

BOYCOTT INTENTIONS TOWARDS BRANDS THAT SUPPORTED ISRAEL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE “ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT”

Ayu Nafira Mohd Noorhafidz

Faculty of Business, Hospitality and Technology
Universiti Islam Melaka

Nadiah Ishak

Faculty of Business, Hospitality and Technology
Universiti Islam Melaka

**Corresponding Author's Email: nadiah_ishak@unimel.edu.my*

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ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization, boycotting products from certain countries or organizations due to past or ongoing conflicts have become common for consumers and thus impacting their purchasing decisions in the global market. This study aimed to investigate some of the variables that influence consumers' boycott intentions to target Israeli products namely animosity, cognitive judgment and affective evaluation in the context of the “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” incident. Respondents consisted of youths who traded online during the pandemic. A total of 152 respondents had answered the distributed questionnaire. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyse the data using Pearson correlation analysis method. The results of the study show that animosity and affective judgement have a significant relationship towards boycotting intention of Israeli brand products ($r_{\text{animosity}} = 0.381$, $r_{\text{affective}} = 0.587$; $p\text{-value} < 0.05$) while cognitive judgement no relation toward boycott intention ($r = -0.025$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, this indicates that the current circumstances of public sentiments toward purchasing Israeli brand related product.

Keywords: *sentiment, genocide war, consumer behaviour, purchasing intention, conflict*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, boycotting products from certain countries or organizations due to past or ongoing conflicts have become common for consumers and thus impacting their purchasing decisions in the global market. Friedman (1985) describes boycotts as actions taken by consumers who feel anger or hostility toward a specific market group, aiming to achieve a particular objective. Klein and Ettenson (2005) define consumer hostility as a negative emotional attitude or aversion to consuming products from countries or groups that consumers oppose for specific reasons. Brand hostility refers to strong negative feelings that lead consumers to avoid purchasing from a disliked brand. Boycotts and hostility are often linked to past or present incidents involving a brand. Such actions can negatively impact a company's reputation, sales, employee morale, and customer trust. As noted by Ettenson and Klein (2005), boycotts have the potential to affect any business.

On the other hand, boycott is generally defined as a deliberate act of abstaining from purchasing, using, or engaging with goods, services, or organizations to express disapproval, pressure for change, or protest unethical practices. This approach is seen as a form of consumer activism, where individuals or groups aim to influence corporate or political policies by withholding economic support. Boycotts may target specific companies, industries, or even entire nations, particularly in response to perceived ethical, environmental, or political issues. Lasarov, Hoffman, and Orth (2023) describe boycotts as a means of signalling discontent while navigating consumer behaviour's ethical and strategic dimensions. These actions are often shaped by societal, cultural, and individual motivations.

Understanding the adverse effects of brand hostility is vital in today's interconnected world, where information spreads rapidly, and affected companies risk losing access to certain markets. In Malaysia, large-scale boycotts of foreign products have taken place, including those targeting Israeli products, U.S. brands, and companies perceived to support Israel's military actions against Palestine. Recently, a new wave of boycotts against Israeli brands and related products emerged, driven by the ongoing "Israel-Palestine conflict."

This conflict is deeply rooted in historical, political, and religious factors, involving competing national identities and territorial disputes. Central issues include the status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees' right of return, borders, and the establishment of a Palestinian state. Despite numerous attempts at negotiation, including international diplomatic efforts, a lasting and comprehensive resolution has remained elusive, often marked by periods of violence and stalled peace processes.

2.0 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Israel-Palestine conflict has sparked significant global reactions, including widespread consumer boycotts targeting Israeli brands and companies perceived to support the conflict. These boycotts are a form of economic protest aimed at pressuring

companies and nations to align with particular political or ethical stances. Historical cases like the boycott of Israeli goods during the Second Intifada and the ongoing Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement highlight the enduring influence of consumer activism on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Recent boycotts intensified following violent escalations, targeting products and brands associated with or perceived to benefit from Israel's actions. Research suggests that consumer animosity at both brand and country levels significantly impacts buying behaviours. These studies emphasize the necessity of understanding both cognitive (rational evaluations) and affective (emotional responses) mediators in addressing boycotts' effects (Leonidou et al., 2019). Several brands have faced boycotts due to their perceived involvement or stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Social media and grassroots campaigns have amplified these actions globally. Prominent brands targeted include brands such as Starbucks, McDonald, Coca-cola and PepsiCo, and Nestle. Boycotts against major brands like Starbucks, Nestlé, and McDonald's due to their perceived connections to the Israel-Palestine conflict have had significant financial implications.

According to the Starbuck financial reports, the company has faced an \$11 billion loss in market value, attributed to widespread boycotts and declining share prices. Meanwhile, company brand like Nestle, the Swiss food giant reported a 2.5% drop in sales, linked partly to the boycott of its subsidiary Osem, which operates in Israel. The company also saw its North American sales volume decline, further impacting overall revenue. Even though specific financial losses weren't detailed, McDonald's has faced consumer boycotts in markets like Malaysia and the broader Middle East. Its local franchisee in Israel has been a focal point of protests, adding to the brand's challenges in these regions. Losses underscore the economic impact of consumer activism and the growing influence of geopolitics on corporate reputations and revenues.

Therefore, this paper examines the mechanisms underlying brand animosity, addressing a gap in the research that has largely emphasized country-level animosity. By shifting the focus to the brand level, this study provides deeper insights into how animosity towards specific brands operates. Second, it explores how cognitive assessments of Israeli products and emotional (affective) evaluations mediate the relationship between animosity and consumers' intentions to boycott.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Scenario of Palestine-Israel conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a long-standing and deeply rooted dispute that traces back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It emerged from competing national aspirations between Jewish and Arab communities, evolving into a complex battle over territory, identity, and self-determination.

Historically, the conflict's roots are tied to the rise of the Zionist movement in the late 1800s, advocating for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This led to increased Jewish immigration, which escalated tensions with the Arab population already residing in the

region. During the British Mandate period, these tensions intensified as nationalist movements on both sides gained momentum. In 1947, the United Nations proposed a partition plan to establish separate Jewish and Arab states. The plan's acceptance by the Jewish leadership and rejection by Arab leaders precipitated the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Arab-Israeli War. This war resulted in significant territorial changes, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, and the creation of a protracted refugee crisis that remains unresolved today. This conflict continues to be characterized by cycles of violence, failed negotiations, and deeply entrenched grievances, making it one of the most persistent geopolitical disputes in modern history.

Despite, numerous efforts have been made to achieve peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but comprehensive solutions remain elusive. Key issues such as border delineations, the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and security measures continue to obstruct progress toward a resolution. Hence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a deeply entrenched and multifaceted challenge rooted in history and shaped by complex geopolitical factors. Thus, only through collaborative and determined action can a just and lasting resolution be achieved.

3.2 Consumer Animosity

Animosity is described as a powerful mix of disgust and hostility rooted in historical or ongoing economic, political, or military actions perceived as aggressive, unjustified, or socially unacceptable (Averill, 1983). This negative sentiment can be directed at external groups (Jung et al., 2002). In the marketing context, it is referred to as consumer animosity, which represents adverse feelings or aversion toward a country or group due to conflicts (Klein & Ettenson, 1999; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007). This sentiment can significantly influence consumers' purchasing behaviors (Klein et al., 1998). When extended to specific brands, this phenomenon is termed brand animosity, defined as strong negative feelings or aversion toward a brand, typically driven by specific incidents or affiliations that shape consumer behavioural intentions. These negative attitudes can manifest as boycotts or reduced brand loyalty.

Consumer animosity, particularly in the context of political or international conflicts, continues to be a significant driver of anti-consumption behavior, including boycotts. This phenomenon is shaped by various forms of animosity, such as economic, political, religious, or personal motivations, and often leads consumers to avoid purchasing goods from companies associated with the target country or group (Krüger et al., 2022).

Recent studies confirm that animosity can lead to consumer boycotts, particularly when linked to global events such as military conflicts, political decisions, or social issues. For instance, after the U.S. presidential election in 2020, consumer animosity in countries like France and the UK toward U.S. products saw a notable decrease, along with an increase in consumer willingness to buy American goods, highlighting how animosity and its effects can change over time (Krüger et al., 2024). In particular, animosity often triggers strong emotional responses such as anger or fear which in turn influence

consumers' purchase decisions or participation in boycotts (Krüger et al., 2022; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007).

A longitudinal study has also explored how animosity towards specific countries develops and evolves, emphasizing the critical role of time in shaping consumer behaviour (Krüger et al., 2024). This body of work underscores that consumer animosity is not only an immediate reaction to current events but also a long-term psychological process that can have significant consequences for brands involved in conflicts. These studies contribute to understanding the shifting dynamics of consumer attitudes in global markets, where consumer animosity can both harm and benefit brands, depending on the political, social, and economic context at hand.

3.3 Cognitive judgement

Cognitive judgment plays a critical role in shaping boycott intention, particularly when consumers evaluate a product or brand in light of animosity towards a country, group, or brand. Cognitive judgments encompass how individuals assess a product's quality, based on perceptions of its craftsmanship, technology, and reliability, which are often influenced by negative emotions towards the brand's origin or affiliations. When these negative perceptions are strong, they can lead to the intention to boycott products from that brand or country, as consumers may consciously avoid products they associate with the offending group (Harmeling et al., 2015).

Research by Klein et al. (1998) and Samee et al. (2005) further emphasizes that cognitive judgments are not only influenced by the product's intrinsic qualities but also by external socio-political factors, such as past conflicts, wars, or political stances, which shape consumer attitudes. If these judgments result in a strong negative evaluation, they often translate into increased boycott intentions as consumers seek to align their purchases with their ethical or political beliefs. This mechanism explains why certain brands or countries can experience significant market losses due to consumer animosity. Recent studies in consumer behaviour continue to emphasize the complex relationship between emotions, cognitive processing, and purchasing decisions, suggesting that cognitive evaluations play a significant mediating role in how consumers form intentions to engage in boycotts or avoid certain brands (Dreyer, Sonnenberg & Van der Merwe, 2022). Therefore, cognitive judgments can significantly mediate the relationship between animosity and boycott intention, with the psychological evaluation of product quality serving as a key driver of consumer behaviour in contexts of political or social conflicts.

3.4 Affective evaluation

Affective evaluation involves emotional reactions or judgments directed at specific products or brands. Research indicates that emotions arising from consumer animosity significantly influence behaviour. For example, Harmeling et al. (2015) highlighted the roles of agonistic emotions (e.g., frustration or confrontation) and retreat emotions (e.g., avoidance or withdrawal) in shaping consumer responses. Similarly, Antonetti et al. (2019) suggested that threat-related emotions, such as anger and fear, along with extreme

emotions, such as contempt and disgust, are particularly influential in driving consumer decisions within hostile contexts.

These emotional responses are tied to cognitive-affective behavioural theory, which posits that behaviour is shaped by the interplay of cognitive assessments and emotional appraisals, depending on situational factors (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). For instance, a consumer's anger toward a brand associated with a controversial country may intensify avoidance behaviours, while disgust might lead to active participation in boycotts. Such findings underline the importance of understanding the emotional underpinnings of consumer animosity to predict and address boycotts and other forms of anti-consumption behaviour.

3.5 Boycotts as a coping process

Boycotting represents a consumer-driven behaviour aimed at expressing dissatisfaction through a deliberate refusal to purchase specific products or services. As defined by Friedman (1985), a consumer boycott involves encouraging individuals to refrain from buying goods associated with a perceived antagonistic entity, with the intent of achieving a particular goal. This collective action is often structured and organized, reflecting a strategic effort to exert social or economic pressure (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004).

In this context, a boycott can also be seen as a punitive measure against a brand or organization for behaviours perceived as unacceptable. Refusing to purchase their products becomes a means of signalling disapproval and pushing for accountability. This definition aligns with the broader understanding of consumer activism as a mechanism for addressing social, political, or ethical grievances through market-based responses.

3.6 Research framework and hypothesis

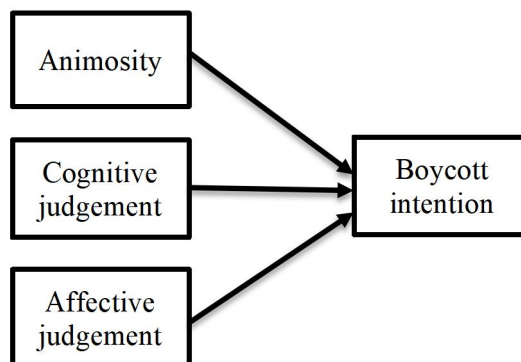


Figure 1: Factors that contribute to boycott intentions toward Israeli brands

The aim of this study is to understand factors that play role in deciding purchasing of Israeli brands product. This discussion is also related to the consumer behaviour in having boycott intention towards Israeli brands product.

Therefore, are three research questions in this study which are;

- i. Is there a relationship between animosity and boycott intention?
- ii. Is there a relationship between cognitive judgement and boycott intention?
- iii. Is there a relationship between affective judgement and boycott intention?

Based from the research questions, the objectives of this research are:

- i. To study the relationship between animosity and boycott intention.
- ii. To examine the relationship between cognitive judgement and boycott intention.
- iii. To investigate the relationship between affective judgement and boycott intention.

Animosity and boycott intention.

H1_o: There is no relationship between animosity and boycott intention among UNIMEL's students and staff.

H1_a: There is a relationship between animosity and boycott intention among UNIMEL's students and staff.

Cognitive judgement and boycott intention.

H1_o: There is no relationship between cognitive judgement and boycott intention among UNIMEL's students and staff.

H1_a: There is a relationship between cognitive judgement and boycott intention among UNIMEL's students and staff.

Affective judgement and boycott intention.

H1_o: There is no relationship between affective judgement and boycott intention among UNIMEL's students and staff.

H1_a: There is a relationship between affective judgement and boycott intention among UNIMEL's students and staff.

4.0 METODOLOGY

The conducted research is focused on Malaysian consumer specifically around Universiti Islam Melaka. Furthermore, this study solely concentrates on wide range of consumers who engage with brands that supported Israel.

4.1 Measurement

The instrument used by the researcher in this study takes the form of a questionnaire. This questionnaire serves as the instrument for collecting quantitative data on the consumer behaviours toward boycott intention against brands that supported Israel.

This study incorporated five constructs from existing research: demography respondent, animosity, cognitive judgment, affective evaluation, and boycott intention. Items related to animosity and cognitive judgment were taken from Klein et al. (1998), while those concerning affective evaluation were derived from Leong et al. (2008). The measures for boycott intention were adopted from Xie, Choo and Lee (2023). All items used in the present study were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”).

4.2 Sampling

The sampling method used in this study was simple random sampling whereby each individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected. The sample size in the study was determined based on the Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) method. This method is one of the most commonly used current methods because it is easy to use and relevant for researchers. Therefore, the required sample size will be calculated using the Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) formula, which is $N > 50 + 8m$. The study was conducted with three (3) independent variables. According to the formula for three independent variables, it is $50 + 8(3) = 74$. Thus, the minimum sample size consists of a total of 74 consumers of brands that supported Israel.

4.3 Data collections and analysis

The data was collected through an online survey using google form. The questionnaire was distributed surrounding Universiti Islam Melaka. The respondents include students, academic staff, administration staff, general workers and others. A total of 152 valid answers were collected.

The obtained data from questionnaire surveys were analysed using computer software, IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive analysis and correlational analysis were used to identify the relationship between dependent and independent variables in a quantitative form.

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Malaysians' efforts to boycott Israeli brands and companies that openly supported the Zionist regime were reflected in the market as these products experienced a significant decline in consumer acceptance and sales. Descriptive analysis aims to describe the demographic distribution of respondents. This study involved a total respondent of 152 whereby 78 females (51.3%) and 74 males (48.7%) respondents. The participation of this survey was actively among below 30 years old (57.2%) and only 10.6% are age between

50 to 59 years old. The majority of the respondents were Malay Muslim which comprise of 74.3% while other races and religions made up 25.7%.

This study highlights that boycott intentions are driven by actions aimed at undermining Israeli companies and others that contribute profits to them. Findings indicate that the awareness of boycotts within Malaysian society remains prevalent and is even encouraged among the public to collectively boycott Israeli products. Among the key factors, animosity has the positive influence ($r = 0.381$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$) on boycott intentions, as reflected in responses to a questionnaire item, “*I dislike brands that support Israel*” and “*I feel angry toward brands that support Israel*”. The results demonstrate that respondents harbour significant hatred and disdain toward Israel as the consumer pretty much aware that these brands involved in funding genocide war in Palestine in response to item “*The Israel brand should be boycotted for funding Genocide in Palestine*”.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis on demographic respondents

Demographic	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	48.7
	Female	51.3
Age	20 to 29 years old	57.2
	30 to 39 years old	14.5
	40 to 49 years old	17.7
	50 to 59 years old	10.6
Education level	SPM/STPM/ Diploma	32.9
	Degree	51.8
	Master	14.1
	PhD holder	1.2
Race	Malay	74.3
	Chinese	11.2
	Indian	9.9
	Others	4.6
Religion	Muslim	74.3
	Hindus	9.9
	Christian	7.9
	Buddhism	5.9
	Atheist	2
Monthly income	< RM 1,500	49.3
	RM1, 501 – RM 2,000	9.9
	RM 2,001 - RM 3,000	3.9
	> RM 3,001	19.7

Such cognitive assessments, as part of the broader animosity framework, had allowed to explain how emotions and historical contexts shape consumer behaviour, influencing their judgments beyond mere product attributes (Klein et al., 1998; Shimp et al., 2004). However, in the context of this study, cognitive judgement ($r = -0.05$, $p\text{-value} > 0.05$) showed no relation towards boycott intention towards Israeli brands product. On the other hand, affective judgement demonstrated the strongest positive relationship towards boycotting intention of Israeli brand products among UNIMEL's staff and students ($r = 0.587$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$).

Table 2: Analysis for items measurements

Variables	Item	Mean	s.p
Animosity	1. I dislike the brands that support Israel.	4.69	.683
	2. I feel angry toward brands that support Israel.	4.70	.528
	3. The Israel brand should be boycotted for funding Genocide in Palestine	4.81	.524
	4. The Israel is not reliable trading partner	4.59	.792
	5. The Israel is taking advantage of Palestine.	4.80	.631
Cognitive Judgment	1. Israel products are carefully produced and have fine workmanship.	3.21	1.486
	2. Israel products are usually quite reliable and seem to last the desired length of time.	3.05	1.406
	3. Israel products are usually good value for money.	2.66	1.452
Affective Evaluation	1. Israel products do not appeal to me.	4.12	1.016
	2. I do not favor buying Israel products.	4.40	.930
Boycott Intention	1. I would avoid purchasing Israel products when possible.	4.63	.752
	2. If possible, I would choose another products over Israel products	4.70	.689
	3. From now on, I am less willing to buy Israel products.	4.68	.647
	4. I would spend as little as possible on Israel products	4.26	1.231

In Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim nation, there has been a significant movement to boycott Israeli brands and companies perceived to support Israel, particularly in response to the Israel-Gaza conflict. This sentiment is deeply rooted in solidarity with the Palestinian cause and is manifested through various consumer actions. Malaysian consumers have actively participated in boycotts against brands with alleged ties to Israel. Lists of such companies circulate on social media, urging the public to avoid their products. This collective action reflects widespread support for Palestine and a desire to influence international policies through economic means. Undoubtly, the impact of boycott will that reduced revenues could lead to job losses, thereby harming Malaysian workers more than the intended foreign entities. The insignificant role of cognitive judgment warrants deeper investigation, particularly in relation to cultural and religious influences that may override rational product evaluation. In the context of boycott intentions towards brands perceived to support Israel during the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, such factors could exert a stronger emotional or moral influence on consumer behavior than purely cognitive assessments.

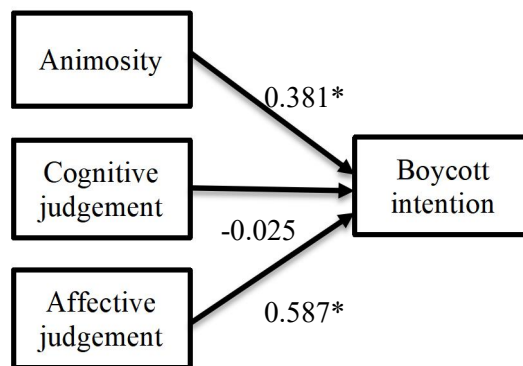


Figure 1: Correlations between animosity, cognitive and affective judgment with boycott intention

Table 3: Hypothesis analysis

Animosity		
H1	There is significant relationship between business operations and business continuity.	Accepted
Cognitive Judgement		
H0	There is no significant relationship between readiness and business continuity.	Accepted
Affective Judgement		
H1	There is a significant relationship between the support system and business continuity.	Accepted

Despite the critics over the boycott which highlighting potential negative impacts on local employees working for the targeted companies, the consumers standing against Israel remains strong. The boycotts have led to shifts in consumer behaviour, with Malaysians opting for alternative brands perceived as neutral or supportive of the Palestinian cause. This change influences market dynamics and presents opportunities for local businesses to fill the gaps left by boycotted companies.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The sentiment of boycotting Israeli brands in Malaysia is a powerful expression of solidarity with Palestine, reflecting deep-seated political and religious convictions beyond cognitive judgement as demonstrated in this study. While it demonstrates the influence of consumer behaviour on international relations, it also raises complex economic and ethical considerations, particularly concerning local employment and the effectiveness of such boycotts in achieving political objectives. Positively, the boycott of Israeli brands has led to a noticeable shift in consumer behaviour, with markets increasingly favouring local brands. This shift is seen as an opportunity to bolster domestic economic development while simultaneously reducing reliance on international brands perceived to support the Israeli regime. This study advances theoretical understanding of consumer boycott behaviour by revealing that emotional, moral, and religious factors can outweigh rational product evaluations, particularly in politically sensitive contexts such as boycotts of brands perceived to support Israel during the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The findings suggest the need to extend conventional decision-making models such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour by integrating socio-religious and moral dimensions. Future research should examine these dynamics across different cultural settings, employ longitudinal or experimental designs to track changes in boycott intensity, and include qualitative methods to capture the deeper moral reasoning behind such consumer actions.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nadiah, I: Drafted this manuscript, involved in planning and supervised this project; Ayu Nafirah, MN: Drafted this manuscript, collected the data and performed the analysis; All authors provided critical feedback and assisted in the research, analysis and manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by other journals. All authors have approved the review, agree with its submission and declare no conflict of interest on the manuscript.

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