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Digitally mediated consumer boycotts in transnational food risk controversies: A theory of planned behavior perspective

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Abstract: In digitally mediated markets, consumer boycotts are increasingly shaped by platform infrastructures, online visibility, and networked communication, transforming individual consumption choices into collective and publicly observable actions with direct implications for entrepreneurial ventures operating across borders. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study examines how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control predict boycott intention within social media environments—a dimension prior TPB research has not fully addressed. This study is distinctive in that it operationalizes each TPB construct through the lens of specific digital affordances: Algorithmic curation for attitude formation, social-proof mechanisms for normative influence, and e-commerce tools for perceived feasibility. Survey data from 336 working-age Chinese consumers were collected to examine boycott intention in response to Japan’s discharge of treated wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant. Multiple regression analysis shows that all three TPB constructs significantly predict boycott intention, with subjective norms exerting the strongest effect ($B = 0.813$), followed by perceived behavioral control ($B = 0.754$) and attitude ($B = 0.597$). In platform-driven contexts, consumer boycotts are shaped more strongly by digitally constructed social norms and platform-enabled perceptions of participation feasibility than by individual risk evaluation alone. By integrating TPB with a digital consumer perspective, this study contributes to research on consumer activism and entrepreneurship by elucidating how social media shapes consumer behavior and market responses in transnational contexts.

keywords: consumer boycott intention; theory of planned behavior; social media platforms; subjective norms; transnational food safety controversy; digital markets

1. Introduction

Consumer boycotts represent a significant form of collective action in which individuals refrain from purchasing products in response to perceived corporate or state misconduct [1]. Digital media have fundamentally reshaped how such collective action emerges and circulates, with social media platforms, online news networks, and algorithmic systems enabling rapid information diffusion and construction of shared moral frameworks. In transnational contexts, food safety and environmental risk controversies provide particularly fertile ground for digitally mediated consumer activism, where platforms function as critical arenas for negotiating blame, trust, and moral accountability.

On August 24, 2023, Japan commenced discharging treated wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean, triggering widespread protests and a consumer boycott in China. China’s General Administration of Customs suspended all imports of Japanese aquatic products citing public health concerns. This study examines the ‘Japan Seafood Boycott’ as a case of platform-driven collective action,

using the Theory of Planned Behavior to understand the factors driving Chinese consumers' participation by analyzing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

Digitally mediated consumer boycotts pose distinct challenges for entrepreneurial ventures and digital businesses operating in transnational markets. Unlike established corporations with diversified revenue streams and crisis management infrastructure, entrepreneurial ventures—particularly those in digital commerce, cross-border e-commerce, and food technology—face amplified vulnerability when boycott narratives circulate through social media algorithms [2]. Smaller ventures experience rapid reputational damage concentrated in digital spaces where they lack equity buffers [3,4]. For entrepreneurs in the seafood supply chain, food delivery platforms, or international trade services, understanding the psychological mechanisms driving boycott participation is essential for developing proactive communication strategies and building resilient digital brand architectures [5].

Despite extensive boycott research, most existing studies have applied TPB in offline or single-channel digital contexts. This study extends the framework in three specific ways: (1) it operationalizes each TPB construct through distinct digital mechanisms—algorithmic curation shaping attitudes, visible social-proof indicators intensifying subjective norms, and e-commerce tools reducing perceived barriers; (2) it examines how these digitally amplified mechanisms interact in a transnational food risk context involving geopolitical dimensions; and (3) it connects these psychological mechanisms to concrete implications for entrepreneurial decision-making. These extensions move beyond prior TPB boycott studies that treated social media exposure as a background condition rather than as a structuring force on each construct.

Previous research focused primarily on brand associations or firm performance impacts [6], treating boycotts as temporally bounded reactions rather than recurring phenomena with cascading effects on digital business models. Prior TPB applications to boycotts [7] confirmed the framework's predictive validity but did not systematically examine how each construct operates under intensified conditions of online visibility and algorithmic mediation.

This study addresses the research question: What is the impact of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on Chinese consumers' intention to boycott Japanese seafood? By applying the complete TPB framework within digital environments, this study advances understanding of how psychological determinants operate under intensified online visibility and rapid information diffusion. The findings benefit communication scholars examining platform-driven consumer resistance, entrepreneurs developing crisis communication strategies, policymakers managing digitally circulated responses to international relations crises, and businesses navigating transnational market volatility.

The study investigates boycott motivations among post-90s Chinese consumers (aged 25–40) employed at Ningbo Beyond Holding Group in Zhejiang, collecting data from February to April 2025. This demographic is characterized by high digital media engagement and substantial purchasing power, making it particularly relevant for examining digitally mediated consumption behavior.

2. Literature review

Consumer boycotts represent organized collective actions designed to influence corporate or governmental behavior through coordinated withdrawal of patronage, defined as ‘a punitive ban on relations with other bodies, cooperation with a policy, or the handling of goods [8]. Early research emphasized economic effectiveness and financial costs [9], while subsequent studies highlighted expressive motivations, framing boycotts as moral statements. Scholars distinguish between instrumental boycotts seeking specific policy outcomes and expressive boycotts functioning as symbolic value expression [9,10]. Contemporary boycotts often combine both dimensions, particularly in digital environments where public visibility and moral signaling are central. Participation correlates with education, income, brand awareness, and media exposure [11,12].

Consumer boycotts exert substantial influence on entrepreneurial ventures and platform-based firms, particularly in transnational contexts where cross-border commerce intensifies vulnerability to consumer mobilization [13]. Entrepreneurial ventures operating in digital marketplaces face asymmetric exposure compared to established corporations, as their business models depend heavily on digital reputation systems and consumer trust signals that can rapidly amplify negative sentiment [2]. Platform-based firms serving as intermediaries—such as cross-border e-commerce platforms, digital food delivery services, and online retail aggregators—encounter unique challenges when boycott movements target specific national origins or product categories [14,15]. For digital businesses in the seafood supply chain, including online seafood retailers and direct-to-consumer subscription services, transnational boycotts create immediate market disruption by fragmenting consumer bases along national lines [13,14]. Understanding the psychological mechanisms driving boycott intentions is therefore critical for entrepreneurial decision-making regarding market entry, product diversification, and crisis preparedness.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a robust framework for understanding the psychological determinants of boycott intentions. As shown in **Figure 1**, the TPB posits that behavioral intention is determined by three core constructs: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control [16]. Behavioral beliefs shape attitudes through perceived consequences, normative beliefs reflect perceptions of social approval forming subjective norms, and control beliefs encompass perceived facilitators and barriers. Intentions serve as the most proximal predictor of behavior, with favorable attitudes, positive social pressure, and greater perceived control each enhancing intention strength.

Although developed prior to digital media’s rise, TPB remains valuable when adapted to mediated contexts. Its simplicity and predictive capacity make it widely applicable in consumer research [17,18]. Studies have explored Muslim tourism boycotts [19,20] and moral-based supermarket boycotts [21]. Klein et al. [22] found perceived behavioral control most significantly influences boycott intentions related to genetically modified foods, while Yamoah and Yawson [7] confirmed all three TPB constructs as key predictors in food safety boycott contexts. Cultural differences affect TPB application, with collectivist backgrounds amplifying the effects of subjective norms [23].

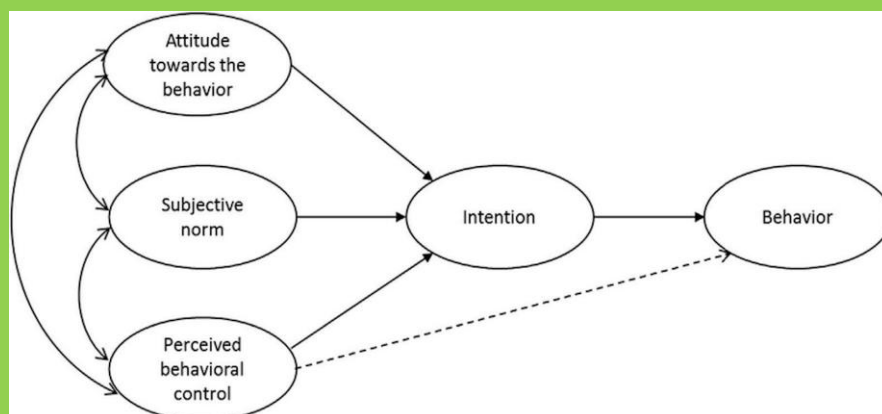


Figure 1. The model of theory of planned behavior [16].

Attitudes significantly influence intention formation, particularly in digital environments where attitudes are shaped through repeated exposure to emotionally laden narratives and peer commentary on social platforms. Algorithmic curation amplifies affective and moralized content, intensifying attitude formation as users encounter platform-prioritized narratives emphasizing moral accountability and collective disapproval. Boycotts profoundly influence consumers' attitudes and purchasing intentions [11,22], with participation representing emotional expression of consumer attitudes [24]. In the context of this study, the digitally specific mechanism is that the Fukushima boycott framing was not passively received but actively reinforced by content recommendation systems, creating repeated exposure effects that prior offline TPB studies could not capture.

Subjective norms substantially influence boycott intentions, with effects amplified in digital contexts [21,25]. In digital environments, normative influence is intensified through visible approval indicators such as likes, shares, and comments that signal collective expectations. Platform affordances enhance perceived consensus visibility, as algorithmic curation prioritizes socially endorsed content, potentially creating perceptions of higher agreement than actually exists. Wang and Chou [26] found consumers more likely to boycott unethical products when influenced by subjective norms. In digital contexts, normative influences become more transparent and immediately observable, transforming boycott participation into publicly visible communicative acts where social recognition and moral signaling are central.

Perceived behavioral control plays a pivotal role in influencing intention to engage in resistive behavior [27]. In digital environments, perceived control is enhanced by access to information, alternative products, and digital tools that lower practical participation barriers. Platform-based communication provides immediate access to coordination mechanisms, substitution information, and social support networks facilitating boycott participation. In South Korea's Japanese product boycott, perceived behavioral control directly inhibited consumers' purchases [25]. Digital platforms reduce traditional collective action obstacles by enabling horizontal coordination and reducing search costs for alternatives—a mechanism absent from most prior TPB boycott studies conducted in offline settings.

Building on the TPB framework and its application to digitally mediated consumer boycotts, this study develops a conceptual model examining Chinese

consumers' intention to boycott Japanese seafood. **Figure 2** presents the conceptual framework operationalizing the relationships between the three TPB constructs—attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control—and boycott intention. Based on this framework and the literature review, three hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Attitude has a significant positive effect on intention towards boycotting Japanese seafood.

H2: Subjective norm has a significant positive effect on intention towards boycotting Japanese seafood.

H3: Perceived behavioral control has a significant positive effect on intention towards boycotting Japanese seafood.

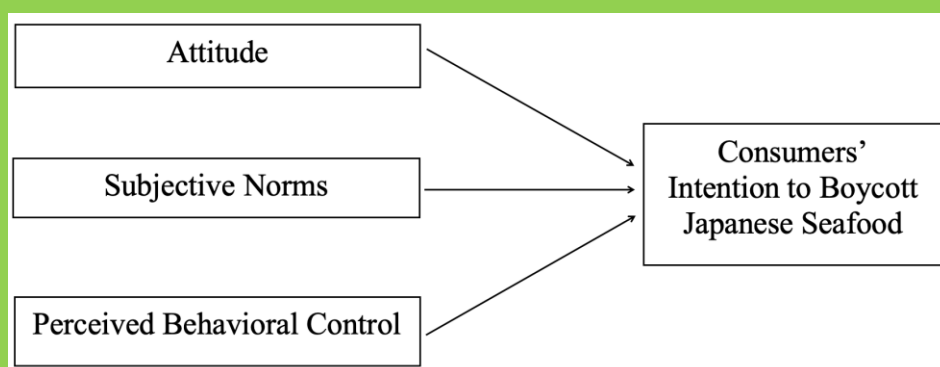


Figure 2. Conceptual framework for the intention to boycott Japanese products among Chinese consumers.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey design to examine consumer boycott intention within digitally mediated communication environments. The target population consisted of Post-90s Chinese consumers (aged 25–40) in Ningbo, Zhejiang, recruited through Ningbo Beyond Holding Group. This demographic is characterized by high digital media engagement and substantial purchasing power, making it particularly relevant for examining digitally mediated consumption behavior.

The conceptual framework incorporated attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control as independent variables, with boycott intention as the dependent variable. A causal research design was adopted, and hypotheses were tested using an online survey method, reflecting the platform-based nature of contemporary collective action. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26 for Mac, employing descriptive statistics, reliability testing, and multiple regression analysis.

Participants were employees of Ningbo Beyond Holding Group, selected based on convenience and accessibility. Eligible respondents were aged 25–40, held Chinese citizenship or permanent residency, and were proficient in Chinese or English. This cohort represents nearly 30% of China's population and constitutes one of the most digitally active consumer groups. Beyond Holdings Group employs approximately 16,000 individuals, with about 4,800 employees within the target age range.

Simple random sampling was employed. Using employee lists from the company's human resources department, 450 potential participants were randomly

selected using Microsoft Excel's random number generator. Sample size was calculated using the formula as shown in the Equation (1).

$$n=N \times X / (X+N-1) \quad (1)$$

where the value of X can be found in Equation (2).

$$X=Z^2 P(1-P) / MOE^2 \quad (2)$$

Assuming a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and $P=0.5$, the minimum required sample size was approximately 357. A total of 336 valid responses were collected, which exceeded conventional thresholds for multiple regression analysis with the number of predictors in this study and was thus considered adequate for the analytical procedures employed [28,29].

It is important to note that concentrating the sample on a single company in Ningbo restricts the generalizability of findings to the broader Chinese consumer population. Ningbo is a coastal, economically developed city with high exposure to Japanese cultural and commercial influences, which may have intensified boycott-related attitudes compared to inland or less affluent regions. Future studies should replicate this analysis across multiple companies, industries, and geographic regions to establish broader external validity.

A structured questionnaire using a 7-point Likert scale was developed based on established TPB instruments and adapted to digitally mediated consumption contexts. Following a pilot study with 30 participants and subsequent revisions, the formal survey was administered online between February and April 2025 via the WJX platform, functionally comparable to Amazon Mechanical Turk.

The questionnaire comprised 24 items across five sections. Section 1 included eight demographic items. Section 2 contained four items measuring attitude toward boycotting, adapted from Farah and Newman [24], using evaluative terms such as useful, good, reasonable, and desirable. Section 3 included six items measuring subjective norms, adapted from Ajzen [30], Hino [31], and Knussen and Yule [32], capturing perceived social pressure shaped by visible online approval and peer participation. Section 4 comprised four items measuring perceived behavioral control, adapted from Terry and O'Leary [33]. Section 5 included four items measuring boycott intention, adapted from Maher and Mady [34].

Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. As shown in **Table 1**, the pretest results indicated that the attitude scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha above 0.9, indicating potential item redundancy. After reducing attitude items to four, the alpha decreased to 0.879, indicating optimal internal consistency. Final Cronbach's alpha values—Attitude (0.879), Subjective Norms (0.739), Perceived Behavioral Control (0.844), and Intention (0.883)—fell within acceptable ranges [35], confirming satisfactory reliability.

Convergent and discriminant validity were evaluated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) procedures. Item loadings on their respective constructs were examined to confirm convergent validity. The relatively clean factor structure supported the theorized four-factor model. While full structural equation modeling was beyond the scope of this study, the CFA-based validation procedures provide confidence that each scale captured its intended construct with reasonable precision.

Future research should employ more comprehensive validity assessments including average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability to further strengthen measurement rigor.

Statistical analyses were conducted with significance set at $P < 0.05$. Composite mean scores were computed for each construct. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine the relative influence of the three predictors on boycott intention, with standardized regression coefficients indicating relative predictor strength and R^2 values assessing the model's explanatory power [36].

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for variables.

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Attitude	.879	4
SNs	.739	6
PBC	.844	4
Intention	.883	4

4. Results and discussion

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the 336 respondents. The sample was predominantly female (57%), with the largest age group being 25–28 years (41%). Bachelor's degree holders constituted the majority (56%), and most respondents earned between ¥5000 and ¥10,000 monthly (34%). Regionally, participants came from diverse areas across China, with Southeast China (20%) and Eastern China (18%) most represented, suggesting that while the sampling frame was based in Ningbo, many employees had geographic origins spanning the country.

Short video platforms (27%) and social media platforms (26%) were the primary digital media channels, followed by news applications (19%) and official government websites (13%). Most respondents (59%) spent 1–3 hours daily on digital media, while 19% exceeded 5 hours, indicating substantial digital immersion. This profile reflects a digitally connected, educated, and economically empowered consumer group, providing a solid foundation for examining how digital media shapes boycott intentions.

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents ($N = 336$).

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	25–28	139	41
	29–32	68	20
	33–36	60	18
	37–40	69	21
Gender	Male	142	42
	Female	191	57
	Non-binary / Third gender	3	1
Region	Northern China	21	6

Table 2. (Continued).

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Region	Northeast China	19	6
	Eastern China	60	18
	Western China	17	5
	Northwest China	15	5
	Southern China	44	13
	Central China	45	13
	Southwest China	48	14
	Southeast China	67	20
Education	High school degOther	14	4
	Professional degree	55	16
	Bachelor's degree	188	56
	Master's degree	68	20
	Doctoral degree	8	2
	Other	3	1
Working year	less than 1 year	78	23
	1–3 years	81	24
	4–6 years	49	15
	7–9 years	50	15
	10-more than 10 years	78	23
Salary	No income	29	9
	Under 5.000 ¥	74	22
	5.000 ¥–10.000 ¥	114	34
	10.000 ¥–15.000 ¥	73	22
	15.000 ¥–20.000 ¥	25	7
	Over 20.000 ¥	21	6
Digital media channel	Social media platforms	88	26
	Short video platforms	92	27
	Instant messaging	29	9
	News applications	65	19
	Search engines	18	5
	Official government websites / portals	42	13
Frequency of digital media usage	Other	2	1
	Less than 1 hour	71	21
	1–3 hours	198	59
	More than 5 hours	65	19
	Rarely or never	2	1

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the four constructs. Attitudes toward boycotting Japanese seafood were generally positive ($M = 5.44$, $SD = 1.40$). The relatively high mean indicates that online discourse surrounding Japan's wastewater discharge successfully framed the boycott as morally justified. Some variability in

attitudes reflects differential exposure to digital narratives, media literacy, and skepticism toward emotionally charged content.

Subjective norms also exhibited a high mean score ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 1.07$), indicating strong perceived social pressure from digital networks. The lower variability compared to attitudes suggests greater consensus regarding social expectations—consistent with the TPB prediction that normative beliefs reflect collective rather than individual evaluations.

Perceived behavioral control showed the highest mean value ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.12$), indicating that respondents generally felt confident in their ability to boycott. This aligns with TPB’s conception of perceived control as a capacity belief, here supported by digital tools such as e-commerce filters and origin verification systems that reduce practical barriers.

Boycott intention was also high ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.25$), though with notable variability reflecting individual differences in risk perception, trust in information sources, and consumption habits.

Table 3. Variable description of respondents ($N = 336$).

Construct	Item	Mean	Std. deviation
Attitude	My participation in the boycott against Japanese seafood is: 1. Useful 2. Good 3. Reasonable 4. Desirable	5.44	1.40
SNs	1. My parents think I should avoid buying Japanese seafood. 2. My friend think I should avoid buying Japanese seafood. 3. My boyfriend/girlfriend think I should avoid buying Japanese seafood. 4. Most people who are important to me think that I should refrain from buying Japanese seafood. 5. Key opinion leaders in digital media influence me to boycott Japanese seafood. 6. If more people boycott, I would boycott more.	5.46	1.07
PBC	1. I want to know how much control do I have over whether I boycott Japanese seafood. 2. If I want, I can refrain from buying Japanese seafood. 3. I have total control over whether I do or do not boycott Japanese seafood. 4. For me to boycott Japanese seafood will be very easy.	5.85	1.12
Intention	1. Whenever possible, I would avoid buying Japanese seafood. 2. I won’t consider buying Japanese seafood. 3. I will reduce the number of times I buy Japanese seafood. 4. I would never buy Japanese seafood.	5.51	1.25

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on boycott intention. **Table 4** presents the results. The overall model was statistically significant, and the R^2 value indicated that the three TPB constructs together explained a substantial proportion of variance in boycott intention.

Attitude significantly predicted boycott intention ($B = 0.597$, $P < .01$), supporting H1. In keeping with TPB, this confirms that a positive evaluative stance toward the boycott translates into stronger behavioral intention. However, the relatively modest

coefficient compared to the other two predictors suggests that in the context of the Fukushima controversy—where moral and safety framings were widespread—individual attitudinal evaluation was supplemented by stronger social and feasibility-based influences.

Table 4. Results of hypotheses testing.

Hypothesis	Path relationship	Coefficient <i>B</i>
H1	Attitude → Intention	.597**
H2	SNs → Intention	.813**
H3	PBC → Intention	.754**

Note: * $P < .05$; ** $P < .01$; *** $P < .001$

Subjective norms exerted the strongest influence on boycott intention ($B = 0.813$, $P < .01$), fully supporting H2. This finding aligns with TPB’s core proposition that normative beliefs—perceptions of what important others expect—are a primary driver of behavioral intention. The amplification of this effect beyond what prior offline TPB studies typically report is consistent with the heightened visibility of social consensus in digital environments, where approval indicators and influencer endorsements make normative expectations immediately observable.

Perceived behavioral control also had a significant positive effect on boycott intention ($B = 0.754$, $P < .01$), supporting H3. TPB predicts that greater perceived control over performing a behavior strengthens intention; here, digital affordances providing product origin information, substitution alternatives, and e-commerce filters appear to have reinforced this sense of capacity. Misinformation or limited digital literacy could undermine this perceived control, potentially weakening intention-behavior consistency.

The results confirm the applicability of TPB in digital media contexts and reveal important variations in the relative weights of its three constructs compared to prior offline studies. Most notably, subjective norms emerged as the dominant predictor ($B = 0.813$), a pattern that is less pronounced in traditional offline TPB boycott studies where attitude and perceived behavioral control often exert comparably strong effects [22]. This shift has a clear theoretical explanation: the digital affordances of the China Seafood Boycott context—likes, shares, follower counts, trending hashtags, and influencer content—made normative pressure unusually visible, immediate, and quantified. In Ajzen’s [16] original formulation, normative beliefs reflect perceptions of what relevant others expect; in digital contexts, these perceptions are continuously updated and publicly displayed, systematically amplifying normative influence.

The strong effect of perceived behavioral control ($B = 0.754$) illustrates how digital tools restructure TPB’s control component. In offline boycott settings, perceived control is shaped by individual factors such as access to substitute products or awareness of alternatives. In the present context, e-commerce filters, origin verification systems, and peer-generated substitution guides collectively reduced the information and transaction costs of boycott participation, translating directly into higher perceived feasibility. This finding extends TPB by identifying specific digital mechanisms—rather than individual cognitive processes alone—as drivers of perceived behavioral control in collective action settings.

The comparatively weaker attitude effect ($B = 0.597$) does not suggest that attitudes are unimportant; rather, it reflects that when both normative consensus and behavioral feasibility are high, attitude variation explains proportionally less of the residual variance in intention. This finding aligns with TPB's allowance for differential weighting of constructs across contexts, and provides theoretical direction for future digital boycott research to examine how the balance among the three constructs shifts across different platform environments and controversy types.

The dominance of normative influence carries direct implications for entrepreneurial crisis communication. When boycott behavior is primarily normatively driven, conventional crisis strategies that prioritize factual correction or product safety assurances are insufficient on their own. A company releasing scientific evidence about the safety of its products may fail to shift boycott intentions if normative pressure remains high and participation remains easy. Effective crisis response must therefore address all three TPB levers simultaneously.

For the subjective norms dimension, entrepreneurial ventures should invest in building authentic community relationships before crises emerge. Concretely, this means: establishing ongoing partnerships with credible micro-influencers who can provide counter-narratives; maintaining active brand communities with genuine social capital; and conducting real-time social listening to detect normative shifts early, enabling rapid response before consensus crystallizes. When boycott calls begin circulating, rapid engagement with trusted community voices—rather than corporate statements alone—is more likely to provide effective normative counter-pressure.

For the perceived behavioral control dimension, businesses should recognize the double-edged nature of digital transparency. Product origin filters and traceability disclosures that build trust in normal operating conditions can simultaneously lower boycott participation barriers during controversies. This suggests that platform interface design decisions—how to display country-of-origin information, whether to implement product filtering by national source—become strategic acts with reputational implications during geopolitical tensions. Platform operators should consider graduated disclosure architectures that maintain transparency commitments while building in response mechanisms during heightened controversy periods.

For the attitude dimension, crisis communications should operate on the moral and emotional levels where attitudes are formed in digital contexts, not solely on the rational information level. This means engaging with the emotional and symbolic dimensions of public discourse, acknowledging community concerns authentically, and where appropriate, making visible the firm's own values and social commitments that resonate with the moral frameworks activated by boycott narratives.

More broadly, entrepreneurial ventures entering transnational digital markets should treat platform literacy—understanding algorithmic logics, content moderation systems, and social proof mechanisms—as a core strategic capability alongside product development and financial management. Market diversification across geographic regions and consumer segments reduces the severity of boycott impacts when a single national supply chain or consumer base becomes the target of controversy.

This study has several limitations that point toward future research directions. First, the geographic and organizational concentration of the sample in Ningbo, China,

and specifically within a single company, limits generalizability. Ningbo is a coastal, economically developed city with distinctive cultural and commercial exposure to Japan, and Beyond Holding Group employees may not represent the diversity of Chinese consumers more broadly. Future studies should recruit samples across multiple cities, regions, and industries—including inland and rural areas where economic conditions and media exposure patterns differ substantially.

Second, this study measures boycott intention rather than actual behavior. Intentions do not always translate to behavior, and the intention-behavior gap may be particularly pronounced in contexts where social desirability biases operate—respondents may report higher boycott intention due to normative pressure than they would actually enact in purchasing decisions. Future research should employ behavioral tracking methodologies, such as actual purchase data from e-commerce platforms, to examine the intention-behavior relationship.

Third, the cross-sectional design captures a single point during the boycott period and cannot examine temporal dynamics—how boycott intensity evolves as online discourse shifts, how normative pressure dissipates over time, or whether platform algorithm adjustments affect boycott sustainability. Longitudinal research designs or experience sampling methodologies would provide richer insight into these dynamics.

Fourth, while CFA procedures were used for validity assessment, more comprehensive psychometric evaluation including average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability would strengthen measurement confidence. Future studies should also consider integrating additional theoretical frameworks from digital activism theory and network analysis to capture the emergent, collective dimensions of platform-driven boycott movements that individual-level TPB analysis may underestimate.

5. Conclusion

This study examined Chinese consumers' intentions to boycott Japanese seafood following Japan's discharge of treated wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant in August 2023. Using the Theory of Planned Behavior, the research analyzed how attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control influence boycott intention in digital environments. Analysis of 336 survey responses revealed that all three TPB constructs significantly predicted boycott intentions, with subjective norm exerting the strongest effect ($B = 0.813, P < .01$), followed by perceived behavioral control ($B = 0.754, P < .01$) and attitude ($B = 0.597, P < .01$).

This study makes three key theoretical contributions. First, it extends TPB to digital contexts and demonstrates that the relative influence of its constructs shifts substantially in platform-driven environments. The dominance of subjective norms—beyond the levels reported in most offline boycott studies—reflects how digital affordances such as visibility mechanisms, social proof indicators, and influencer endorsements systematically amplify normative influence, transforming boycott participation into publicly accountable moral performances. Second, it identifies specific digital mechanisms underpinning each TPB construct: algorithmic curation for attitude formation, social approval indicators for normative intensification, and e-commerce tools for perceived feasibility. This specificity extends the framework

beyond generic media effects and provides actionable insight into which platform features most strongly shape each component. Third, by conceptualizing the Japan seafood boycott as a case of recurring platform-driven consumer mobilization, the study provides a transferable framework applicable to future transnational food safety and geopolitical risk controversies.

For entrepreneurial ventures and digital businesses navigating transnational consumer markets, the practical message is clear: platform-mediated crises are battles over social legitimacy and behavioral feasibility, not merely over information accuracy. Effective responses require parallel strategies addressing normative discourse, behavioral architecture, and emotional-moral communication simultaneously. Investment in social listening infrastructure, authentic community relationships, and platform literacy—before crises emerge—constitutes the most durable form of crisis preparedness.

As algorithmic systems evolve and digital platforms deepen their penetration into commerce and communication, understanding the interaction between digital consumers and entrepreneurial ventures becomes increasingly critical. This study provides a foundation for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers navigating the complex terrain where consumer activism, platform capitalism, and transnational commerce intersect in the digital economy.

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