interview #3).

Nowadays, boycott calls are pushed on social media platforms such as Facebook discussion forums or in online forums, where we can debate boycott actions and learn from others' experiences, as well as receive advice and support (Interview #6).

Personal proximity to the boycott cause
Involvement and personal emotional and political proximity of the consumer with the boycott cause were also identified as important trigger for boycott participation among interviewees. The analysis of interviews shows that tourist boycott participation is mostly influenced by the felt proximity, which refers to experienced closeness to the boycott target's actions in terms of a range of personal values as well as, in some cases, proximal relationships to people who are affected by the target of a boycott. The interviewees mentioned "direct impacts of the boycott target's actions on their own life" (Interview #14), "personal experience or connection" (Interview #2), "personal importance and relevance of the boycott issue" (Interview #19, 20), and "close to other people personally affected strongly" (Interview #22). The quotes noted below by respondents further reflect how emotional or political closeness or proximity to the boycott call may trigger their pro-sustainability agency and motivations to participate in boycotting activities.

Welfare of the animals is a very important issue for me, and I do my best to protect animals on my holidays and encourage my family not to contribute to animal suffering when they travel (Interview #14).

As a friend of a Kurdish family, I've witnessed many Kurds advise me or others to rethink of our visit to Turkey since [they] feel the money generated from tourism is used to finance the horrific war against the Kurdish people (Interview #2).

4.1.2. Self- enhancement

Self-enhancement was one of the main motives for the study interviewees to participate in boycotting actions. Self-enhancement is typically gained through associating with a group of individuals who share similar beliefs or by being a moral person (Klein et al., 2004). 'Egoistic motives' in addition to 'altruistic motives' were noted by the interviewees reflecting their underlying motivation for boycott participation while digital networks and platforms were recognized as enabling an immediate personal response to their actions. For example, participants stated that they "feel good about themselves" (Interview #4) and that others "admire them for participating in the boycott which improves their public image" (Interview #2). They also stated that by "supporting values are deemed ethical important for people" (Interview #8), they enhance their self-esteem by helping others through boycott participation. Boycotts, according to participants, are a "way to ethically identify and express oneself" (Interview #9), while also being able to "stand out from the crowd" (Interview #12). The following quote reflects this:

> I have always tried to stay away from chain hotels for their 'modern slavery' practices through exploitation of local workers with very low wages… when I do not use the chain hotels in my travel and instead stay in locally-owned accommodations, I feel good about myself… my friends always appreciate my travelling style (Interview #4).

Further investigation into participants' motivations reveals that boycott participation leads to enhanced personal self-esteem by allowing the boycotters to view themselves as 'moral' persons who are 'doing the right thing'. A perspective enhanced by use of social media. One of the interviewees with boycott experiences of destinations with poor human rights record noted:

> I have decided not to spend my holiday in countries with poor human rights records. for instance, I do not wish to visit Turkey as the major travel agencies, hotels and the airlines in the country are owned by people close to the Erdogan… I have participated in the boycott campaign of Turkish tourism, it has helped me to feel like a person who is moral and cares about the world, or at the very least cares about more than just oneself (Interview #9).

In particular, two participants with experiencing of boycotting Club Med (a French travel and tourism operator), mentioned that their participation in boycotting this French tourism giant helped them to show their moral identity and the care and responsibility they had for society:

> I read boycott campaign targeted Club Med that club villages are at the heart of environmental scandals in the areas in which villages are located… I had no hesitation not to use Club Med accommodations in my previous summer holiday… This helped me to liberate my true identity and the care I have for the environment (Interview #13)

> Living a sustainable lifestyle has always been a priority for me. I try to practice this even during my travel... in our last travel, when my family and I decided not to stay in Club Med-owned accommodation and instead we stayed in a hotel run by local people, we all felt really good with making this choice and fulfilling our moral responsibilities (Interview #8)

Furthermore, a few interviewees stated that if they did not respond to a boycott, they would feel embarrassed. They believed that "when a person is fully aware of the detrimental consequences of consuming an unethical product, continuing to support the target firm goes against one's moral obligations" (Interview #17). Shopping responsibly and staying away from businesses that "commit wrongdoings" (Interview #14, 18) was also noted as opportunities for participant self-enhancement which:

> I am determined to buy fair and ethical souvenirs in my travel and always try to stay away from souvenirs made from animal parts or from endangered species… to fulfill my moral responsibility, I refused to buy elephant ivory products in my previous visit of Thailand (Interview #18)

4.1.3. Perceived egregiousness

Expressing anger or discontent was another motive for interviewees to engage in boycotting. They expressed that they were motivated to participate in order to "express their anger" (Interview #3) or "discontent" (Interview #6) at the boycott target. For instance, an interviewee who had boycotted Myanmar noted:

> I cancelled my planned trip and boycott Myanmar after the brutal crackdown against Rohingya minority to show my solidarity with them….I believe that tourists' visiting a country such as Myanmar with very poor human rights violations only endorse the government and its actions (Interview #3).

As a rationale for participating in boycotting, interviewees indicated their willingness to penalize the boycott target for its perceived unethical behaviour. Many participants mentioned they wanted to "push the boycott target to change or stop engaging in what they regard as inappropriate conduct" (Interview #6). This is undertaken by both their personal decision-making and by using social media to convince others to participate in a boycott.

> For our family, it has always been important to being animal friendly on holiday. … for example we never try elephant riding… (Interview #14)

> I will not visit Turkey myself or will convince my friends and relatives not to use visit Turkey or even use Turkish Airlines until Turkey alters its policy toward Kurds (Interview #10).

4.1.4. Creating change

For many interviewees, "making a difference" (Interview #7) or "societal changes" (Interview #6). was another motive for boycott participation. The analysis of the interviews illustrated that tourists are more inclined to boycott if they feel their actions will "make a difference" or "assist the boycott in achieving its goals" (Interview #12). This include by their direct actions, including digital activism, as well as by electronic-word-of-mouth.

> I often take part in calls to boycott unethical practices of brands and businesses…though my support of boycotting may not lead to an immediate change in the boycott target's behavior,

our actions are essential since they can raise awareness among others, leading to a bigger effect in the long term (Interview #6)

When we decide to visit a country, we always do research to book a tour and select an environmentally responsible tour operator reflecting our personal values rather than discounted offers… practicing sustainability or responsible travel helps to make a positive impact (Interview #7)

My involvement in a boycotting is significant as it potentially spread the word and influence or inspire my social network, family, friends, or relatives to participate in boycotts… This word of mouth could influence other people by creating awareness and eventually affect (Interview #12)

Some interviewees also believed that boycotting an unethical brand or product can potentially hurt company sales of the boycott target which in turn may pressure the boycott target firm to adjust its business practices. The following quote illustrate this:

No one can easily underestimate tourist power. For me a boycott decision is a sort of economic voting against unethical practices of companies. My purchasing power gives me the ability to make a pressure on a firm… if we stop buying from a particular brand, they may face loss change the target firm's practices and that may eventually force them to change their behaviour (Interview #23)

4.2. Theme 2: Barriers to Boycott Participation

The analysis of the interviews also revealed several barriers influencing consumers to decline to participate in boycotting:

4.2.1. Counterarguments

Some of the interviewees encountered counterarguments from online sources while making boycott decisions. The interviewees mentioned that when their support of boycott issue will be "useless" (Interview #26, 5), "small" (Interview #27), or "ineffective" (Interview #11, 24), they feel "powerless" (Interview #30), or decide not to engage in boycotting. Furthermore, several interviewees also noted that if they believe that their boycott participation "cause unintentional harm to some people" (Interview # 8, 15), they do not support boycott.

To me, boycotting travel to countries like Myanmar might hurt many people, including local tourism providers and locally owned accommodations, restaurants and transportation that rely on tourism revenues for a living suffers the most (Interview #15).

Boycotts could induce unintended harm… If I do not buy a specific product, many workers who work for the boycott target's firm will lose their jobs due to our boycott on their employer (Interview #8).

I'm sure there are a lot of workers that don't share the same beliefs as the firm for which they work, and by refusing to support them, their job security will be at risk (Interview #11).

4.2.2. Ineffectiveness

Some interviewees indicated that a boycott's perceived ineffectiveness in achieving its aims is a barrier to participate in boycott calls. Some participants stated that their individual participation will "make no difference to the situation" (Interview #8) or would not have "enough power to make a positive difference" (Interview #15, 27), or would not be "big enough to make a change in the boycott target's behaviour" (Interview #5, 26).

> Boycotting mostly targets large businesses… A single person like me is very unlikely to affect these big companies who are very powerful (Interview #5).

> I understand that some luxury hotels pay little attention to sustainability but changing the unethical practices of these luxury hotels is not in my hands... they have their own customers such as businessmen who may not take care about sustainability (Interview #8).

4.2.3. Free-riding

The analysis of interviews also illustrates the 'free-rider' problem whereby tourists might choose not to engage in a boycott by shifting the boycotting obligation to other people even though they retain a level of support for the boycott. Several interviewees stated that they did not need to support a boycott since other people were actively participating in the boycott and that their participation was "sufficient for the boycott to be effective" (Interview #5, 26). Some interviewees suggested that when the cost of boycott participation is personally high for them, they prefer to free ride upon the boycott actions of other people and "let others face the burden of boycotting (Interview #15). In other words there is a personal threshold that must be passed in order for them to commit to specific boycotts, although where this threshold sits was regarded as being subject to change depending on circumstance and context. These issues are reflected on by the interviewees.

> The company for which I work has partnerships with some hotels. The employees can get 30% discounts if they stay in these hotels... I know that these hotels are not eco-friendly, but I prefer other people refrain staying in these hotels than me who receives discounted offers (Interview #30).

> Sometimes, you may not have other options and there are other people that can make the sacrifice… for example I like to visit zoos during travel, although I think it is unethical to visit such attractions which are not sometimes animal-friendly, but I am still visiting them... there are always other people who can boycott such places (Interview #30).

5. Discussion

"Digital media in relation to digital activism are often considered as universal in the ways in which activists use them for political purposes" (Kaun & Uldam, 2018, p.2101). However, as the interviewees in this study suggest, there are a range of different motives and contexts for boycott participation. Information sources such as newsgroups and/or online communities are significant influences and triggers on boycott decisions and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn were the most popular sources of information for tourism consumers learning about the boycott target. Previous research has also suggested that information sources

are critical in creating and enhancing awareness of the boycott target (Gretzel, 2017; Yousaf et al., 2021). Rising awareness and contemplation of the problem is necessary to get a boycott off the ground (Klein et al., 2004; Chen, 2020) with social media increasingly being used to raise awareness of boycott calls. However, the provision of information by itself is not sufficient to result in boycott engagement as it is also clear that digital information can also lead to non-participation in boycotts.

As the findings of the study reveal, without understanding how emotionally or politically close tourists are to the boycott target, boycott participation cannot be fully explained. The proximity of a single consumer to the affected group/cause whose activities are the reason for the boycott call is a major determinant of the motive for the boycott call. The previous literature has also demonstrated the significant role of digital platforms and social media in enabling virtual proximity to a cause (Theocharis et al., 2015). According to Jones (1991), "people care more about other people who are close to them (socially, culturally, psychologically, or physically) than they do for people who are distant" (p.376). Previous studies note that being personally affected and/or being close to other people personally affected is a major incentive for boycotting (e.g., Albrecht et al., 2013; Hoffmann, 2013). This situation reflects Lazarus' (1991) appraisal theory which posits that feeling or 'being personally affected' strongly motivates individuals to act, i.e., practice their pro-sustainability agency. Similar observations have been noted by Hoffmann (2013), who found that proximity to the boycott cause influences boycott beliefs and attitudes, which in turn influences motivations to boycott. Research on pro-social behaviour also confirms that if a person is connected to someone in need, they are more inclined to aid them (Levine et al., 2005). Importantly, such findings serve to highlight the online community building function that digital activism can play and which encourages senses of belonging, connectivity and closeness to an issue thereby encouraging active participation (Kaun & Uldam, 2018; Leong et al., 2019).

The study's interviewees also noted that the desire to help create change is a major reason for boycott participation. The motivation of making a difference is linked to individuals' willingness to influence societal change through digital collaboration via a consumer boycott (Klein et al., 2004; Leary et al., 2019). Several studies show that a desire to encourage change is related to consumers' belief and trust in a boycott's mechanism to accomplish its ultimate aims (Sen et al., 2001; Klein et al., 2004; Granström, 2014; Shin & Yoon, 2018) which can also be achieved through digital awareness raising. For example, Yousaf et al. (2021) showed that tourists could use their purchasing power and destination decision-making as leverage against perceived unethical incidents at a destination. Previous studies in tourism have similarly reported that some tourists inherently desire to promote social change by adopting practices that reduce or eliminate perceived inappropriate conduct a destination that they have become familiar with as a result of online or social media (Mkono, 2018; Zapata-Campos et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2020).

The findings also show that boycott participation can make tourists feel better about themselves and improves their identity formation and public self-image. Tomhave and Vopat, (2018) argue that some consumers believe it is their personal and moral mission to impact change and punish a place by boycotting it because they want to perceive themselves as moral people. This connects with discussions about the so called 'moral turn' in the social sciences, which emphasises consumers' can care not only for 'their own' and people close by, but also for distant strangers

(Massey, 2004). In this context digital activism therefore becomes a means for creating a notion of extended community (Flores-Marcial, 2021). Furthermore, self-enhancement is a boycott motive grounded not only on one's self-perception but also for others' admiration (Klein et al., 2004; Hoffmann, 2013; Granström, 2014; Makarem & Jae, 2016). As the findings of this study demonstrate, self-enhancement is both a motivator and a benefit of boycott participation. Individuals have an 'egoistic' motivation to participate in boycotts to achieve positive public image by publicly supporting values that are deemed important, morally high or that reflect attitudinal norms among their online and offline communities (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Hoffmann, 2013). As a result, in some situations individuals could be driven to boost their self-esteem by participating in boycotts.

The other motive that was discovered from the interviews was tourists' willingness to express anger at the boycott targets through their boycott engagement. This find supports in prior studies which reported that tourists are driven to participate in boycotts to express discontent with the boycott target's perceived behaviour (Yousaf et al., 2021). Perhaps not surprisingly, studies of boycott motivations have also emphasized the role of consumer sentiments with boycott causes where negative consumer outrage plays a key role in increasing boycott participation (Hoffmann & Müller 2009; Lindenmeier et al. 2012).

The results of this study also illustrated some of the underlying barriers to boycott participation. The interviewees in this study did not participate in specific boycotts because of their perceived ineffectiveness and were of the view that their individual participation would make no difference to the overall situation. This finds support in several previous studies (e.g., Sen et al., 2001; Klein et al., 2004; Hoffmann, 2011; Yuksel, 2013; Granström, 2014). Another factor that discouraged interviewees from participating in specific boycotts was the free-rider problem in which individuals let others bear the cost of boycotting. Potential boycotters may believe that their boycott efforts will not be required because the boycott will be successful due to the participation of others (Sen et al., 2001; Klein et al., 2004). While boycotts require widespread participation to be effective, their perceived potential effectiveness can undermine tourist participation (Hahn, 2018). Nevertheless, in some cases even though the likelihood of boycott success may appear small, the anger and personal proximity of some interviewees means that they may retain their personal boycott and non-purchase even though the wider boycott campaign may have moved on.

6. Conclusion and implications

This research set out to investigate consumer sustainable tourism behaviour in the context of digitally mediated pro-sustainability boycotts. The dominant mode of understanding behaviour change in tourism with respect to sustainability has been to influence consumer behaviour (downstream social marketing) rather than how consumers seek to influence businesses and destinations to alter their policies (upstream social marketing) (Hall, 2016). Drawing upon a disciplinary base in political consumerism and consumer sustainability behaviour and building on in-depth, empirical data from potential tourists who are engaged in digital boycotts and buycotts, the findings provide a holistic account of drivers and barriers influencing tourist' boycott participation. Given the perceived growth in tourism-related digital activism and ethical consumerism, our findings emphasize boycotts as an important area to further understanding of

digitally mediated tourist decision making, particularly in relation to pro-sustainability tourist behaviour.

6.1. Theoretical implications

This study yields potentially important contributions to the literature. *First,* tourist digital participation in boycotts has been overlooked in the extant literature stream on boycotts with the majority of existing tourism-related boycotts research is rather generic and case-specific focusing on boycott intentions. Thus, the results of this study help begin to fill this major gap in the boycott literature on tourism.

Second, the results provide new insights on pro-sustainability tourism-related activity. Despite Hall's (2016) call to examine the significance of upstream social marketing for sustainable tourism in terms of political consumerism and via a range of different media, little research has been undertaken on digitally-mediated consumer boycotts and their inter-play with off-line activism. This work therefore extends understanding of how different economic, environmental, social and political aspects of sustainability at the firm and destination levels become specific foci for online pro-sustainability behaviour. In particular it means extending focus from relatively passive online feedback and customer review to a much more activist form of digital communication of consumer concerns that is often overtly aimed at changing the behaviours or policies of the boycott target. This is an increasingly salient issue as conscious consumer decision-making and ethical consumption are suggested as potentially important 'bottom-up' efforts to generate more sustainable forms of tourism and influence the future trajectory of tourism development (Hall, 2018).

Third, the study results contribute substantially to consumer digital activism literature in general and to tourism-related political consumerism literature in particular. Current research often universalizes the digital dimensions, e.g. emphasising digital technologies and infrastructures while losing the specificities of activism, especially the association with political consumerism. However, this study reveals that different digital media technologies act as both information sources and mediators of boycott decision-making. While previous research has focused on 'traditional' universalistic accounts of digital analysis which primarily just apply to information dissemination awareness, the findings of this study point out that it is in fact all mediated. The latter raises intriguing questions for future research, particularly with respect to the digital activism in tourism context.

Fourth, the results of this study suggest that participation in sustainability-related boycotting occurs as a process-based continuous practice instead of a one-time boycott participation. The findings therefore throw a new light on understanding what constitutes sustainable consumer agency. Understandings of behaviour needs to be extended beyond apolitical notions of tourist behaviour with respect to reducing the material effects of consumption to engage in a broader conceptualisation of sustainable consumption practices that include consumer activism in online and offline environments and the relationships between them (Hall, 2016). While respondent interpretations of what constituted worthy focal points for sustainable tourism behaviors clearly varied, the results of study demonstrated that digitally mediated boycott actions could sometimes potentially contribute to encouraging pro-sustainable behavior in businesses and destinations. This

is significant given that, as Stolle and Micheletti (2013, p.2) argue, consumer activism has become a new mode "of political participation based on individualized responsibility-taking", with Saarinen (2021) noting that this kind of individualized responsibility-taking is largely grounded in neoliberal forms of tourism consumption with their emphasis on personalized ideology-based behaviour and decision-making.

Fifth, respondents demonstrated only two dimensions of Milbrath's (1981) hierarchy of political participation, that of being engaged in spectator or transitional activities. Digital spectator activities adopted include clicktivism, metavoicing, and digital assertion of positions, and transitional activities included e-funding of boycott campaigns, political consumerism via boycotts, and digital boycott petitions (George & Leidner, 2019). Digital gladiatorial activities, such as data activism, exposure, and hacktivism (George & Leidner, 2019), are not part of the respondents' involvement in tourism boycott activities. Instead, the findings show respondent approaches to digital activism to be deeply situated with there being a clear need to distinguish between the followers of boycotts in terms of consumer behaviour and those who become core digital activists engaged in furthering boycott campaigns as part of more formal movements.

6.2. Practical implications

The results of the present study also suggest specific practical implications. *First,* understanding the motivations for tourists' boycott participation on the principles of sustainability is important information for parties that are interested in promoting green consumerism and engaging in upstream social marketing (Hall, 2016, 2018). From a managerial perspective, tourism businesses need to recognize the significance of conscious consumerism and/or ethical consumption and the potential for accompanying shifts from individual to collective tourist activism as consumers are now considering the power of their consumption patterns to induce sustainable environmental, political or economic change. Importantly, the digitalization of the tourism system is a double-edge sword for businesses and destinations. Although such measures can enhance communication with customers they also further enable activist responses to perceived unsustainable destination and tourism business practices. This means that destination management organizations and businesses should have strategies in place to better respond to pro-sustainability consumer concerns, including potentially improving their behaviours as an anticipatory strategy response.

Second, tourism businesses and destinations should recognize the political and mediating power of social media, especially in light of the rapid transmission of information on a large scale, resulting in a closer and faster connection between consumers and any potential boycott target. As a result, understanding how and why customers react to certain corporate sustainability related practices becomes critical for such organizations and DMOs.

Third, the study findings reinforce that some tourists are interested in bringing sustainability into their consumption practices and decisions about what and what not to purchase via boycott and buycotts. Thus, tourism destinations and businesses need to have a deeper understanding of consumer boycott motivation and how it is mediated by online technologies and practices. The interviewees in this study believe that boycotting and associated digital activism has the power to effect change in at least some circumstances. Such digitally mediated boycott activities may not put businesses or destinations out of business, but can affect visitor numbers, expenditure and, for

publicly listed firms, their share price while even the potential for boycott activity can influence policy settings.

Fourth, understanding why consumers choose to boycott is crucial for managers to developing capacity and methods to respond. For example, the hospitality sector is increasingly having to respond to the ethical concerns of vegans and others who have made the ethical decision to boycott animal products as well as issues of animal, climate, human, and environmental welfare in their supply chain (see also Shaheer et al., 2019; Lamers et al., 2019; Gössling & Hall, 2022). Such a situation clearly has substantial implications for tourism firms and destinations and reflects the urgent need to incorporate pro-sustainability thinking into daily business operations and market strategies (Zapata Campos et al., 2018; Seyfi & Hall, 2020).

6.3. Limitations and directions for future research

Despite the contributions made, this study has several limitations that provide avenues for future investigation. *First*, the conclusions of this study are constrained by the usual limitations of research method and the obtained sample, the application of other methods can also help provide insights into digitally mediated pro-sustainability consumer boycott motivations. *Second*, this study used the data from those with pro-sustainably boycott experiences. As the paper suggests, tourist boycott behavior and motivations are clearly influenced by context and culture and there is also a personal ideological, economic and socio-political contexts that affects decisions as whether to engage in a boycott or not, including personal and community norms. Thus, future study should explore this line of inquiry, particularly with respect to the different religious, political and cultural contexts in which boycotts might exist. *Third*, respondents in this study did not include 'digital gladiators' (George & Leidner, 2019), future studies would be invaluable to explore the strategies of 'core' activists as tourism related political actions to encourage more sustainable tourism practices. *Fourth*, future examination is needed of domestic tourism boycotts which are under-researched phenomena. This would also lead to the development of a better understanding of whether different sets of barriers and constraints are involved, including political culture and governmental regulation as well as the relative influence between offline and online community norms. *Finally*, further research is required on boycotting and as to whether positive pro-sustainability behaviours and their communication by destinations and businesses in situations where products are highly substitutable actually lead to brand loyalty and provide a sustained competitive advantage. This information would be highly relevant for those aiming to use pro-sustainability thinking as a potential tool for making tourism more sustainable in future.

Acknowledgement

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Table 1: Profile of participants

Participant	Gender	Estimate number of boycotts participation	Primary digital sources for boycott call	Boycott topic
1	Male	3	Facebook/ Online forum	Climate change
2	Male	5	Twitter	Human rights violations
3	Female	4	Facebook, LinkedIn	Human rights
4	Male	2	Facebook, Instagram	Workers' Rights
5	Female	5	YouTube, Facebook	Climate change
6	Female	1	Twitter/Facebook/Online forum	Ethical shopping
7	Female	2	Campaign Website	Environment
8	Female	6	Twitter/Facebook	Environment
9	Female	1	YouTube/ Online forum	Human rights
10	Female	3	Instagram/ Online forum	Human rights
11	Male	1	YouTube, Facebook	Climate change
12	Male	4	Facebook/ Online forum	Animal rights
13	Male	2	Campaign Website/ E-mail communication	Environment
14	Female	5	YouTube/ Online forum	Animal rights
15	Male	3	Twitter	Environment
16	Male	7	Twitter/Facebook	Human rights
17	Female	2	Facebook/ E-mail communication	Ethical shopping
18	Female	3	Campaign Website	Ethical shopping / animal rights
19	Male	2	Twitter, LinkedIn	Human rights
20	Female	5	Twitter/Facebook	Ethical shopping / animal rights
21	Female	2	Campaign Website	Ethical shopping / animal rights
22	Male	4	Online forum	Environment
23	Female	5	Facebook, LinkedIn	Ethical shopping

24	Female	1	Twitter/Facebook	Environment
25	Female	5	Facebook, Instagram	Environment
26	Male	2	Online forum	Environment
27	Female	4	YouTube, Facebook	Ethical shopping
28	Male	3	Twitter/Facebook	Ethical shopping
29	Male	3	Campaign Website/ E-mail communication	Environment
30	Female	6	Online forum	Ethical shopping
31	Female	2	Facebook, LinkedIn	Environment
32	Male	3	YouTube, Facebook	Ethical shopping / animal rights

Figure 1. Themes and categories that emerged from interviews.