

Ethical public typology: How does moral foundation theory and anticorporatism predict changes in public perceptions during a crisis?

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Abstract

This study proposes a new public typology utilising moral foundation theory and anticorporatism. The current paper conceptualised four ethical types of public (e.g., moralists, antagonists, optimists, and pragmatists) and conducted an online survey using a national sample ($N = 1124$) to test the applicability of the new typology. Our results suggest that different types of publics react differently in attributing crisis responsibility, expressing their emotional responses, and showing boycott intentions in evaluating a corporate crisis.

KEYWORDS

anticorporatism, boycott, crisis attribution, emotions, ethical consumerism, moral foundation theory, public segmentation

1 | INTRODUCTION

Understanding the diverse forms of publics is necessary for communication scholars and practice (Grunig & Repper, 1992; Hong et al., 2012). According to Grunig and Repper (1992, p. 124, 127), public should be differentiated by stakeholders who are chosen depending on the organisation's marketing strategies, recruiting, and investment plans. On the other hand, the public chooses an organisation for attention and form when stakeholders recognise one or more of the consequences as a problem. Yet the real issue is that different groups of the public with different characteristics influence the extent to which they pay attention to, understand, and act on different messages (Brown-Devlin et al., 2021; Hong et al., 2012; Ni & Kim, 2009). Thus, an organisation establishes a target to better customise its tactics and messages to meet the target's preferences. It is the informational substantiality that leads the public to trust an organisation (Y. Lee & Li, 2021). This is also why many scholars have attempted to develop various public segmentations (Grunig, 1997;

Hong et al., 2012; Kim, 2011, 2015; Kim et al., 2008; Ni & Kim, 2009; Sha, 2006).

Segmenting publics into a certain type involves the classification of prospective target groups, in accordance with their needs and their tendencies generating a similar response to a particular issue (Kim, 2015). So far, the most prominent segmentation has been developed by Grunig (1997) who identified four types of publics: aware publics, latent publics, active publics, and non-publics. Using this framework, scholars continuously have acknowledged the importance of targeting a specific public in crisis communication (Campiranon & Arcodia, 2008; Claeys et al., 2021; Fediuk et al., 2010; Jin & Liu, 2010; Wen et al., 2021). Oh et al. (2021) underscored the importance of recipient centred messages. Because, for an organisation to communicate effectively during a time of crisis, targeting a certain group who would perceive a situation to be more serious than others would provide better outcomes in a more efficient way (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). Lee and Moon (2021) also attempted to provide a new public segmentation using individuals' political stances.

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However, previous classifications do not provide an explanation about how individuals who differ in their moral states would react differently toward a crisis as the dominant typology (e.g., Grunig, 1997) was developed using three facets that are conceptually disparate (e.g., problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement recognition). In this regard, public relations (PR) practitioners and researchers need to use multiple methods to identify the public as ethical concerns can affect their decision-making (Toledano & Avidar, 2016). Another major reason for the lack of such typology in ethical perspectives, in addition to the relative youth of the theoretical approach, is that crisis communication research does not include valid administered concepts. As assessment and implementation of public segmentation using moral judgement require deliberate procedures and approaches, identifying a key public group based on its ethical judgement tendency could significantly help practitioners acknowledge how a group shares either positive or negative information about an organisation (Kim & Rhee, 2011). This calls for the further development of public segmentation using ethical perspectives in the field of crisis communication. To this end, this paper aims to provide a new public typology by integrating two underlying ethical perspectives: *Moral foundation theory* (MFT) and *anticorporatism*. Based on using those two dimensions, the first part of the paper yields a 2 × 2 of ethical classification of publics to describe how ethical approaches should be applied in crisis communication research. The second part of this paper tests how the new classification could be applied in attributing crisis responsibility, expressing their emotional responses, and showing boycott intentions.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Moral foundations theory

MFT argues for a public-centred view in which an individual develops its own moral values governing ethical perceptions, judgements, and behaviours (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007). The theory includes two perspectives: moral intuition and moral reasoning (Haidt, 2007). According to Haidt (2007), moral intuition is a quick and automatic emotional evaluation of good or bad. Moral decisions follow moral intuition. Moral decisions and behavioural intentions stem from “affect” rather than from logic. On the other hand, moral reasoning is slower, thus hardly leads to decisions, more deliberate and controlled, based on cognition and judgement of ethical violation. Kohlberg's (1969) theory of cognitive moral development provides the backbone concept for moral reasoning. MFT was developed to address several fundamental questions and assumptions about individual moral values and their valuation processes (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007) with five moral intuitions: 1) harm/care, 2) fairness/reciprocity, 3) in-group/loyalty, 4) authority/respect, and 5) purity/sanctity. Such aspects are related to self-driven ethical judgements, and concern equitable treatment of all individuals to maximise everyone's autonomy and welfare (Graham et al., 2011). This study specifically focuses on harm/care and fairness/reciprocity

in the context of measuring the public tendency to evaluate ethical lapses.

MFT provides a useful lens to explain the moral psychology behind the publics' vengeful and punitive actions against a corporate system and to gauge the significant impact of liberal ethics on public perceptions toward a corporation in a crisis. The advantage of using MFT in relation to ethics is that MFT offers individualising moral foundations that well explain grass-root motivations for social justice. As we are looking at global business practices involved in corporate irresponsibility as a transgression of human rights, MFT is a suitable framework to explore how the individual views and processes the issue, based on their moral foundations. In many cases, moral outrage tends to trigger behaviour but we also admit that sometimes their judgement is different from their action, which is called the “Attitude-behaviour gap” (Bray et al., 2011). The study found low moral maturity and young age can impede ethical consumption or boycott behaviour, but it seems clear that high ethical sensitivity and moral awareness, often, although not entirely, drive moral outrage and action that is based on the publics' moral foundations. Therefore, communication practitioners are better aware of public-centred ethics via this framework and comprehend how morals function when managing communication in times of crisis.

2.2 | Anticorporatism

The second criterion to define ethical segmentation of publics is anticorporatism. Although the nature and context of anti-corporatism differ in each country, anticorporatism can be defined as “opposition to the dominance and power of multinational corporations over national states and citizens” (Sadler, 2004, p. 853). In general, anticorporatism sees corporations as evil and dangerous to democracy and community well-being. Kim & Lee (2014, p. 10) explained anticorporatism with a focus on “media's emphasis on the negative sides of corporations over positive ones.” Unlike the relationship between employees and their organisation that relies on precrisis reputation (Y. Kim & Lim, 2020), publics who are anticorporate believe that the power of corporations is excessive enough to wield control over politics and to endanger social justice and democracy. They also negatively assess and criticise entrepreneurs.

In recent years, the polarisation of extreme procorporate and anticorporatism has continued. Wolf (2018) found that people have become more suspicious and distrustful about corporations' motivations. People perceive anticorporatism as individuals' disposition based on previously accumulated personal direct or vicarious experiences, and perceptions. Sadler (2004, p. 853) stated that anticorporatism is “opposition to the dominance and power of multinational corporations over national states and citizens.” In this regard, this study conceptualises that anticorporatism is an accumulated and continued negative perception toward large corporate entities. Consequently, anticorporatism is the perception of too much power concentrated in the hands of a few big companies, too much

profit earned by big companies, and a fair balance between making profits and serving the public interest.

2.3 | Ethical public typology

Taken together, we propose the new classification of publics based on ethical perspectives. Existing literature suggests that two criteria—moral foundation and anticorporatism—are paramount in understanding the publics' evaluations and judgements of an organisation in a crisis. With this new segmentation that exhibits different combinations of high and low levels of moral foundation and high and low levels of anticorporatism, it is predicted that each group will have a different moral orientation to an organisation that needs to utilise different communication strategies and tailored messages. Using the abovementioned rationalisations, four different typologies to define ethical segmentation of publics are posited: 1) moralists (high in both individual moral foundation and anticorporatism), 2) antagonists (high in the individual moral foundation and low in anticorporate sentiment), 3) optimists (low in the individual moral foundation and high in anticorporate sentiment), 4) pragmatists (low in both dimensions).

Moralist publics are conceptualised as those who tend to hold a strong level of moral awareness based on moral foundations such as justice/fairness and harm/care. Therefore, they tend to frame a corporate crisis in the context of ethical lapses and irresponsibility. As a result, this group is the most sensitive and reactive to a corporate crisis.

Antagonist publics are not concerned about ethics in real life and one's own problem-solving, unlike moralist publics. However, they hold a negative bias against corporate activities. Therefore, regardless of moral violations, this group tends to criticise, blame, or call for revenge against corporate irresponsibility or crisis.

Optimist publics uphold strong moral values and are morally aware of the virtue of justice and care. They tend to regard corporate works as aligned with their moral standard. Therefore, this group demonstrates a business-friendly attitude. But, if a company violates its moral standards, the optimist public becomes sensitive to the incident or emotionally engaged based on a sense of betrayal.

Pragmatist publics are neither concerned about moral values nor hold a negative attitude toward corporations. That means this group is interested only in practicality, rather than justice and moral principle. They are indifferent to matters unrelated to their personal lives. In the same vein, pragmatist publics would not be influenced by misbehaving corporations.

2.4 | Crisis attribution

Once classifications are made, those four types of ethical segmentation can be used to provide a powerful segmentation tool by measuring behavioural outcomes. According to MFT, people tend to

make ethical judgements based on their appraisals of an ethical issue. When observing a corporate firm's egregious behaviour, individuals tend to clarify what went wrong, how it went wrong, and who is responsible for the moral failure. Business researchers have been interested in the process by which individuals derive an understanding of who caused the current problem. Such cognitive processing helps the public to identify who is responsible; this is called blame attribution (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016). Those studies demonstrate that active public participation is a function of blame attribution. In Bradfield and Aquino's (1999) study, people tended to use blame attribution with a view toward restorative justice. Based on the aforementioned research, it appears that individualising moral foundations directly could impact blame attribution.

Anticorporate sentiment appears to be an antecedent of blame attribution, as people's inherent bias perceives the corporation as a villain. Accordingly, people tend to blame the corporation as the cause of the crisis. According to previous research, anticorporate thinkers tend to argue that corporations hold too much political, economic, and social power, thus unfairly securing privileges while creating social problems (Hertz, 2003). In this regard, it is conjectured that anticorporate sentiment will lead to blaming attribution when a corporate crisis happens because corporate greediness is the cause of the crisis.

2.5 | Negative emotion

The role of emotional outrage in publics' vengeful behaviours is well documented in communication management research applying appraisal theories of emotion (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999; Lindenmeier et al., 2012; Nerb & Spada, 2001; Zourrig et al., 2009). Moral outrage refers to "anger provoked by the perception that a moral standard such as an individual's standard of fairness or justice has been violated..." (Batson et al., 2007).

Antonetti and Maklan's (2016) research on emotional reactions to egregious corporate behaviour revealed that a moral violation directly influences moral outrage. One notable finding from their study is that emotional outrage strongly correlates with negative word-of-mouth. In making logical connections between emotional reactions to corporate misbehaviour it appears that moral values play an important role in inducing public anger directed toward the company. For instance, Vassilikopoulou et al. (2011) found that individuals' ethical beliefs, along with their perceived degree of ethical violation, elicited anger during an organisation's crisis caused by product harm. As noted above, anticorporatism is a negative perception toward corporations. Furthermore, the public's anticorporate sentiment must be differentiated from situational affective responses or situational emotional reactions of the public. Therefore, it appears that inherent antagonistic attitudes toward a corporation would affect the publics' temporary or situational emotional reactions, such as anger in the context of crisis communication and we propose.

2.6 | Boycott intentions

In the business context, moral motivations are the primary driver of consumer participation in boycotts against big companies (Hoffmann & Müller, 2009). While various motives drive consumers to boycott, ethical judgements are key motivators for consumers to participate in boycotts. Some consumers participate to make a social difference (John & Klein, 2003). The sense of efficacy to achieve the intended goal, along with a likelihood of success and the costs associated with joining boycotts, are important predictors of boycott behaviours (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). This allows consumers to have feelings of moral duty or fulfilment (John & Klein, 2003; Makarem & Jae, 2016). Therefore, it is tentatively concluded that moral foundations are connected to boycott intentions against corporate misbehaviour.

Considerable research indicates that anticorporate sentiment is a phenomenal antecedent of diverse forms of boycott activities such as anti-brand campaigns (e.g., Karagianni & Cornelissen, 2006; Starr, 2000). Specifically, it is suggested that anticorporatism triggers various motives in anticorporate activities and movements. Taken together, it seems likely that if the measures of individual foundations and anticorporatism actually measure tendencies of an individual's ethical traits as public, those measures also should be related to actual behaviour when presented with the situation of how corporations violate their ethical expectations. Consequently, it is predicted that *moralist* publics (high in both individual foundation and anticorporatism) will have more emotional reactions, crisis attribution, and boycott intentions against corporations, while *pragmatist* publics, who are ethically indifferent, will have a low level of emotional reaction, crisis attribution and boycott intention against corporations. It is reasonable to assume that *antagonists* and *optimist* publics will have a moderate level of emotional reaction, crisis attribution, and boycott intention against corporations. Taken together, the following research questions are asked:

RQ1–RQ3: Does *ethical public typology using moral foundations and anticorporatism generate different (1) crisis attribution, (2) emotional reactions, and (3) boycott intentions?*

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Sample

This study used a large-scale survey to be able to generalise the results. Qualtrics panels have a reputation for providing population-representative data collection (Brandon et al., 2013) and are considered able to collect reliable data in testing individual behaviours with its large data pool (Holt & Loraas, 2018).

The total number of participants was $N = 1124$ with a mean age of 35 ($SD = 8.01$), with 51% reporting as female ($n = 579$). As to participants' ethnicity, the largest portion comprised Caucasian (81%, $n = 916$), followed by African-American (5.6%, $n = 63$), Asian (4.7%,

$n = 53$), Hispanic (4.3%, $n = 48$), and "other." Participants' mean age was 46.42 ($SD = 16.51$).

3.2 | Procedure

The web survey included measures for demographic information, antecedents for moral foundation and anticorporatism sentiment, a modified scenario extracted from a published story on a crisis, and participants' emotional reactions and behavioural outcomes toward the stimulus (the scenario). The stimulus story was developed from a real-life crisis case to provide accuracy and realism, although all identifying information (e.g., companies' names, countries, and products) were fictitious to avoid inducing preconceived thoughts or emotions from potentially previously reading about the crisis (see Appendix A for the actual vignette we employed).

3.3 | Measurements

3.3.1 | Independent variables

Moral foundations: Borrowing existing measurements from Haidt and Graham (2007) participants rated the following four statements (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$). We conducted a median split to divide participants into low (M_{Low} group = 3.70, $SD = 0.53$, $n = 589$) and high groups ($M_{High} = 3.98$, $SD = 0.55$, $n = 535$). An independent t -test showed that two groups are statistically different for moral foundation level, $t(2, 1122) = 8.830$, $p < .001$.

Anticorporatism: To measure the level of anticorporatism sentiment, three items from Osborne (2009) were used (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). Then, we conducted a median split to categorise participants into low ($M_{Low} = 3.05$, $SD = 0.71$, $n = 505$) and high groups ($M_{High} = 4.17$, $SD = 0.64$, $n = 619$) and two groups into statistically different groups in terms of their anticorporatism perception, $t(2, 1122) = 27.763$, $p < .001$. A median split is considered a valid way to divide the groups as the sample size ($N = 1124$) is big enough to ensure statistical power, considering that converting a continuous variable into a categorical variable could jeopardise weakening the power (Aiken et al., 1991).

3.3.2 | Dependent variables

Negative emotional reaction: Using items from H. J. Kim and Cameron (2011), emotional reaction was measured with three dimensions on a 5-point Likert scale ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.74$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

Crisis attribution: Three items from Griffin et al. (1992) were adapted to measure crisis attribution on a 5-point Likert scale to measure blame attribution ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.83$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$).

Boycott intention: To measure boycott intention, ten items were utilised (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Klein et al., 2001) on 5-point Likert scale ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.84$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

TABLE 1 Proposed typology of ethical segmentation

Anticorporatism	Moral foundation	
	High	Low
High	Moralist	Antagonist
Low	Optimist	Pragmatist

4 | RESULTS

Based on the level of individual moral foundation and anticorporate sentiment, ethical publics can be categorised into four segments in terms of their moral orientations: 1) *moralists* (high in both individual moral foundation and anticorporatism), 2) *antagonists* (high in the individual moral foundation and low in anticorporate sentiment), 3) *optimists* (low in individual moral foundation and high in anticorporate sentiment), and 4) *pragmatists* (low in both dimensions). As predicted, the four types of ethical public significantly differ in terms of their appraisals of the two ethical foundations: anticorporatism and moral foundations (see Table 1). For individual moral foundation, moralist publics have the highest score ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.54$), followed by antagonist publics ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.46$), optimist publics ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.57$), and pragmatist publics ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.56$). In a similar vein, four types of publics are different in their anticorporatism perception, while moralist publics have the highest score as well ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.40$). The second highest score is shown for antagonist publics ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.37$), followed by optimist publics ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.53$). *Pragmatist* publics have the lowest anticorporatism score ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.50$). To recapitulate, *optimists* have a significantly higher moral foundation. Antagonists are significantly less approving of corporate businesses. These significant differences suggest that our typology is valid with the use of two parameters (Table 2).

As the next step, this paper validated a new public segmentation by testing differences in magnitudes of their perceptions and behavioural actions. RQ1 asked that moralists would produce higher crisis attribution scores than antagonists and optimists, while pragmatists would produce the lowest crisis attribution scores. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with four levels (four types of ethical segmentation) showed significant differences among *moralists*, *antagonists*, *optimists*, and *pragmatists* in how they attribute responsibility about a crisis, $F(3, 1120) = 115.81$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.22$, power = 1.00 (see Table 3).

Consistent with our prediction, a post hoc test using Tukey showed a statistically higher score for moralists ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.04$) than for the other three types of publics, while pragmatists' crisis attribution was the lowest ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.04$) in the groups. Antagonists ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.05$) and optimists ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.06$) hold moderate positions and are not different from each other. Specifically, the mean difference for crisis attribution scores between moralists and antagonists is 0.35 ($SD = 0.06$, $p < .001$), between moralists and optimists is .45 ($SD = 0.07$, $p < .001$), between moralists

TABLE 2 Summary of the scale characteristics of the ethics per public types

N = 1124	Moral foundation			Anticorporatism				
	Type	N	Mean	SD	α	Mean	SD	α
	Moralists	389	4.04	0.54	.90	4.49	0.40	.91
	Antagonists	230	3.64	0.46	.85	4.23	0.37	.85
	Optimists	146	3.83	0.57	.90	3.26	0.53	.85
	Pragmatists	359	3.61	0.56	.91	3.14	0.50	.90
	F-score		41.090			719.649		
	p		<.001			<.001		
	df		31,120			31,120		

and pragmatists is 0.99 ($SD = 0.05$, $p < .001$), between antagonists and pragmatists is 0.64 ($SD = 0.06$, $p < .001$), and between optimists and pragmatists is 0.54 ($SD = 0.07$, $p < .001$). Antagonists and optimists are not different in their crisis attribution ($p = 1.00$) (see Table 3).

RQ2 asked the difference between four ethical types in negative emotional reactions. A result from ANOVA showed a significant difference between four types of ethical segmentation of publics, $F(3, 1120) = 99.966$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.19$, power = 1.00. A post hoc test showed that moralists were strongest ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.03$) in the condemnation of an action that violates their ethical standards in comparison to the other three types. Also, pragmatist publics ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.03$) showed the lowest negative emotional reaction of the groups, yet antagonists ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.04$) and optimists ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.06$) types of publics again do not differ from each other. Specifically, the mean difference for negative emotional reaction between moralists and antagonists is 0.40 ($SD = 0.05$, $p < .001$), between moralists and optimists is 0.38 ($SD = 0.06$, $p < .001$), between moralist and pragmatists is 0.84 ($SD = 0.05$, $p < .001$), between antagonists and pragmatists is 0.43 ($SD = 0.06$, $p < .001$), and between optimists and pragmatists is 0.46 ($SD = 0.06$, $p < .001$). Antagonists and optimists do not differ ($p = 1.00$).

An ANOVA was conducted to test RQ3, $F(3, 1120) = 92.934$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.21$, $p < .001$, power = 1.00. Moralist publics had the highest intention to boycott an organisation ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.04$) followed by antagonist publics ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.05$) and optimist publics ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.06$). Pragmatists produced the lowest intention ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.04$). Using Tukey, follow-up examinations revealed statistically significant differences on boycott intentions. The difference between moralists and antagonists is 0.41 ($SD = 0.06$, $p < .001$), between moralists and optimists is 0.41 ($SD = 0.07$, $p < .001$), between moralist and pragmatists is 0.92 ($SD = 0.06$, $p < .001$), between antagonists and pragmatists is 0.51 ($SD = 0.06$, $p < .001$), and between optimists and pragmatists is 0.41 ($SD = 0.06$, $p < .001$). No difference exists between antagonists and optimists ($p = 1.00$).

TABLE 3 An analysis for ethical segmentation of publics toward three dependent variables

Dependent variables	F-score	p	Mean (SD)			
			Moralists (n = 389)	Antagonists (n = 230)	Optimists (n = 146)	Pragmatists (n = 359)
Crisis attribution	115.810	<.001	4.359 (0.04) ^a	4.007 (0.05) ^b	3.909 (0.06) ^b	3.371 (0.04) ^c
Negative Emotion	99.966	<.001	4.098 (0.03) ^a	3.694 (0.04) ^b	3.716 (0.06) ^b	3.261 (0.03) ^c
Boycott intention	92.934	<.001	4.143(0.04) ^a	3.730(0.05) ^b	3.732 (0.06) ^b	3.224 (0.04) ^c
N = 1124						

Note: Superscripts = post hoc test results.

5 | DISCUSSION

Numerous scholars have tried to explain how communication practitioners should communicate with their publics by discussing the morality of practitioners (Bowen, 2000, 2005; Fawkes, 2012; S. T. Lee & Cheng, 2012; Pearson, 2017; Pratt, 1991). While their focus is limited to practitioners' standpoints, the individual public's ethical traits that largely influence their own judgement have been ignored for a long time. In a crisis, corporate actions culminating in negative events were severely judged versus actions not culminating in negative events. In doing so, the public uses their moral judgements to evaluate a corporation. During this process, moral judgements function to attribute responsibility and convey quality, while the density of the situation is dependent upon individuals' moral foundation levels (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007). In this regard, identification of a public's underlying moral judgements would enable PR practitioners to gauge the potential impacts of a crisis and suggest to whom they need to centralise their messages.

This paper yielded the 2 × 2 ethical classifications of publics by acknowledging MFT and anticorporatism. As our four segmentations are consistent with the main conceptualisation in previous literature, our typology adequately describes variations in the ethical reasoning displayed by social psychology. Theoretically speaking, this new typology considers the conceptualisation of ethical segmentation of publics in terms of their ethical minds and moral principles. Results demonstrate that the four typologies—moralists, antagonists, optimists, and pragmatists—indeed are valid segments for explaining an individual difference in moral judgements. We believe this framework is, in particular, effective in understanding the motivation and underlying psychology behind aggressive grassroots movements in the boycott campaign as anticorporation boycotts are often driven by liberal anarchism as based on antisentiment toward corporate entities (Epstein, 2001). Given that, we hope that our framework can extend the horizon of ethical consumerism scholarship by looking at dynamics between ethical self-awareness and anticorporate sentiment.

This development helps practitioners to easily target key publics who may be more vulnerable in the event of certain crises violating their ethical principles. Consistent with our predictions, our results confirmed that, in all dependent variables, moralists are highest, and pragmatists are lowest. The other two types, antagonists and optimists, demonstrate moderate levels. This finding suggests that it is essential not to treat the public as a single group with whom to

communicate during a crisis. Specifically, moralists and optimists both have high moral standards. However, in those behaviours they apparently differ due to different anticorporatism levels. Similarly, pragmatists and antagonists share the same low level of moral foundation, yet their attitudes toward corporate values contrast. Therefore, both moral foundations and anticorporatism should simultaneously be taken into account when evaluating a corporate crisis. Targeting a particular group (e.g., moralists) does not mean excluding people who do not pertain to the criteria (e.g., pragmatists). Rather, learning as much as possible about specific people allows practitioners to promote more affordable, effective, and efficient ways and generate outcomes.

Noteworthy, the study's findings align with previous research-related fields. For instance, previous research has noted the important role of consumer-centric ethical beliefs in generating emotions, blame attribution, and boycott intentions (e.g., Antonetti & Maklan, 2016; Vassilikopoulou et al., 2011). This may be due to a sense of guilt as a corporate crisis violates a public's moral duty in a crisis situation (John & Klein, 2003; Makarem & Jae, 2016). For anticorporate sentiment, ample research indicates that anticorporate sentiment may be the antecedent of boycott movements rather than the outcome of boycott activity (e.g., Karagianni & Cornelissen, 2006; Starr, 2000). Moreover, the public is willing to attend boycotts not only for moral or social causes but also to vent negative feelings toward corporations (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). So it is interesting to see that antagonist and optimist publics showed the same level of boycott intentions. Given this result, some may argue there should be three typologies instead of four. We offer two possible explanations for this. It may result from using dependent variables strongly correlated with each other. Based on the discrepant and common nature of the two types, we assume that two antecedent factors commonly exert a negative influence on companies involved in moral lapses or crises. So the way two public groups react to those dependent variables could be similar. It is plausible that if we apply a different type of variable in the future analysis, the result could differ. For example, even with correlated dependent variables, antagonists had higher attribution scores than did optimists, while optimists had higher negative emotion scores than did antagonists. This inconsistency also strengthens the validity of the four typologies. Second, antagonists and optimists differ based on our conceptualisation. Antagonists hold strong prejudice toward businesses, regardless of moral violations. No matter what, they are sceptical of businesses and

tend to blame due to their inherent negative attitude toward the company (e.g., anticorporatism). On the other hand, optimists are more emotionally outraged as a result of their expected morality, betrayal by a company's mishaps, and moral bankruptcy. They have business-friendly attitudes until the business violates moral standards. Therefore, we can conjecture that moral outrage and blame attribution tend to generate boycott intentions, based on an individual's inherent moral standards towards the world generally and the corporation in particular.

The current study suffers from several limitations that can be addressed in subsequent studies in the following research. First, our typology was developed using data only from the U.S. Although participant numbers were large enough to generalise findings, it would be meaningful for future scholars to apply this typology to different populations with various cultural backgrounds. In addition, our crisis scenario was described as a preventable crisis using denial/shifting as the responsibility strategy. Past studies pointed out that the type of crisis (Hegner et al., 2016; J. Kim et al., 2009) or crisis response type (Huang, 2008; S. Kim & Liu, 2012) could impact the public perception. In this regard, future studies need to investigate how such factors would interplay among four public types. Despite these limitations, this study provides a valuable foundation as a starting point to understand and investigate the influences of ethical foundations and anticorporatism in segmenting a new public typology and the role those types of publics can contribute in crisis communication.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX A

Workers commit suicide at WorldJeans manufacturer Akon factory in Africa.

WorldJeans, the world's leading clothing giant, and its North-African-based manufacturer, are currently facing a backlash from consumers outrage following the suicide of workers at the factory in Algeria.

Some 14 African workers were reported to have committed suicide at Akon, the clothing manufacturer for WorldJeans garment products, and another 150 have threatened to leap to their deaths in protest against harsh working conditions in the city of Alger in Algeria. WorldJeans leads the world in the invention and patent of riveted clothing such as jeans and other denim garments.

Akon employees apparently work more than 12 h daily for six days each week. Many are forced to attend early work meetings for no pay and have to skip meals to do overtime. Toilet breaks are restricted. Employees who make mistakes are scolded, yet training is not provided for them.

WorldJeans insists that it works closely with the labour-rights NGO The Fair Labor Association which surveys and audits the Akon factories yearly. Although The Fair Labour Association's Report alleges poor working conditions at the Akon factories, WorldJeans states there was no violation of labour laws.

The spate of suicides and poor treatment of workers prompted WorldJeans CEO Peter Jones to call on Akon to improve working conditions. But there was no mention whatsoever of him offering to provide any financial assistance to do so.

Akon's response so far has been to blame WorldJeans and the workers. Akon's CEO Boipelo insists that low labour costs and working conditions are set to yield WorldJeans' large profit margin, thus Akon should not be held liable for the workers' welfare.

Akon's CEO Boipelo has since introduced a required antisuicide pledge whereby employees promise that if they decide to kill themselves, the company will not be blamed. This new requirement, seen as unfair to workers, has led labour unions in Africa to protest against Akon.