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# Investigating place solidarity and consumer boycotting in threatening times: A study on the Ukraine-Russia conflict

Alexander Josiassen<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Eva Lang<sup>a</sup>, Astrid Nørfelt<sup>c</sup>, Florian Kock<sup>a</sup>, A. George Assaf<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Copenhagen Business School, Solbjerg Plads 3, Frederiksberg 2000, Denmark

<sup>b</sup> School of Business, James Cook University, 149 Sims Drive, Singapore 387380, Singapore

<sup>c</sup> La Trobe Business School, La Trobe University, Melbourne 3086, Victoria, Australia

<sup>d</sup> University of Massachusetts Amherst, 121 Presidents Drive, Amherst, MA 01003, USA

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## ABSTRACT

Solidarity with a suffering country has emerged as an important topic of discussion and influence in society. Using the Ukraine–Russia conflict as the research setting, this research explores the broader conceptual nature of place solidarity and its impact on consumer behavior. Our findings reveal that place solidarity significantly influences consumer boycotting behaviors and drives key behavioral intentions, such as willingness to buy and recommend. Moreover, the study finds that perceived threats to humanity are key motivators of place solidarity. By providing a comprehensive understanding and empirical examination of place solidarity, this research offers valuable insights for managers, as well as local and international policymakers.

## 1. Introduction

Solidarity with a suffering region, country, or city has emerged as an important topic of discussion in society. A prominent example is the Ukraine–Russia crisis. When Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022, a war erupted on the European continent. In response, individuals, companies, and countries around the world showed solidarity with Ukraine by providing political, financial, and humanitarian assistance (The Economist, 2022). Luxembourg's representative to the United Nations, Olivier Maes, stated, "The fate of Ukraine is our fate; today, we are all Ukrainians" (United Nations General Assembly, 2022).

Beyond the political context, solidarity with Ukraine has also manifested in the consumption domain: Anecdotal evidence shows that Russian restaurant owners in the U.S. and London have reported decreasing consumer visits (Bland, 2022; Brooks, 2022), while sales of Ukrainian spirits on the US delivery platform Drizly have risen sharply (Kary, 2022).

Existing theoretical frameworks are unable to explain such anecdotal evidence, and this lack of theoretical understanding motivates the present research. To fill this research gap, we develop and test a research model on the role of place solidarity in international consumer behavior across two studies. In the first study, we test whether place solidarity has the potential to drive boycotting motives among consumers. In the

second study, we test whether threats to humanity as a common superordinate group drive place solidarity. In this research we take point of departure in the Ukraine–Russia conflict as a relevant and current context for the study. Previous research has examined how shared threats can create a sense of togetherness and elicit prosocial behaviors (e.g., Drury et al., 2009). Expanding on this, we employ intergroup threat theory (Stephan & Renfro, 2002) to examine the influence of these shared threats on place solidarity. We also test several additional solidarity outcomes, including concrete consumption intentions.

This research advances theorizing on the important phenomenon of consumer solidarity with a place and its people. Although intergroup biases and consumer behavior (e.g., Josiassen, 2011) have been studied through concepts such as consumer affinity (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011) and animosity (Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007), it has yet to be studied through the lens of place solidarity. To date, the emerging literature on place solidarity is situated within the context of tourism and hospitality. We extend this inquiry by examining the role of place solidarity in shaping international consumer behavior. Further, this is the first study to provide an empirical test of the assumption that solidarity arises as a result of threats, thereby enriching the theoretical understanding of place solidarity. This research provides valuable implications for businesses, policymakers, and organizations in dealing with global issues, from political crises to climate change and

\* Corresponding author at: Copenhagen Business School, Solbjerg Plads 3, Frederiksberg 2000, Denmark.

E-mail address: [aj.marktg@cbs.dk](mailto:aj.marktg@cbs.dk) (A. Josiassen).

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humanitarian challenges.

## 2. Study 1: Place solidarity and boycotting

### 2.1. Model and hypotheses

In keeping with earlier research on solidarity (Durkheim, 1984; Marx, 1964), we build on the definition of place solidarity as “an individual’s compassion and sympathy with a place, resulting from an observation of relative suffering” (Josiassen et al., 2022, p. 1). Central to the understanding of place solidarity is the categorization of the self along a continuum from purely personal to increasingly inclusive self-categories (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Turner et al., 1987).

As a function of the social context, people identify with different social category memberships at different times (Turner et al., 1994). Category inclusiveness increases as the context makes more abstract identities salient (Turner et al., 1994). For example, observing fundamental human suffering in emergencies can make people conceive of themselves and others in terms of the most inclusive categorization, that of human beings (e.g., Drury et al., 2009). As others become a part of one’s identity, concern for their welfare increases (e.g., Brewer, 1991). This process is a manifestation of ingroup favoritism (i.e., ingroup bias), which refers to individuals’ tendency to value ingroup members preferentially compared to members of the outgroup (Brewer, 1999). For place solidarity to occur, individuals must come to identify the people as part of their ingroup. Thus, the central tenet of the social identity perspective—that attitudes are grounded in group membership (Hogg & Smith, 2007)—firmly applies to place solidarity.

Along these lines, the concept of place solidarity aligns with theories of sociopsychology on helping behavior and bystander intervention (e.g., Levine et al., 2002; Levine & Thompson, 2004). Recently, Josiassen et al. (2022) provided initial empirical support for place solidarity in the context of tourism. They found that solidarity with Ukraine had positive effects on ingroup-supportive intentions, such as a willingness to visit Ukraine and the neighboring countries supporting Ukraine. In the marketing context, a recent study of European consumers’ attitudes and intentions toward Israeli products found that although their empathy

toward Arabs in the West Bank and Golan Heights negatively influenced their attitudes toward Israeli products, there was a negligible effect of such empathic concerns on buying decisions (Hino, 2023). We build on these initial findings (Fig. 1).

Consumers have several tools at their disposal to voice negative opinions about firms and their products, ranging from negative word-of-mouth (WOM) to not buying the company’s products by boycotting them. John & Klein (2003) define a boycott as “occurring when a number of people abstain from purchasing a product, at the same time, as a result of the same egregious act or behavior, but not necessarily for the same reasons” (p. 1198). Klein et al. (2004) identified two key motivations for participating in a boycott—instrumental and intrinsic benefits of boycotting—which extend Friedman’s (1991) distinction between instrumental and expressive functions of boycotts.

We combine the notion of instrumental and expressive functions of boycotts (Friedman, 1991; Klein et al., 2004) with Scheepers et al.’s (2006) distinction between an instrumental and identity-expressive function of ingroup bias. According to Scheepers et al. (2006), the function of an instrumental ingroup bias is to achieve a material advantage for the ingroup. As a complement to this bias, ingroup actions that serve to express the group’s identity, i.e., identity-expressive ingroup actions, serve the symbolic function of creation, expression, preservation, and confirmation of a group identity and its values (Leonardelli & Brewer, 2001). Combining the functions of boycotting with those of ingroup biases provides a strong argument for viewing boycotting as an expression of solidarity.

Solidarity aligns with boycotting since boycotting can also be seen as a collective action (Sen et al., 2001). Self-categorization with a group induces a depersonalization (Hogg et al., 1993), fostering ingroup cooperation and adherence to shared norms (Blackwood & Louis, 2012). Accordingly, the recategorization engendered by place solidarity may drive commitment to collective and cooperative acts such as boycotting.

Place solidarity may positively link to consumers’ perceived benefits of boycotting, as ingroup categorization and the resultant depersonalization increase an individual’s desire to align with the group’s cause. Therefore, place solidarity may positively affect consumers’ perceived opportunities for self-enhancement through boycott participation.

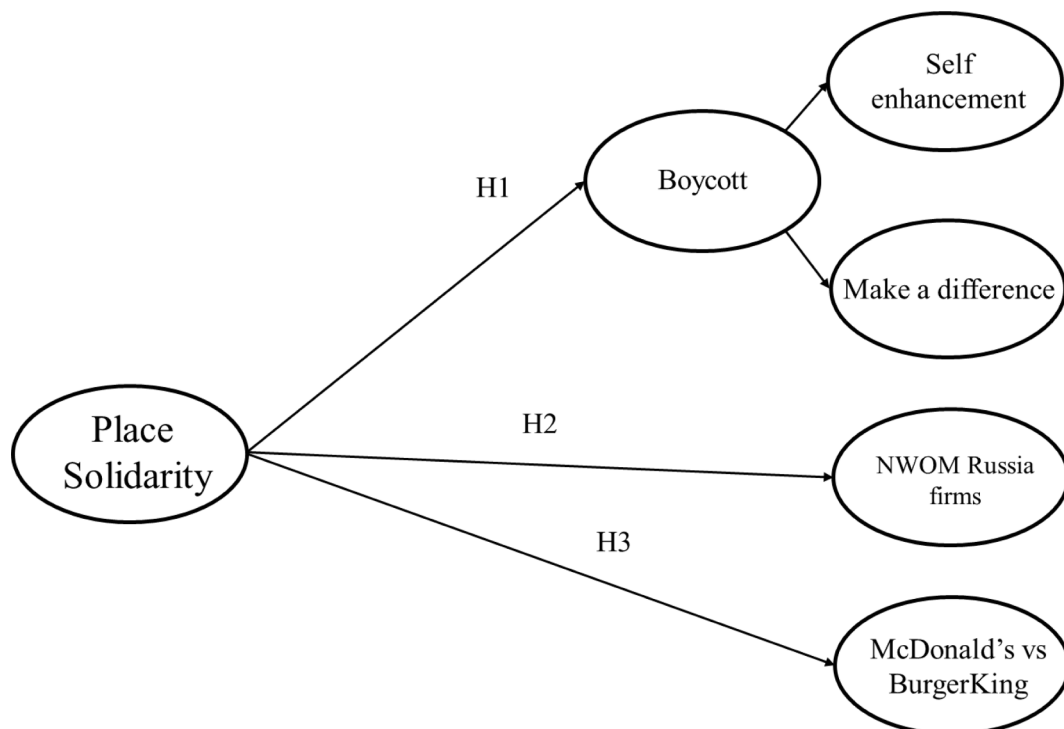


Fig. 1. The Place Solidarity-Boycott Model.

Additionally, the recategorization and the assimilation of group members to the group prototype may increase expectations about boycott effectiveness, enhancing consumers' instrumental motivation to boycott (Klein et al., 2004). Empirical evidence supports this line of argumentation, showing that people's cooperativeness in social dilemmas increases as their expectations about goal attainment increase (Sen et al., 2001; Wiener & Doeschner, 1991). Against this backdrop, we hypothesize that place solidarity has a positive effect on consumers' perceived benefits of boycotting. Finally, note that while this research is set in the context of a conflict between nations, we suggest that place solidarity has the same relationships also at other levels of geographical place (such as region, city, and street).

*H1: Solidarity with a nation positively influences consumers' perceived benefits of boycotting products from an opposing nation in a conflict.*

Solidarity may not only manifest in consumer behavior such as boycotting, but also in the desire to voice opposition more publicly and to influence others to do the same. This hypothesis is rooted in the idea that solidarity is linked to the desire to alleviate suffering, which is more effective when it mobilizes and seeks the cooperation of other ingroup members (Scheepers et al., 2006). One effective way for consumers to influence others is through WOM (e.g., Lin & Kalwani, 2018). In the Russia-Ukraine context this would suggest that consumers with high levels of solidarity with Ukraine may be more likely to engage in negative WOM about Russian firms to mobilize others to boycott Russian products.

*H2: Solidarity with a nation positively influences consumers' willingness to spread negative word-of-mouth about firms from an opposing nation in a conflict.*

The concept of place solidarity may also affect consumers' attitudes toward companies. Balance theory focuses on humans' desire for consistency in their patterns of likes and dislikes (Heider, 1958). In essence, balance theory reflects the saying "the friends of my friends are my friends too" and "my friends' enemies are my enemies" (Rapoport, 1963). From this perspective, consumers who harbor high levels of place solidarity will be attracted to companies sharing their attitudes, as this allows them to maintain or establish cognitive balance. Conversely, consumers may adjust their relationship with companies that do not share their attitudes in order to avoid psychological imbalance.

Based on this theory, and illustrated by the Russia-Ukraine context, we argue that place solidarity with Ukraine has a positive effect on consumers' preference for companies that withdraw from Russia over those that choose to remain in Russia. This hypothesis also aligns with discrete evidence that many companies have signaled the ending of their operations in Russia due to threats of boycotts. Tosun & Eshraghi (2022) further found that "firms that remained operating in Russia despite the invasion, sanctions and souring public sentiment, are doing so to the detriment of their market performance," (p. 5) suggesting that many customers may indeed prefer companies that boycott Russia.

*H3: Solidarity with a nation positively influences consumer preferences for firms that boycott an opposing nation in a conflict over firms that continue operations there.*

2.2. Participants and procedures

To test our hypotheses, we administered a questionnaire to 404 US respondents using the Mechanical Turk online panel (MTurk). The US was chosen as the target country for this study because it is the largest importer of goods in the world (OECD, 2022). The MTurk panel has been found to be comparable to other data collection methods, such as street intercepts (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017), but researchers need to implement strict controls to ensure the quality of its data. First, to ensure that our respondents were actually located in the US and not using a VPN to show that they were, we admitted only those respondents that were

approved by a third-party curated sub-panel. We employed a sophisticated IP-location tool that filters out IPs from many VPN servers, and QualtricsXM, as well as coded a Turing test into the questionnaire. After cleaning the data, we obtained completed responses from 378 respondents (see Table 1 for sample characteristics). Data for the studies were collected during June 2022 and February 2023 respectively.

To mitigate the occurrence of common method bias in the data, we followed the guidelines of Kock et al. (2021) and included a number of procedural controls. First, we provided concise and clear instructions, avoided ambiguous and complex items, and kept the survey brief (i.e., under 8 min) to limit the chances of respondent fatigue leading to biasing response behaviours (Kock et al., 2021; MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Second, we highlighted the anonymity of respondents in the introduction to the questionnaire to avoid the chances of social desirability bias (Kock et al., 2021; MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Third, we separated the measures of independent and dependent variables proximally in the questionnaire, thus also masking the causal link between these variables. This methodological and psychological separation can help limit the chances of respondents satisficing by answering in a way that is consistent with an implicit theory (Kock et al., 2021; MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012).

2.3. Measures

The Russia-Ukraine conflict was the research setting, and the measures were adapted to reflect this. Place solidarity was measured using Josiassen et al.'s (2022) eight-item scale. Perceived boycotting benefits were adopted from Klein et al. (2004) as a second-order latent construct with the benefit dimensions 'make a difference' and 'self-enhancement'. Negative WOM consisted of two items taken from Martin, Borah, & Palmatier (2017). Preference for firms that leave Russia was adapted from Kock et al.'s (2019) preference scale and focused on the choice of preferring a burger from McDonald's over Burger King because McDonald's had withdrawn from Russia. We also logged respondents' age, gender, education, and political stance, which was measured along a Republican–Democrat semantic differential scale from 0 to 100 in line with Josiassen et al. (2023). We consider this scale appropriate for the purpose of the present study because the goal is to capture a general idea of whether political orientation affects perceived boycott benefits and because the majority of Americans can be identified as either Democrats/Republicans or as Democrat/Republican-leaning (Jones, 2022). See Table 2 for all measures and respective items.

In addition to implementing measures to limit the occurrence of common method bias, we also employed statistical techniques ex-post to identify whether common method bias had significantly impacted data quality. Following recent accounts and suggestions in the literature (i.e., Kock et al. 2021, Podsakoff et al., 2024), we employed an unmeasured latent variable (UMLV) technique. The UMLV technique compares the

Table 1  
Sample characteristics.

Sample	Study 1	Study 2
Sample size	378	360
Age (%)		
18–25 years	5.8	7.8
26–39 years	45.2	45.0
40–55 years	35.4	31.9
> 56 years	13.5	15.3
Gender (%)		
Female	53.2	51.7
Male	46.8	48.3
Education (%)		
Finished a master's degree or higher	17.7	17.2
Finished a bachelor's degree	46.8	41.1
Enrolled at university	15.3	14.4
Finished secondary school	17.2	25.6
Finished primary school	2.9	1.7

**Table 2**  
Construct measures used in Study 1.

Constructs/Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE
<b>Place solidarity</b> (Josiassen et al., 2022)		0.97	0.78
1. We should support the suffering [place] financially.	0.89		
2. I have a feeling of solidarity with [place].	0.88		
3. Each of us can play a positive role in alleviating the consequences of [cause] in [place].	0.86		
4. We should unite with [place] in the face of [cause].	0.90		
5. It is our common responsibility to help [place].	0.86		
6. [Place] is having a hard time, which was not self-inflicted; hence, we should help.	0.88		
7. We should show solidarity with [place].	0.88		
8. I want to show my commitment to help [place].	0.92		
<b>Perceived boycotting benefits</b> (Klein et al., 2004)		0.93	0.87
<i>Make a difference:</i>	0.95		
1. Boycotts are an effective means to make Russia change its actions in Ukraine.	0.86		
2. Everyone should take part in the boycott because every contribution, no matter how small, is important.	0.89		
3. By boycotting, I can help change Russia's decision.	0.84		
<i>Self-enhancement:</i>	0.91		
4. I would feel guilty if I bought Russian products.	0.82		
5. I would feel uncomfortable if other people who are boycotting saw me purchasing or consuming Russian products.	0.78		
6. I will feel better about myself if I boycott Russia.	0.90		
<b>Negative word-of-mouth of companies perceived to be siding with Russia</b> (Martin et al., 2017)		0.89	0.80
1. I am willing to spread negative word of mouth on social media, about companies that support Russia.	0.97		
2. I intend to talk negatively about Russian firms and products on social media.	0.82		
<b>Preference for companies that actively support the boycott of Russia</b> (Kock et al., 2019)		—	—
1. If I want a burger, I would prefer McDonald's over Burger King.	—		

model fit of the original model with a model that adds a UML to that original model. That UML is operationalized as being reflected by all primary items of the original model. We then estimated both models and compared their fit indices, assessing whether the chi-square difference is not significantly different (i.e., being smaller than the difference between the critical values for the models' degrees of freedom. The chi-square difference is significantly different with a delta of 166,962 ( $\chi^2\Delta = 454,261 - 287,299$ ). Given that the model with the added UML shows a superior model fit, we moved on to assess whether the relationships between the model variables are still significant after we included the UML. We can conclude that even after adding the UML, and hence statistically controlling for potential CMB sources that the UML represents, the relationships stay significant.

To examine the quality of the measures and their suitability, we checked for convergent validity and found that the standardized factor loadings were significant and above 0.70. All composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) coefficients were above 0.80 and 0.75 respectively, indicating good levels of reliability (Hair et al., 2010). Next, we noted that the AVEs for all measures were higher than the squared correlations for any variable pair, demonstrating satisfactory discriminant validity. We also carried out a heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) analysis (Henseler et al., 2015). The highest correlation ratio for all variable pairs was 0.69, meeting the criteria for discriminant validity (Kline, 2011). Finally, we observed that collinearity was not harmful as all variance inflation factors were below three.

## 2.4. Results

We tested the research model using AMOS 26's covariance-based structural equation modeling. The goodness-of-fit indices showed satisfactory model-data fit ( $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 3.485$ ; CFI = 0.954; RMSEA = 0.081; SRMR = 0.034) (Hooper et al., 2008).

The results showed strong support for the hypothesized relationships (Fig. 2). Place solidarity had a significant and positive effect on perceived boycotting benefits (0.76,  $p < 0.001$ ) with the second-order boycott construct being reflected in consumers' wish for their consumption choices to make a difference (0.95,  $p < 0.001$ ) and boost self-enhancement (0.91,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results confirm H1.

H2 suggests that place solidarity has a positive relation to consumers' willingness to spread negative WOM about companies they perceive as supporting Russia. This hypothesis is also confirmed (0.54,  $p < 0.001$ ). The hypothesis that consumers with higher levels of place solidarity would choose a supporting company over a company that has not shown support exhibited a high, but statistically insignificant estimate (0.12,  $p = 0.06$ ). This result may be due to some consumers being unaware of McDonald's vs. Burger King's choices to cease vs maintain operations in Russia.

Conducting a series of Kruskal-Wallis and pair-wise tests, we found no significant linear effects on perceived boycott benefits for age, gender, and education. Conversely, in terms of political views, Democrats demonstrated significantly higher support for boycotting Russian products than Republicans ( $\chi^2 = 115.892$ , asymp. sig.  $< 0.05$ ).

## 3. Study 2: The role of threats on place solidarity

### 3.1. Model and hypotheses

In Study 2, we investigate the role of threats as a key antecedent as proposed by the nascent literature on place solidarity (Josiassen et al., 2022, 2023), while also investigating further outcomes (Fig. 3).

Research on intergroup relations has reiterated the importance of interdependence in understanding the antecedents of positive ingroup bias (Balliet et al., 2014). The functional relations perspective suggests that shared goals can induce cooperative group behavior (Sherif et al., 1961; Sherif & Sherif, 1953). In a similar vein, the common ingroup identity model (Dovidio et al., 1993) proposes that a common ingroup may result from positive intergroup orientations, caused by cooperative interdependence, such as perceptions of a common fate. In this context, common fate refers to "a relationship between groups in which there is awareness that the goals of both groups are linked such that each could attain its goal if, and only if, the members of the other group attained their goals" (Gaertner et al., 1999, p. 390). Similarly, the social identity model of collective behavior (Drury, 2018) suggests that social support in emergencies and disasters is rooted in a sense of common fate. According to this model, the experience of a shared threat is the source of an emerging common ingroup identity, which is accompanied by ingroup-strengthening behaviors. These lines of research converge on the general finding that the experience of a shared threat or common challenge increases group-level solidarity (Brewer, 1999). Therefore, we propose that place solidarity increases when individuals are motivated by a perceived common threat and potential common fate to view themselves as part of a common ingroup.

The war in Ukraine has been a catalyst for the perception of a shared threat and common fate among individuals. Researchers (e.g., Pyszczynski et al., 2012; Weisel & Zultan, 2016) suggest that conflict can lead to the recategorization of individuals into a common ingroup, particularly when it highlights a shared threat. Studies have shown that shared threats can increase positive attitudes and concern for previously perceived outgroup members (Dovidio et al., 2004; Vezzali et al., 2015). In this context, the war in Ukraine has raised concerns about spread of autocracies, leading to a salient recategorization based on a shared threat.



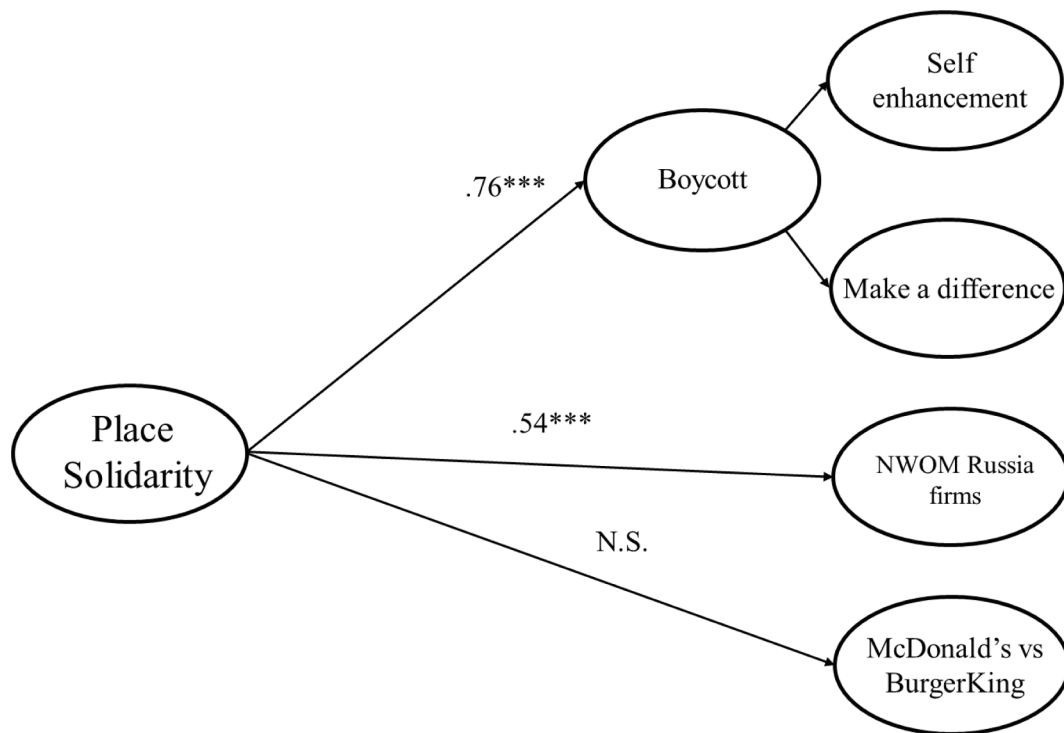


Fig. 2. The Place Solidarity-Boycott Model: Results. N.S.: not significant, \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

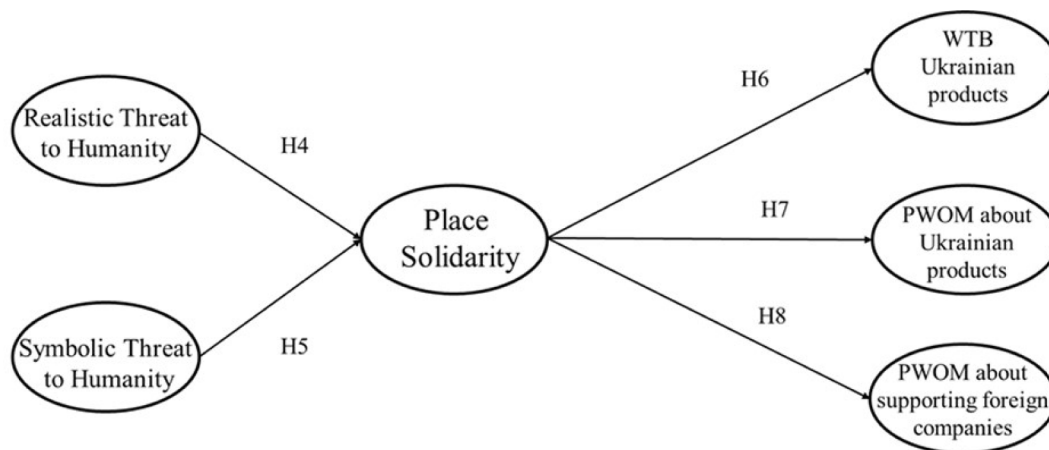


Fig. 3. The Threats-Solidarity Model.

The relevant levels of threat for this study are the perceived threats to humanity, i.e., the community of all people (McFarland et al., 2012). Intergroup threat theory outlines two distinct forms of threats, realistic and symbolic, that may contribute simultaneously to ingroup and outgroup attitudes (Stephan et al., 2009). Realistic threats concern perceived threats to the welfare of the group or its members, such as threats to tangible resources, political or economic power, and physical well-being (Stephan & Renfro, 2002). In distinction, symbolic threats pertain to perceived threats to the identity and worldview of the ingroup, which includes beliefs, morals, values, and norms (Stephan & Renfro, 2002).

Given the risk of military escalation, citizens in other countries may perceive realistic threats from the war in Ukraine in the form of a danger to physical safety, international stability, disruption of supply lines, and resulting price increases. Further, when looking at the research case, symbolic threats from the war in Ukraine are constituted by what many Americans view as Russia's violation of international law, values, and

moral code (OHCHR, 2022). Hence, Russia's attack on Ukraine may be perceived as a threat to fundamental human morals, values, and decency, and even democracy at large. According to intergroup threat theory, realistic and symbolic threats may enhance ingroup cohesiveness as well as empathy and concern for ingroup members (Stephan et al., 2009). Against this background, we hypothesize:

*H4: Individuals who perceive a higher level of realistic threat to humanity related to a conflict exhibit higher levels of place solidarity.*

*H5: Individuals who perceive a higher level of symbolic threat to humanity related to a conflict exhibit higher levels of place solidarity.*

In addition to punishment-oriented consumption behaviors targeting the outgroup (Study 1), consumers may express solidarity through reward-oriented consumption behaviors focused on the ingroup. The marketing literature (e.g., Paharia et al., 2014) has introduced the concept of buycotting as a counterpart to boycotting, referring to consumer pro-buying initiatives "in support of a cause or practice"

(Ettenson et al., 2006, p. 6). From a sociopsychological perspective, purchase intentions in favor of the ingroup can be seen as a form of ingroup support (Kock et al., 2019; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015) and, therefore, qualify as a potential manifestation of place solidarity. As the supported group (i.e. Ukraine) becomes incorporated into a common ingroup, benefits to their economic well-being may be perceived as benefits to the collective self (Brewer, 1991). Additionally, as consumption is a means of self-expression (Belk, 1988), purchasing products from the supported group may also be motivated by a desire to symbolize and strengthen the sense of common group membership engendered by solidarity. Since boycotting and buycotting can be adopted simultaneously or separately (Hoffmann et al., 2018), we aim to test whether solidarity has a positive effect on consumers' willingness to buy from the supported nation.

*H6: Solidarity with a nation positively influences consumers' willingness to buy products from that nation.*

Similarly, we argue that perceived solidarity may not only influence consumers' willingness to spread negative WOM about the outgroup, but also to spread positive WOM about the ingroup (Kock et al., 2019). This supposition is supported by previous research (Carlson et al., 2008) demonstrating a link between ingroup identification and supportive engagement through WOM promotion. We test two types of WOM behavior that reflect ingroup-supportive behaviors: (a) positive WOM about Ukrainian products and (b) positive WOM about companies supporting Ukraine. We expect that consumers with higher levels of solidarity are more committed to persuading ingroup members to buy Ukrainian products to support the country's economy and will therefore have a higher tendency to spread positive WOM about Ukrainian products.

*H7: Solidarity with a nation (place) positively influences consumers' willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth about products from that nation.*

Balance theory (Heider, 1958) predicts that individuals with positive attitudes toward Ukraine will also have positive attitudes toward individuals and parties supporting Ukraine. Consistent with this prediction, Josiassen et al. (2022) showed that place solidarity not only results in increased support for the place directly affected by suffering (i.e., Ukraine) but can also spill over to other places supporting this place (e. g., Poland). From a sociopsychological perspective, these supporting places position themselves as part of the ingroup through their support and thus become subject to ingroup favoritism (Brewer, 1999). We propose that this idea applies not only to countries but also to companies showing support by donating money and medical supplies, offering increased support to Ukrainian employees, or speaking out against the invasion. As a result, we suggest that place solidarity increases consumers' willingness to share positive WOM about companies that are also supportive.

*H8: Solidarity with a nation positively influences consumers' willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth about companies that support that nation.*

3.2. Participants and procedures

The data for Study 2 were again collected from a US sample on MTurk, where a questionnaire containing the scales outlined in Table 3 was distributed. In addition, IMC and classificatory variables were included. Responses were collected from 365 respondents, of which five were disqualified and removed from the dataset due to signs of response bias. The resulting 360 responses were used to test the proposed hypotheses. See Table 1 for the sample characteristics. We employed a

Table 3  
Construct measures used in Study 2.

Constructs/Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE
<b>Place solidarity (Josiassen et al., 2022).</b>		0.96	0.77
1. We should support the suffering [country] financially.	0.85		
2. I have a feeling of solidarity with [country].	0.85		
3. Each of us can play a positive role in alleviating the consequences of [cause] in [country].	0.80		
4. We should unite with [country] in the face of [cause].	0.90		
5. It is our common responsibility to help [country].	0.89		
6. [Country] is having a hard time, which was not self-inflicted; hence, we should help.	0.88		
7. We should show solidarity with [country].	0.89		
8. I want to show my commitment to help [country].	0.91		
<b>Realistic threat to humanity (adapted from Rugar &amp; Graf, 2019). Russia's attack on Ukraine...</b>		0.91	0.77
1. Causes safety concerns elsewhere in the world too	0.89		
2. Is a threat to human well-being.	0.93		
3. Increases the fear of war in the world.	0.81		
<b>Symbolic threat to humanity (adapted from Rugar &amp; Graf, 2019). Russia's attack on Ukraine...</b>		0.92	0.79
1. Is a threat to what it means to be human.	0.85		
2. Is an attack on human decency.	0.91		
3. Undermines human morals.	0.92		
<b>Willingness to buy Ukrainian products (Josiassen et al., 2022).</b>		—	—
1. I am willing to buy more Ukrainian products.	—		
<b>Positive word-of-mouth about Ukrainian products (Wu et al., 2020).</b>		—	—
1. I am willing to talk positively about Ukrainian products.	—		
<b>Positive word-of-mouth about supporting companies (newly developed).</b>		—	—
1. I am willing to spread positive word of mouth, on social media, about companies that support Ukraine.	—		

similar approach to limit and detect common method bias as in Study 1. That is, we employed the following procedural controls to limit common method bias from happening ex-ante: provision of clear and concise instructions, avoiding ambiguous and complex items, keeping the survey brief, ensuring the anonymity of respondents, separating the measures of the independent and dependent variables proximally in the questionnaire, and hiding the causal link between the independent and dependent variables.

3.3. Measures

We adapted Rugar & Graf's (2019) scales to measure perceived realistic and symbolic threats toward a shared superordinate category (see Table 3). Place solidarity was again measured with Josiassen et al.'s (2022) scale. Willingness to buy was adapted from Josiassen et al. (2022), and willingness to provide positive WOM was measured with a single item adapted from Wu et al. (2020).

For Study 2, we conducted the same UMLV test as outlined in Study 1. The model comparison did not yield a significant difference in the model fit indices, hence indicating that CMB effects were not harmful. In addition, we also included a marker variable and conducted a marker variable technique to identify potentially detrimental effects of CMB. This step is complementary to the UMLV test procedure. The marker variable technique estimates a CFA with all study variables and a dedicated marker variable that is measured by all original study items plus its own marker variable items. That is, this technique differs from the previously employed UMLV technique by adding dedicated measures that are expected to reflect specific types of method variance. Our marker variable asks respondents to indicate their sleep and hence is

conceptually unrelated to the other constructs in the nomological model. For the marker variable, we employ the same response format as with the study's constructs of interest, so they share measurement characteristics. Following Williams, Hartman, & Cavazotte (2010), we estimated and compared three models in which the marker variable is either correlated with the substantive latent constructs, is unrelated to the substantive constructs but with its factor loadings and error variances being fixed, or includes additional factor loadings of the marker variable on the items of the substantive constructs. Factor loadings were not forced to be equivalent. Model comparisons of the latter two models indicated no harmful existence of CMB.

We checked for convergent validity and found all standardized factor loadings to be above 0.70. Reliability levels for all CRs and AVEs was above 0.80 and 0.75, respectively. We applied the Fornell-Larcker criterion to check for discriminant validity and found that all scale AVEs were higher than any variable pair squared correlations.

### 3.4. Results

We first examined the fit between the developed model and the data in AMOS 26, and the goodness-of-fit indices indicated a good fit ( $\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 3.014$ ; CFI = 0.968; RMSEA = 0.075; SRMR = 0.027) (Hooper et al., 2008). The results showed a positive and significant relationship (0.33,  $p < 0.001$ ) between the level of perceived realistic threat and the level of place solidarity. Additionally, symbolic threats to the world showed a positive and significant relationship with place solidarity (0.49,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results confirm H4 and H5.

Next, we advanced hypotheses related to several specific outcomes (Fig. 4) and found that individuals with higher levels of place solidarity are more willing to buy products from the supported country (0.82,  $p < 0.001$ ), spread positive WOM about products from the supported place (0.83,  $p < 0.001$ ), and spread positive WOM about supporting companies (0.79,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results confirm H6, H7, and H8.

### 4. Discussion

Against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the resulting global attention to solidarity with the suffering nation, this research investigates the potential role of place solidarity in international consumer behavior. Despite ample anecdotal evidence of place solidarity, research on solidarity with a place and its people has been neglected.

The behaviors of solidarity consumers align well with the main premise of the social identity perspective (e.g., Hogg & Smith, 2007)—

that attitudes are grounded in group membership. In turn, the common group membership fosters an ingroup bias, which manifests itself in prosocial and ingroup-supportive consumer behavior. In this context, consumers exhibiting place solidarity had included Ukraine and Ukrainians as part of their ingroup. Hence, to support their group members, we found that consumers experiencing place solidarity were more willing to buy Ukrainian products and are more willing to spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM) to support the suffering place and its people. Additionally, the results showed that place solidarity is a driver of boycotting, having a positive effect on perceived instrumental and intrinsic boycotting benefits. Place solidarity was found to positively relate to consumers' willingness to spread negative WOM about firms associated with Russia; however, we did not find a significant effect of place solidarity on consumers' choice of firms.

Building on Josiassen et al.'s (2022, 2023) conceptualization and operationalization of the place solidarity construct, this research extends the nascent stream of literature on place solidarity beyond the realm of tourism and hospitality. The finding that solidarity significantly affects consumer behavior in the marketplace is noteworthy, as the marketplace for goods is broadly characterized by more fleeting and less intimate interactions than tourism experiences.

Our research substantially broadens the scope of intergroup threat theory, which has predominantly been employed to explain negative outgroup attitudes (e.g., Riek et al., 2006). Previous research (e.g., Uenal et al., 2021; Uhl et al., 2018) has proposed that perceived global threats can strengthen group boundaries on an intermediate level (e.g., national level) and thus have negative effects on group relations on a superordinate level. We find that perceiving a threat as a shared fate can indeed yield positive attitudes and concern for individuals previously perceived as outgroup members, consistent with the functional relations perspective (Sherif et al., 1961).

More broadly, this research adds to the consumer bias literature (e.g., Josiassen, 2011; Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011), corroborating that consumer behavior can be shaped by considerations such as solidarity with a place. Importantly, our results support that Americans' pro-Ukrainian behaviors can indeed be explained through their positive attitude toward Ukraine, thereby underscoring the constructive power of solidarity. This finding challenges the assumption that Americans' support for Ukraine stems solely from their anti-Russian sentiments. Instead, supportive behaviors towards a suffering party and opposition to the offending side may result from a combination of both positive and negative attitudes. This idea aligns with research (e.g., Josiassen et al., 2011; Serrano-Arcos et al., 2022) advocating for the distinction between positive and negative intergroup biases as independent rather than

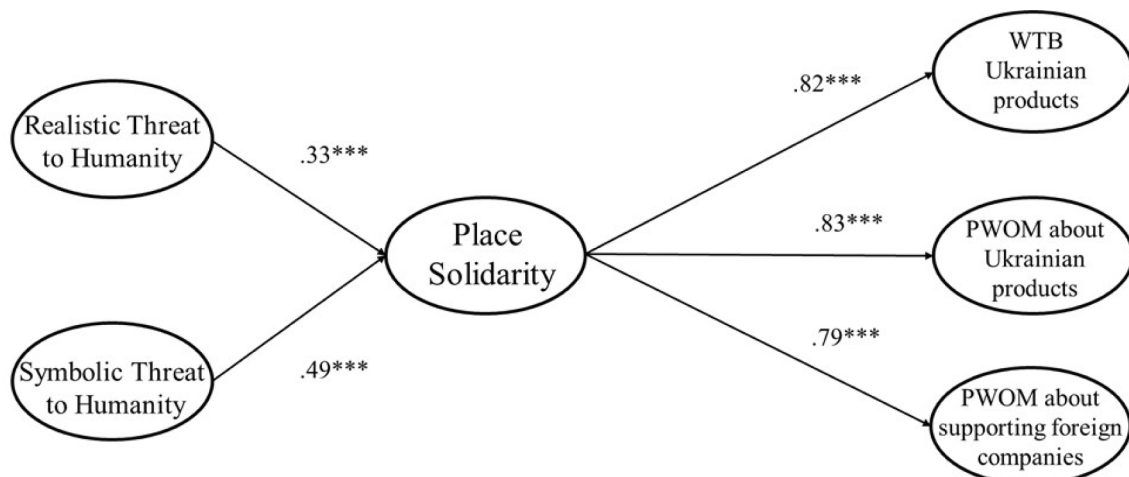


Fig. 4. The Threats-Solidarity Model: Results. N.S.: not significant, \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



dichotomous phenomena.

Furthermore, this is one of few studies (e.g., Lee et al., 2017) that examines intergroup biases related to a country as potential antecedents of boycotting. Place solidarity is a driver of boycotting, having a positive effect on the perceived instrumental and intrinsic benefits of boycotting. Consumers with higher levels of place solidarity are more motivated to boycott to make a difference and to enhance their self-esteem. While it is acknowledged that participating in a boycott is a form of group behavior that is shaped by group identity mechanisms (e.g., John & Klein, 2003; Sen et al., 2001), this study is one of the first to explicitly view boycotting as an expression of ingroup bias. By adopting a social identity perspective to boycotting, we contribute to the theoretical foundation of boycotting.

Our findings have direct managerial implications. Understanding that consumers' solidarity with a place and its people can influence their purchasing decisions opens up opportunities for businesses to tailor their marketing and product development strategies. For instance, companies can create products or campaigns that explicitly support places afflicted by suffering, thereby aligning with consumer solidarity. An example is Nike's 2006 launch of the Air Jordan 3 Katrina to raise funds after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and its neighboring areas. Similarly, international businesses may want to consider partnerships with non-profits or humanitarian organizations working in regions of concern to demonstrate their commitment. Our results indicate that such initiatives can have positive effects on consumers' willingness to spread positive WOM about the company or product. Our results show that not taking a stance in times of social or geopolitical challenges can have a detrimental impact on businesses, such as consumer boycotts.

The direct positive relationship between place solidarity and consumers' willingness to spread positive WOM and buy products from that place suggests that consumer solidarity can play an important role in mitigating the repercussions of the war in Ukraine and similar international crises. By highlighting the origin of their products, businesses located in or associated with the affected place can potentially attract consumers experiencing solidarity.

A key takeaway from this study is that a narrative of "us" being in this together will be more effective in rallying public support for critical global issues than a narrative of "them" needing "our" help. Relatedly, the finding that realistic and symbolic threats to humanity are drivers of solidarity can help in promoting prosociality and international cooperation. Framing threats as superordinate global-level phenomena can promote solidarity attitudes and behavior toward foreign places. Governments and organizations engaged in public diplomacy as well as policymakers working on global issues, such as climate change or humanitarian crises, can use these insights to tailor their outreach and garner support.

## 5. Limitations and future research

This study has certain limitations to consider. This research focused exclusively on US consumers in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It is important to recognize that the historical relationship between the US and Russia—marked by periods of tension, competition, and Cold War hostilities—may have influenced our findings. Other countries with distinct histories and relationships with Russia might yield different responses, highlighting the need to replicate our findings in diverse international contexts.

Furthermore, the age distribution includes fewer people in the youngest and oldest categories and the sample has a higher educational attainment than the general population (United States Census Bureau, 2022). Similar observations are common for MTurk samples (Hou et al., 2021; Shapiro et al., 2013). We encourage future place solidarity research to achieve greater representativeness of these two categories and explore alternative research methods.

In addition, the place solidarity effects may be influenced by the immediacy of the conflict. Over time, international sentiments and

feelings of solidarity may wane or intensify, and we urge future research on this possibility. It would also be interesting to investigate how other place-related consumer biases in the attraction–repulsion matrix (Josiassen, 2011, Prince et al., 2020) might interact with place solidarity.

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## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Alexander Josiassen:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization, Original Idea. **Eva Lang:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis. **Astrid Nørfelt:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis. **Florian Kock:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Data curation, Conceptualization. **A. George Assaf:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

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**Alexander Josiassen** is Professor of Marketing, and Director at the Center for Tourism and Culture Management, Copenhagen Business School. His research focuses on tourist and consumer behavior.

**Eva Lang** is Research Assistant at Department of Marketing at Copenhagen Business School, specializing in marketing and psychology research. Her research interests are consumer behavior and consumer biases.

**Astrid Nørfelt** is a Lecturer in Tourism at La Trobe Business School, La Trobe University. Her research interests include evolutionary psychology, tourist and consumer behaviors, and intergroup biases.

**Florian Kock** is Professor of Tourism research at the Department of Marketing at Copenhagen Business School. He researches the evolutionary roots of human behavior to examine contemporary phenomena.

**A. George Assaf** is Professor at Isenberg School of Management, University of Massachusetts. His research interests are firm strategy, and consumer behavior using quantitative methods.