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Brand Animosity as a Driver of Digital Boycotts: How Socio-Political Issues Shape Generation Z Consumer Behaviour in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: The rise of digitally mediated consumer activism has fundamentally altered the dynamics between global brands and value-conscious consumers. This study investigates how socio-political issues activate brand animosity among Generation Z consumers in a Muslim-majority emerging market context and how such animosity translates into digital boycott participation. The research adopts a qualitative exploratory design grounded in an integrative framework that combines Brand Animosity Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Data were collected through netnographic observation across TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram between December 2024 and January 2026, supplemented by twelve semi-structured, in-depth interviews with purposively selected Generation Z respondents aged 18–24 years. Theoretical saturation was assessed through systematic monitoring of code novelty rates, with the final two interviews yielding fewer than 5% new codes. Reflexive thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts and netnographic field notes, with inter-coder agreement testing conducted on a 25% subsample, yielding a Cohen's kappa value of 0.81. The findings reveal three primary mechanisms through which socio-political issues generate brand animosity: moral-religious framing of geopolitical conflict, viral social contagion of negative brand associations, and collective identity reinforcement through digital solidarity rituals. Cognitive dissonance resolution and digital social norm pressure operate as critical mediating pathways between brand animosity and actual boycott participation. The study proposes a tentative construct labelled networked moral outrage, conceptualised as a digital-era extension of brand animosity that complements existing constructs of online moral outrage and digital activism while remaining grounded in brand-level affect. The findings have important implications for brand crisis communication strategies in digitally connected emerging markets.

KEYWORDS: Brand animosity; digital boycott; generation Z; social media activism; political consumerism

1. Introduction

Consumer boycotts have long served as instruments of collective social action; however, the emergence of social media as a primary arena for public discourse has introduced qualitatively

new dynamics to this phenomenon. Whereas conventional boycotts operated through the physical withdrawal of consumers from marketplaces and required sustained organisational infrastructure, digital boycotts have been able to mobilise thousands of participants within hours through the viral diffusion of socio-political content across interconnected platforms [1,2]. This transformation has carried significant implications for global brand management, consumer behaviour theory, and the sociology of political consumerism.

Indonesia provided a particularly salient context for examining these dynamics. As Southeast Asia's largest economy and the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia experienced a substantial wave of digital boycott activity from late 2023 onward, triggered by the escalation of the Israel–Gaza conflict. Global brands perceived as supporting Israel, including McDonald's, Starbucks, and Unilever, became the focal targets of organised campaigns across TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), with the hashtag #BoikotIsrael accumulating hundreds of millions of impressions within weeks [3,4]. The intensity and speed of this mobilisation suggested that Generation Z consumers, defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, had increasingly treated their consumption choices as visible moral and political statements.

Despite growing scholarly interest in digital boycotts, several gaps persisted in the literature. First, most existing studies adopted quantitative approaches that measured boycott intention using standardised survey instruments [5–7], thereby sacrificing the interpretive depth needed to understand why boycott behaviour unfolded as it did within specific socio-cultural contexts. Second, the theoretical frameworks most commonly applied, particularly the Brand Animosity Model [8] and the Theory of Planned Behavior [9], were developed in contexts markedly different from contemporary social media environments, where information diffuses at algorithmic speed and moral judgements are formed within networked communities rather than through individual cognition alone. Third, research on digital boycotts in Indonesia and comparable Muslim-majority emerging markets remained limited despite the disproportionate influence of these markets on global brand reputations [10,11].

This study addressed these gaps by examining three intersecting research questions: How did socio-political issues shape brand animosity perceptions among Generation Z consumers in a Muslim-majority emerging market? What distinctive forms and patterns of digital boycott behaviour emerged from such animosity? What psychological and social mechanisms mediated the transition from animosity formation to active boycott participation? In addressing these questions, the study proposed a tentative theoretical construct, networked moral outrage, to capture the amplification dynamics specific to algorithmically driven social media environments. The construct was positioned as complementary to, rather than a replacement for, the existing constructs of online moral outrage [12] and digital activism [13]. Whereas online moral outrage describes a generalised affective response to moral violations and digital activism encompasses the broader repertoire of digitally enabled collective action, networked moral outrage focuses more narrowly on the brand-specific affective processes through which algorithmically amplified moral content translates into sustained consumer–brand avoidance.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Brand Animosity Theory and Its Digital Extensions.

The foundational theoretical construct underpinning this study was Brand Animosity, introduced by Klein and colleagues [8] in their investigation of Chinese consumer resistance to Japanese products following historical military conflict. Their animosity model proposed that consumer reluctance to purchase foreign products could be driven by enduring hostility rooted in historical or contemporary events, independent of product quality judgements. The original typology distinguished between war animosity, hostility arising from military conflict, and economic animosity, hostility stemming from perceptions of exploitative trade relationships. Subsequent scholars expanded this taxonomy to incorporate religious animosity [14], political animosity [15], and cultural animosity [16]. Particularly relevant to the Indonesian context, Abosag and Farah [14] demonstrated that religiously motivated boycotts in Muslim-majority markets exhibited distinctive intensity and durability, since they were reinforced by collective religious identity and community solidarity rather than individual grievance alone. More recent scholars began examining how digital media environments reshaped animosity dynamics. Kim and colleagues [17] found that social media amplified animosity formation through accelerated information diffusion and peer reinforcement effects. Tong and colleagues [18] extended this by showing that repeated exposure to emotionally charged content on social media strengthened moral outrage and consolidated boycott norms within networked communities. The systematic review by Salma and Aji [19] further established that cancel culture, a form of collective digital animosity, had become a structurally distinct phenomenon warranting its own theoretical treatment. A critical gap remained. Existing digital animosity research had concentrated primarily on quantitative measurement of boycott intentions, overlooking the qualitative interpretive processes through which consumers constructed meaning from socio-political events and translated that meaning into collective digital action. This study addressed that gap.

2.2. Cognitive Dissonance as a Mediating Mechanism.

Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory [20] posited that individuals experienced psychological discomfort when they held simultaneously contradictory cognitions. In consumer behaviour contexts, dissonance arose when an individual held positive product associations with a brand whose perceived values or actions conflicted with the individual's own moral commitments. The resolution of this dissonance typically involved either rationalisation of continued consumption, modification of attitudes toward the product, or behavioural change in the form of consumption withdrawal. Digital environments introduced new complexity to dissonance dynamics. Chatterjee and colleagues [21] found that repeated exposure to negative brand content on social media intensified dissonance by preventing the rationalisation strategies that consumers might otherwise have employed in information-scarce environments. The public, performative nature of social media further amplified dissonance, as consumers felt identity-level pressure from their online communities to resolve inconsistencies between stated values and consumption practices [22].

2.3. Theory of Planned Behavior in Digital Activism Contexts.

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) [9] provided the social-psychological scaffold through which individual intentions were linked to collective action. The three primary components, attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, interacted to produce behavioural intentions, which in turn predicted actual behaviour. In the context of digital boycotts, attitude corresponded to the individual's moral evaluation of the target brand; subjective norms were constituted by perceived social expectations within one's digital community; and perceived behavioural control reflected the individual's assessment of the ease with which digital boycott actions (unfollowing, sharing, hashtagging, refraining from purchase) could be accomplished. Several studies had validated and extended the TPB framework in boycott contexts [5, 23]. Notably, the subjective norms component had been found to exert especially strong influence in collectivist cultural contexts such as Indonesia, where social belonging and communal identity were highly salient motivators of behaviour [24]. This cultural specificity further underscored the importance of contextually grounded qualitative research.

2.4. An Integrative Reading: How the Three Frameworks Interacted.

The three frameworks were introduced here not as parallel lenses but as components of a single explanatory chain. Brand Animosity Theory specified the affective input variable, namely the consumer-level hostility that arose when a brand became symbolically attached to a morally salient external event. Cognitive Dissonance Theory specified the intrapsychic mechanism that converted this hostility into action pressure, since a consumer who simultaneously held a positive brand habit and a negative moral judgement of that brand experienced identity incongruence that demanded resolution. The Theory of Planned Behavior then specified the social-cognitive environment in which the chosen resolution strategy, here boycott participation, was enacted, supplying the constructs of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control through which the resolved animosity was translated into observable behaviour. Read sequentially, Brand Animosity supplied the *why*, Cognitive Dissonance supplied the *how*, and the Theory of Planned Behavior supplied the conditions under which the boycott decision occurred. The empirical analysis in Section 4 was organised to track this sequence, with each thematic cluster mapped to the framework component to which it most closely corresponded. This integrative reading was consistent with prior multi-theory treatments of consumer activism [22,23] but was, to the authors' knowledge, the first to specify the sequential interlocking of these three frameworks within a single qualitative design.

2.5. Research Gap and Novelty.

Table 1 synthesised the existing literature and mapped the position of this study within the scholarly landscape. No prior study had qualitatively investigated the formation of brand animosity among Indonesian Generation Z consumers within digital media environments, nor had any study examined the socio-psychological mechanisms linking socio-political issue exposure to digital boycott participation in this specific socio-cultural and religious context. The novelty of this study therefore lay in three contributions. First, the study provided empirical documentation of a digitally constituted form of brand animosity formation, mediated by social media algorithms and community solidarity rituals. Second, it proposed the construct of networked moral outrage as a tentative extension of classical animosity theory, positioned

alongside, rather than in displacement of, the established constructs of online moral outrage [12] and digital activism [13]. Third, it offered contextually grounded evidence from a Muslim-majority emerging market that had been substantially underrepresented in global consumer behaviour research.

Table 1. Summary of related research and research gap identification.

No	Author(s) & Year	Focus	Method	Key Findings	Gap Addressed
1	[8]	Brand Animosity Model	Quantitative (Survey)	Animosity reduced purchase willingness independently of quality	No digital or social media context
2	[14]	Religious boycotts in MENA	Quantitative	Religiosity amplified animosity and boycott intent	No Gen Z focus; no digital platform analysis
3	[17]	Animosity in cross-cultural boycotts	Quantitative (SEM)	Consumer affinity moderated animosity effects	Quantitative only; no Indonesian context
4	[10]	McDonald's boycott, Indonesia	Quantitative case study	Image restoration partially mitigated boycott impact	Company-side focus; lacks consumer psychology depth
5	[11]	McDonald's boycott, Malaysia	Qualitative case study	Digital boycott as moral-religious expression	Single-country; no Gen Z-specific analysis
6	[24]	Psychological drivers of boycott	Quantitative (Survey)	Emotional and social identity factors drove boycotts	No qualitative exploration; no discourse analysis
7	[5]	Boycott intention via TPB	Quantitative (SEM)	Animosity, norms, and PBC predicted boycott intention	Intention only; no actual behaviour or digital discourse
8	[18]	Social media and boycott norms	Mixed methods	Repeated exposure consolidated boycott community norms	Not Indonesia-specific; limited Gen Z focus
9	[23]	TPB-based boycott of Israeli brands in Bangladesh	Quantitative (SEM)	TPB components predicted boycott participation	Quantitative only; no Indonesian-Muslim specificity
10	This study	Brand animosity, digital boycott, Gen Z, Indonesia	Qualitative (Netnography + IDI)	Networked moral outrage; three-stage animosity formation	Addressed preceding gaps through integrative qualitative approach

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design.

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory design, selected on the grounds that the central research questions concern meaning-making processes, emotional dynamics, and social interpretation rather than the measurement of causal relationships between variables. As Creswell and Poth observe [25], qualitative inquiry is epistemologically appropriate when the phenomenon under investigation is contextually embedded, emotionally laden, and insufficiently theorised to permit hypothesis-driven investigation. All three conditions apply to the study of brand animosity formation and digital boycott behaviour among Generation Z consumers in Indonesia. The primary methodological approach is netnography [26], which adapts the principles of ethnographic immersion to the study of online communities. Netnography permits the researcher to observe the naturalistically occurring communicative practices of digital communities without the reactive distortions that often attend laboratory or interview-only designs. In the present study, netnographic observation was conducted across TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram over a twelve-month period, focusing on discourse streams associated with #BoikotIsrael, #BoycottMcDonalds, #BoycottStarbucks, #SavePalestine, and related hashtags.

3.2. Netnographic Data Selection Procedures.

To address concerns about the reproducibility of netnographic sampling, the data selection procedure followed a four-stage filter. In the first stage, posts were retrieved from each platform using the boundary hashtags identified above, with a daily monitoring window between December 2024 and January 2026. In the second stage, posts were screened against three inclusion criteria: explicit reference to one of the target brands (McDonald's, Starbucks, Unilever, or their Indonesian variants); minimum engagement threshold of one thousand interactions (likes, shares, and comments combined) to focus on materially influential content; and publication in Indonesian, English, or mixed-language form ("bahasa gado-gado") consistent with the linguistic register of Indonesian Generation Z. In the third stage, posts were screened against three exclusion criteria: explicit commercial promotion of alternative brands, since these introduce a separate marketing-effect confound; bot-pattern indicators following the heuristics described by Bessi and Ferrara [27], including near-identical wording across accounts and posting cadences inconsistent with human users; and posts whose comment sections had been disabled, which limited the analysis of community discursive uptake. After this filtering, the final corpus consisted of 1,247 posts and 18,432 associated comments, drawn approximately equally across the three platforms. Field notes were maintained for each retrieval episode, recording the manifest content of posts and the emotional registers, symbolic resources, and community norms enacted through the surrounding interaction.

3.3. Participants and Sampling.

Netnographic observation was supplemented by twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with Generation Z informants meeting four inclusion criteria: Indonesian citizenship; age between 18 and 24 years; at least twelve months of active social media use across one or more of the target platforms; and demonstrated knowledge of and engagement with digital boycott campaigns against global brands. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with snowball referral used to identify additional informants once the initial purposive sample had been established [25]. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study sought information-rich participants who had direct experience with digital boycott campaigns and could provide nuanced reflections on the socio-political and psychological processes underlying their participation. Efforts were also made to recruit participants with diverse demographic backgrounds, including differences in gender, educational attainment, geographical location, and levels of boycott engagement, thereby enhancing the breadth of perspectives represented in the dataset and improving the credibility of the thematic interpretations. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Saturation was operationalised following the criteria proposed by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson [28] and refined by Hennink and Kaiser [29], specifically the criterion that fewer than five percent of codes generated in a given interview should be new codes not already present in the existing codebook. A running tally was maintained throughout fieldwork. The first six interviews produced 87 codes, the seventh through tenth interviews added a further 19 codes, and the final two interviews (INF-11 and INF-12) produced only four new codes between them, all of which were elaborations of existing categories rather than novel themes. This pattern indicated that meaning saturation, in addition to code saturation, had been reached, suggesting

that further interviews were unlikely to generate substantively new conceptual insights relevant to the study objectives. Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the interview informants.

Table 2. Demographic profile of research informants.

Code	Age	Gender	Education	City/Province	Primary Social Media Platform	Boycott Participation
INF-01	22	Female	Undergraduate	Bengkulu	TikTok, Instagram	Active (sharing, hashtagging, purchase withdrawal)
INF-02	20	Male	Undergraduate	Jakarta	X (Twitter), TikTok	Active (content creation, boycott advocacy)
INF-03	23	Female	Undergraduate	Bogor	Instagram, TikTok	Moderate (sharing, purchase avoidance)
INF-04	21	Female	Diploma	East Kalimantan	TikTok	Active (hashtagging, purchase withdrawal)
INF-05	24	Male	Undergraduate	Bengkulu	X (Twitter), Instagram	Moderate (sharing, commenting)
INF-06	19	Female	Senior High School	Jakarta	TikTok, Instagram	Active (hashtagging, community campaigns)
INF-07	22	Male	Undergraduate	Bengkulu	X (Twitter)	Passive–Active Transition (observer becoming participant)
INF-08	20	Female	Undergraduate	South Sulawesi	Instagram, TikTok	Active (unfollowing, purchase withdrawal)
INF-09	23	Male	Undergraduate	Padang	TikTok	Moderate (sharing, selective purchase avoidance)
INF-10	21	Female	Undergraduate	West Java	Instagram	Active (commenting, sharing, hashtagging)
INF-11	18	Male	Senior High School	Bengkulu	TikTok, X (Twitter)	Passive (awareness, occasional sharing)
INF-12	24	Female	Postgraduate	Bogor	X (Twitter), Instagram	Active (multiple forms, including academic discourse)

3.4. Data collection and triangulation.

Data collection proceeded through four complementary channels. First, netnographic observation entailed systematic documentation of digital discourse threads, comment sections, viral content, and hashtag campaigns across the three platforms, with field notes recording both manifest content and the emotional registers and community norms enacted around it. Second, the IDIs were conducted online via Zoom and WhatsApp, each lasting between 35 and 50 minutes, using a semi-structured protocol organised around five thematic areas: initial emotional responses to socio-political issues, formation and dimensions of brand animosity, cognitive processes around consumption decisions, forms and motivations of digital boycott participation, and reflections on the broader social significance of digital activism. Third, documentary data were gathered from archived social media posts, news coverage of the boycott campaigns, and corporate communication materials issued by targeted brands. Fourth, to mitigate the well-documented limits of self-reported behaviour, a digital trace component was added: with informant consent, the research team examined each informant's public posting history across TikTok, X, and Instagram during the three months preceding the interview, recording the frequency of boycott-related posts, the categories of brands referenced, and the patterns of platform engagement. The digital trace data were cross-checked against informants' self-reported behaviour, with discrepancies (observed in three of twelve cases, generally in the direction of slight over-claiming of participation intensity) flagged for follow-up clarification during member-checking. This four-channel design follows the trustworthiness criteria articulated by Lincoln and Guba [30] and the contemporary refinements proposed by Denzin and Lincoln [31], enhancing credibility through source convergence. The use of digital

trace data alongside self-report addresses the specific concern that boycott behaviour, as a morally charged identity-relevant practice, may be subject to social-desirability inflation.

3.5. Data Analysis and Inter-Coder Reliability.

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and, together with field notes and documentary data, subjected to reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke [32]. Initial coding was inductive, with codes generated directly from data content rather than from prior theoretical categories. Thematic construction in the second phase was guided by the analytical interest in identifying patterns of meaning that responded to the research questions. The resulting themes were subsequently reviewed against the theoretical literature to assess theoretical resonance and to identify points of departure. To strengthen analytic rigour, three procedures were employed beyond the single-coder default of reflexive thematic analysis. First, a second researcher independently coded a randomly selected 25 percent sub-sample of interview transcripts using the codebook developed by the lead author. Inter-coder agreement, calculated using Cohen's kappa on the matched code applications, reached 0.81, indicating substantial agreement [33]. Disagreements were resolved through discussion until consensus, with the codebook revised where the discussion exposed ambiguity. Second, peer debriefing sessions were held at three points during analysis with two senior qualitative researchers external to the project, who reviewed emerging themes against the data extracts and pressed the lead author to defend interpretive choices. Third, member-checking was conducted with four informants who reviewed preliminary thematic summaries and confirmed their interpretive accuracy. An audit trail documenting all analytic decisions was maintained throughout. Transferability was supported through thick description of the research context.

3.6 Ethical Considerations.

All informants provided written informed consent prior to participation. The study protocol ensured the confidentiality of all personally identifiable information, with each informant assigned a numerical code for reporting purposes. The digital trace component was conducted only with explicit additional consent, and informants retained the right to exclude any specific social media post from the analysis. Netnographic observation was confined to publicly accessible content in accordance with the ethical guidelines for digital research articulated by Kozinets [26]. The study was conducted in compliance with the institutional ethical standards of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu.

4. Results and Discussion

The reflexive thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and netnographic field notes generated three overarching themes, each comprising several interrelated sub-themes that collectively explained the progression from socio-political issue exposure to digital boycott participation. These themes were subsequently interpreted through the integrative theoretical framework presented in Section 2.4. Theme 1 represented the animosity formation stage, corresponding to Brand Animosity Theory, in which socio-political events were translated into negative brand evaluations. Theme 2 represented the intrapsychic transformation stage, corresponding to Cognitive Dissonance Theory, whereby participants reconciled conflicts between their consumption practices and moral values. Theme 3 represented the behavioural enactment stage, corresponding to the Theory of Planned Behavior, illustrating how attitudes,

subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control collectively shaped digital boycott participation. Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchical thematic structure and its alignment with the study's integrative theoretical framework.

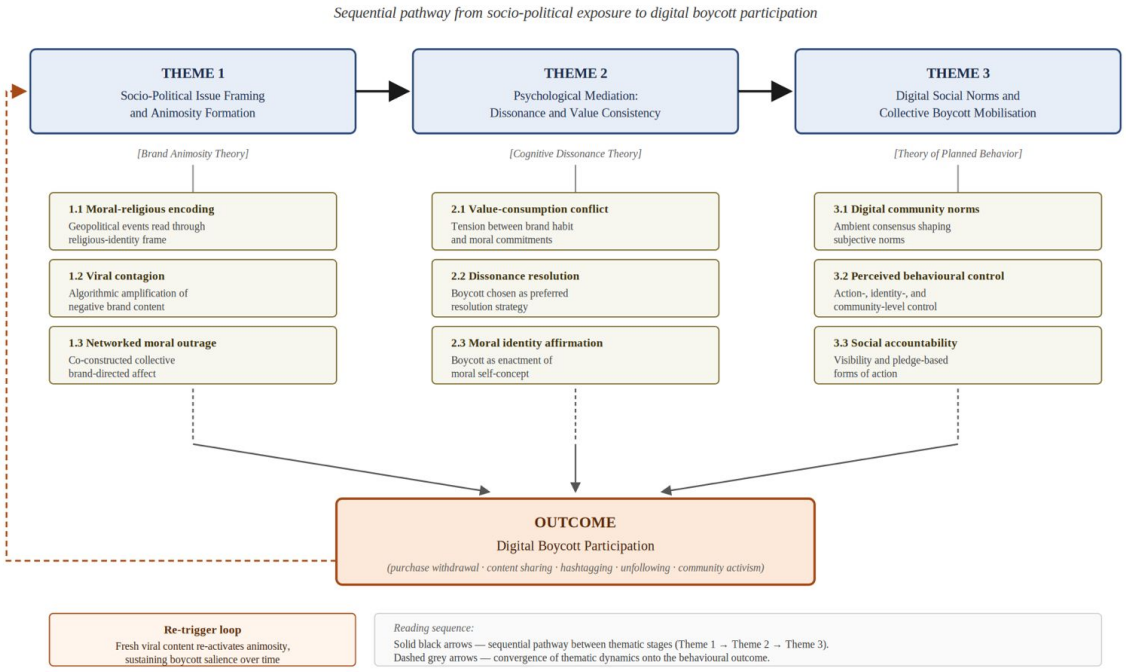

Figure 1. Thematic structure of brand animosity and digital boycott among Generation Z in Indonesia.

4.1. Theme 1: Socio-Political Issue Framing and Animosity Formation.

4.1.1. Sub-theme 1.1: Moral-Religious Issue Encoding.

Before presenting the data, a definitional distinction is required to avoid conceptual overlap. The study uses the term socio-political framing to refer to the broad set of interpretive schemas through which informants made sense of the Israel-Gaza conflict, including geopolitical, humanitarian, and historical narrative elements. Within this broader category, moral-religious framing is treated as a specific sub-type characterised by two distinguishing features: explicit invocation of religious identity or doctrinal commitments as the warrant for moral judgement, and the framing of the boycott decision as a religiously mediated obligation rather than as a politically negotiable choice. A general humanitarian framing that draws on universalist moral language without religious anchoring is therefore not coded as moral-religious framing in this analysis. This distinction is operationalised through three coding indicators: (i) explicit mention of Islamic concepts such as ummah, kemanusiaan Muslim, or solidaritas; (ii) reference to religious authorities or textual sources; and (iii) framing of consumption choices as religiously prescribed rather than as personally preferred.

Applying this definition, the formation of brand animosity among informants was not triggered by direct experience with brand products or corporate communications, but rather by the moral-religious framing of geopolitical events encountered through social media content. For the majority of informants, the Israel-Gaza conflict was processed primarily through a humanitarian-religious lens, activating a framework of collective Muslim identity and moral obligation that subsequently became attached to brands perceived as complicit in Israeli military operations.

INF-01 expressed this framing explicitly: *"When I saw McDonald's in Israel was supporting soldiers with free meals, I felt betrayed. Not just as a consumer, but as a Muslim. Suddenly McDonald's everywhere did not feel the same."*

This moral-religious encoding was found to operate through a process of brand association transfer, whereby the actions of a specific corporate entity in one geographic location were attributed to the broader brand identity as a whole, regardless of operational independence. This process aligns with the concept of symbolic brand contamination described by Salma and Aji [19], and extends it by documenting the speed and intensity with which such contamination occurs in algorithmically amplified social media environments. The pattern was consistent across informants, with seven of twelve explicitly referencing Islamic humanitarian values (kemanusiaan, solidaritas Muslim) as the primary interpretive frame through which brand behaviour was evaluated. The remaining five informants drew on universalist humanitarian language without religious anchoring and were therefore coded under broader socio-political framing rather than moral-religious framing in the narrow sense. This finding resonates with Abosag and Farah's typology of religiously motivated animosity [14], but suggests that digital media environments accelerate and deepen this form of animosity through community-level reinforcement.

4.1.2. Sub-theme 1.2: Viral Contagion of Brand Negativity.

Netnographic observation revealed that negative brand sentiment did not simply originate with individual consumers and then aggregate upward; rather, it was systematically amplified through the content recommendation algorithms of TikTok and X (Twitter). Posts documenting alleged corporate connections to Israel routinely accumulated millions of views and hundreds of thousands of shares within 24 to 48 hours, creating an information environment in which avoidance of such content was difficult for active platform users. Informants described this process with notable consistency. INF-07 reported that even those who had no prior strong feelings about geopolitical issues found their social media feeds saturated with boycott content to the point that continued engagement with targeted brands became socially difficult. The digital trace data supported this account: informants who self-reported low pre-existing political engagement nonetheless showed a marked rise in boycott-related reposting within two weeks of the first viral wave, consistent with an algorithmic exposure effect rather than pre-existing activism. This suggests that viral contagion functions not merely as an information-diffusion mechanism but as a norm-construction mechanism, effectively establishing what Petersen and colleagues [34] call a normative floor below which silence becomes legible as complicity.

4.1.3. Sub-theme 1.3: Networked Moral Outrage as an Extension of Brand Animosity.

The phenomenon the researchers tentatively label networked moral outrage warrants careful conceptual positioning. Two adjacent constructs in the literature need to be distinguished from it. Online moral outrage, as developed by Crockett [12] and applied in subsequent studies, refers to a generalised affective response to perceived moral violations encountered in digital environments, irrespective of brand involvement. Digital activism, as treated by Earl and Kimport [13] and others, refers to the broader repertoire of digitally enabled collective action, including petitions, hashtag campaigns, and online organising, of which boycott participation is one possible component. Networked moral outrage, as used in the present study, is narrower than either of these. It refers specifically to the brand-directed affective register that results

when online moral outrage becomes attached, through symbolic association, to a particular consumer brand, and that subsequently sustains durable brand-avoidance behaviour. In this narrower sense, it is best read as a digital-era extension of classical brand animosity [8] rather than as a wholly new construct. The contribution of the present study is therefore to specify the social and algorithmic mechanisms by which generalised online moral outrage is converted into brand-specific animosity, rather than to coin an unrelated theoretical category. Informants described experiencing their outrage as fundamentally social and relational. INF-12 articulated this with particular clarity, observing that her own emotional intensity around the boycott was amplified by witnessing the outrage of others, by adding her voice to a collective, and by seeing that collective recognised and affirmed by still others. The experience was not one of isolation but of moral community. Table 3 presents a comparison of classical brand animosity and networked moral outrage across key theoretical dimensions, presented with the caution that the right-hand column describes a tentative analytical category whose stability across other empirical contexts remains to be tested.

Table 3. Comparison Between Classical Brand Animosity and Networked Moral Outrage.

Dimension	Classical Brand Animosity [8]	Networked Moral Outrage (This Study)
Origin	Historical personal or national conflicts	Algorithmically amplified socio-political issues and digital narratives
Formation process	Gradual and experience-based	Rapid, triggered by viral online content
Temporal pattern	Slowly developed and relatively stable	Rapidly formed and repeatedly intensified by emerging events
Social mechanism	Primarily individual, with limited social reinforcement	Socially co-constructed through networked digital communities
Moral foundation	National, political, or ethnic identity	Humanitarian, religious, and cosmopolitan ethical values
Primary actors	Consumers with direct or inherited historical memory	Generation Z digital natives with limited direct historical memory
Brand target specificity	Brands associated with a country of origin	Symbolically associated brands regardless of operational location
Decay dynamics	Slow decline; may persist for decades	Dynamic; dependent on issue salience and susceptible to rapid reactivation
Amplification mechanism	Traditional media and interpersonal word-of-mouth	Social media algorithms, viral content, influencer networks, and hashtag mobilisation
Managerial implications	Country-of-origin image management	Real-time crisis communication, digital engagement, and values-based brand alignment

4.2. Theme 2: Psychological Mediation Dissonance Resolution and Value Consistency.

4.2.1. Sub-theme 2.1: Value-Consumption Conflict Experience.

A pronounced pattern in the interview data concerned the subjective experience of internal conflict when informants found themselves caught between prior consumption habits or brand affections and newly crystallised moral objections. This experience maps directly onto the cognitive dissonance construct [20], with the data enriching the theoretical account by detailing the phenomenological texture of dissonance in digital environments. INF-04 described a visceral sense of contradiction when she found herself craving a McDonald's meal shortly after sharing a boycott-related post: the social visibility of her prior digital commitment created a performance pressure that made the dissonance impossible to resolve through simple rationalisation. This finding points to the uniquely public character of identity performance in social media contexts, which heightens the stakes of cognitive dissonance resolution in ways that do not obtain in offline consumption contexts.

4.2.2. Sub-theme 2.2: Dissonance Resolution Through Boycott Participation.

For the majority of informants, participation in digital boycott activities functioned as the preferred resolution strategy for value-consumption conflict. This was not experienced simply as an instrumental choice to abstain from purchasing specific products; rather, it was described as a psychologically necessary act of self-alignment, a restoration of coherence between inner values and outward behaviour. INF-09 characterised the act of publicly posting a boycott endorsement as removing a weight from his conscience. This finding has implications for brand crisis management. If boycott participation functions primarily as dissonance resolution rather than as strategic consumer pressure, then corporate response strategies focused solely on reputational repair may be insufficient. What consumers require is not merely reassurance but a moral permission structure that allows them to reconcile continued consumption with maintained self-integrity, a more difficult communication challenge.

4.2.3. Sub-theme 2.3: Moral Identity Affirmation.

Beyond dissonance resolution, boycott participation served a positive identity-construction function for many informants. Engaging in digital boycott activities was experienced as an enactment of moral identity, a demonstration to oneself and one's online community that one's consumption choices reflect deeply held values. INF-03 stated that the boycott was not just about McDonald's but about being the kind of person who does not ignore suffering because it is inconvenient. This finding extends the social identity tradition in boycott research [24] by showing that identity affirmation operates not only at the group level but also at the level of individual moral self-concept. The digital environment, which renders boycott participation publicly visible and searchable, transforms what might otherwise be a private consumption decision into a legible moral statement, a mechanism that substantially lowers the threshold for participation.

4.3. Theme 3: Digital Social Norms and Collective Boycott Mobilisation.

4.3.1. Sub-theme 3.1: Digital Community Norm Construction.

Consistent with the TPB framework, the interview data revealed that subjective norms were a powerful determinant of boycott participation decisions. The data also revealed important specificities concerning the mechanism through which norms were constructed and communicated in digital environments. Rather than norms being experienced as external pressures from identifiable social referents, they were experienced as ambient features of the digital information landscape, the cumulative effect of witnessing an overwhelming consensus of moral condemnation within one's social media network. Netnographic observation confirmed this dynamic. The comment sections of boycott-related posts on TikTok and X were strikingly homogeneous in their moral evaluations, with dissenting voices either absent or subjected to rapid counter-messaging. This discursive homogeneity created what informants experienced as an unambiguous normative expectation that participation in the boycott was the morally correct and socially required response to the situation.

4.3.2. Sub-theme 3.2: Perceived Behavioural Control in the Digital Environment.

The perceived behavioural control (PBC) component of the TPB framework, which has received less analytical attention in prior boycott research than attitudes and subjective norms, emerged from the present data as substantively important and theoretically distinctive. Three

forms of PBC were identifiable in informants' accounts. The first is action-level control: the perceived ease with which discrete boycott actions can be performed. Informants consistently described digital boycott actions as low-effort and frictionless. INF-08 contrasted unfollowing a brand account, accomplished with a single tap, with the much higher activation cost of avoiding physical stores in offline boycotts. This action-level PBC is uniformly high in digital contexts and, on its own, does not discriminate between participants and non-participants. The second is identity-level control: the perceived capacity to maintain a consistent boycotter identity over time. Here PBC was reported as more variable. Informants who had stronger pre-existing engagement with religious or moral communities reported higher confidence in their ability to sustain boycott behaviour through periods of weaker viral attention, whereas informants with weaker community anchors reported episodes of slippage, including INF-09's account of returning to McDonald's during travel before re-engaging the boycott after fresh viral content. The third is community-level control: the perceived capacity to influence the broader trajectory of the boycott movement. This dimension diverges sharply from the individual-action-focused conception of PBC in the original TPB formulation. Several informants, particularly those with larger digital followings, described their participation as oriented partly toward shaping community norms rather than only toward personal alignment. INF-12 articulated this most explicitly, framing her academic-register posts as contributions to a collective project rather than as personal moral statements. This finding suggests that digitally mediated boycott contexts call for a broader conceptualisation of PBC than the single-actor framing inherited from Ajzen's original formulation.

4.3.3. Sub-theme 3.3: Social Accountability, Visibility, and Forms of Action.

The public visibility of digital platforms introduced a dimension of social accountability that informants reported as a significant factor in their boycott decisions. Several informants noted that having previously posted boycott-supportive content created a form of ongoing obligation. Not boycotting, having publicly declared support, would have been experienced as hypocrisy and would have been potentially visible to one's digital community. This mechanism, which might be called digital pledge accountability, constitutes a structural feature of social media environments that has no precise parallel in offline boycott contexts. Table 4 illustrates the types and frequencies of digital boycott actions reported by informants, drawing on both interview self-report and the digital trace verification described in Section 3.4.

Table 4. Types and Frequencies of Digital Boycott Actions Reported by Informants.

Boycott Action Type	Frequency (n=12)	% of Informants	Dominant Motivation
Product purchase withdrawal	11	91.7%	Value congruence and cognitive dissonance resolution
Sharing/reposting boycott content	12	100%	Social norm conformity and identity performance
Use of boycott-related hashtags	10	83.3%	Community solidarity and visibility enhancement
Commenting on brand or boycott-related posts	9	75.0%	Moral expression and peer reinforcement
Unfollowing brand accounts	8	66.7%	Symbolic distancing and digital disaffiliation
Creation of original boycott content	5	41.7%	Active moral agency and digital leadership
Recommendation of alternative brands	7	58.3%	Constructive activism and collective support
Participation in online discussions/debates	9	75.0%	Persuasion, identity assertion, and norm reinforcement

Contrary to the static, binary conceptualisation of boycott behaviour that characterises much quantitative research (either participating or not), the qualitative data revealed boycott behaviour to be dynamic, graduated, and contextually responsive. Informants moved between more and less active forms of boycott participation depending on the salience of the triggering issue at any given moment, the content in their social media feeds, and the perceived responses of targeted corporations. Particularly notable was the phenomenon of boycott revival: instances in which informants who had returned to consuming boycotted products reported renewed abstention following fresh viral content about the same issue. This revival pattern is at odds with the assumption of boycott decay reported in quantitative longitudinal studies [1] and suggests that digital environments sustain boycott relevance through periodic re-triggering of the original animosity. Figure 2 presents a schematic model of the brand animosity-to-digital boycott pathway developed from the empirical findings of this study.

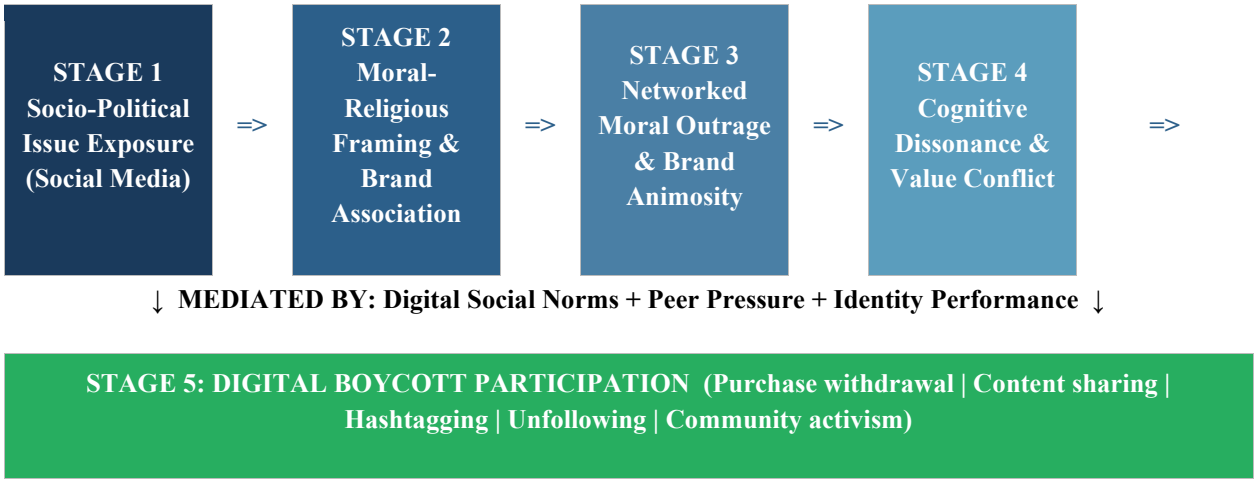

Figure 2. Five-Stage Model of Socio-Political Animosity-to-Digital Boycott Conversion.

4.4. Discussion: Theoretical Implications.

The findings of this study both confirm and tentatively extend classical brand animosity theory. They confirm the core proposition advanced by Klein and colleagues [8] that animosity is an independent determinant of brand avoidance, operating through emotional and moral channels rather than product quality assessments. The findings also suggest several points of departure from the classical model, which are presented here in cautious form given the qualitative and single-site nature of the evidence. First, brand animosity in digital environments appears to be collective rather than individual in its primary locus of formation, at least within the present sample. Where the original animosity model conceived of hostility as an individual-level affective disposition, the construct of networked moral outrage points toward an emergent property of digitally networked communities. This pattern resonates with the Dynamic Social Impact Theory framework applied by El-Menawy and colleagues [35] to social media boycott dynamics in Egypt, while remaining context-bound to the specific socio-cultural and religious mechanisms operating in Indonesia. Whether the same dynamic operates in non-religious activism contexts or in non-Muslim-majority emerging markets is an empirical question for further research.

Second, the findings suggest a more volatile temporal pattern than the relatively stable disposition assumed by classical animosity research [36]. Animosity can be rapidly activated, partially attenuated, and then sharply re-intensified through fresh digital content exposure. This periodic re-triggering, which might be conceptualised as animosity salience cycling,

complicates the implicit assumption in much quantitative research that a single measurement of animosity adequately captures its impact on consumption decisions across time.

Third, the findings on cognitive dissonance resolution add nuance to existing theory. The classical Festingerian account treats dissonance as a private psychological state resolved through internal cognitive work. The present data suggest that in social media environments, dissonance resolution becomes fundamentally public and performative. The visibility of digital boycott participation transforms what might otherwise be a private consumption withdrawal into a legible moral statement, with two consequences: a lowered participation threshold, since social rewards of visible alignment supplement intrinsic dissonance reduction, and a lock-in effect, since publicly committed boycotters experience renewed dissonance when tempted to return to consuming targeted brands. This lock-in dynamic is consistent with Chatterjee and colleagues' [21] findings on the role of public commitment in sustaining digital consumer activism.

Fourth, the application of TPB to digital contexts may require contextual adaptation along the three components identified in Section 4.3.2. The subjective norms component in particular operates through mechanisms different from those assumed in Ajzen's [9] original formulation. In offline contexts, subjective norms are constituted by the expectations of identifiable social referents; in digital social media environments, normative pressure is constituted through the ambient discursive environment of algorithmically curated feeds, which can create the impression of near-universal consensus even when actual opinion distributions are more varied. This ambient normativity is qualitatively different from referent-specific social pressure and may produce different behavioural outcomes, particularly in terms of the breadth and speed of mobilisation.

4.5. Practical Implications for Brand Management.

Table 5 summarises practical recommendations derived from the study's findings, with the caveat that these recommendations are derived from a single qualitative study and require validation through larger-scale comparative research.

Table 5. Practical Recommendations for Brand Crisis Management Based on Empirical Findings.

Finding	Implication	Recommended Strategic Response
Networked moral outrage emerges rapidly through algorithmic amplification	Conventional media monitoring is insufficient for early detection of crises	Implement real-time social listening systems incorporating sentiment analysis and moral framing detection
Brand animosity is primarily driven by symbolic value associations rather than operational or factual attributes	Fact-based correction strategies may have limited effectiveness in mitigating animosity	Develop proactive value-alignment communication strategies that engage with prevailing community moral frameworks
Digital pledge accountability mechanisms reinforce boycott commitment and behavioural lock-in	Reconciliation strategies must enable consumers to restore moral consistency without social penalty	Design engagement initiatives that reframe consumption as ethically compatible with consumers' value systems
Boycott behaviour is fluid and susceptible to repeated reactivation by external triggers	Crisis management should not be treated as a one-off intervention	Establish sustained stakeholder engagement strategies targeting highly sensitive digital communities
Cognitive dissonance resolution acts as a primary driver of boycott behaviour	Corporate responses must address psychological and moral dimensions, not only reputational damage	Integrate CSR and community engagement programmes aligned with the moral concerns underlying consumer animosity
Digital social norms generate persistent normative pressure within online communities	Individual-level communication strategies have limited influence against collective norm systems	Engage trusted community influencers, including religious and moral authorities, in communication strategies

The practical implications of this study for brand crisis management in digitally connected emerging markets are considerable. The findings suggest that traditional crisis

communication strategies based on factual correction and image restoration, such as those employed by McDonald's Indonesia through its Baznas collaboration [10], are necessary but insufficient when facing brand animosity driven by networked moral outrage. What corporations face in such contexts is not primarily a cognitive problem of misattribution but an emotional and moral problem of value incongruence. Communication strategies must therefore engage directly with the moral frameworks through which consumers evaluate brand behaviour, rather than simply disputing factual premises. The fluidity and revivability of digital boycott behaviour implies that brand managers cannot treat a particular boycott crisis as resolved once immediate consumer pressure subsides.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the formation of brand animosity among Generation Z consumers in Indonesia and its translation into digital boycott behaviour using a qualitative exploratory design combining netnography, in-depth interviews, and digital trace verification. The findings yielded three principal contributions. First, the study proposed networked moral outrage as a digital-era extension of Brand Animosity Theory. The construct was positioned as complementary to online moral outrage and digital activism, and was defined by algorithmic amplification and brand-specific affect that distinguished it from related concepts. Second, cognitive dissonance resolution was found to mediate the relationship between brand animosity and boycott participation, with social media rendering this process public and performative, thereby strengthening normative pressure and participation lock-in. Third, the study provided qualitative evidence of the animosity-to-boycott pathway in Indonesia, extending prior quantitative research conducted in other national contexts. Several limitations were identified. The sample was limited to one city (Bengkulu), restricting national generalisability given Indonesia’s regional diversity. The focus on Generation Z limited applicability to other age cohorts. In addition, the qualitative design precluded causal inference, and the proposed model should be interpreted as a heuristic rather than a causal structure. Finally, the digital trace data were restricted to publicly available posts, excluding private communication channels. Future research should adopt longitudinal, multi-site, and cross-cohort designs to validate and extend the proposed framework.

Author Contributions

Annisa Tussolihah: conceptualisation, data collection, formal analysis, original draft preparation, theoretical framework development. Andi Azhar: supervision, review and editing, funding acquisition.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest was reported by all authors.

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