

## Will you boycott? : A study of Malaysian Non-Muslims' Willingness to Boycott

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### Abstract

**Purpose :** This paper examined the motivations and willingness to boycott of Non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia; where Islam is prominent. The underlying base used is an on-going boycott spurred by Palestinian/Israel conflict in the Middle East, which targets American-originated firms operating in Malaysia.

**Design/Methodology/Approach :** Two firms were selected based on their market presence, consumer familiarity and product affordability. In total 340 questionnaires were obtained from Non-Muslim university students and validated by multiple regression analysis.

**Findings :** Three factors were found to be significant in predicting willingness to boycott; which were self-enhancement, perceived egregious behavior, and country image.

**Originality/value :** This paper addressed boycott motivations from the context of Malaysian Non-Muslims quantitatively, based on an issue strongly related to Muslims. The results may have some implications on multinational firms, non-government organizations, policymakers as well the consumers.

**Keywords :** boycott, Malaysia, Non-Muslims, religiosity, country image.

**Paper Type :** Research paper

## **Introduction**

In this era of globalization, multinational corporations transcend boundaries in search to seize untapped markets, new resources and better opportunities. Nevertheless, business opportunities and threats go hand in hand. With the increase of consumer boycott occurrences (Friedman, 1985), not limiting only to the western world, firms must be wary of the impact of these threats to their business operations as “consumer protest behavior is an area of strategic and tactical uncertainty” (Ettenson & Klein, 2003, pg. 200). Yet, savvy marketers may view business threats as a step towards discovering new opportunities.

There are many forms and causes of consumer boycotts (Friedman, 1985; 1991; 2001); spurring from environmental concerns (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011), factory relocation (Hoffman & Muller, 2009) difference in political affiliations (Fischer, 2007), and foreign policies (Farah, 2008). Boycotts can even be inflicted by religious reasons (Abosag, 2010).

There were several occurrences of boycott in Malaysia since the last decade, with the most prominent boycott which focused on US and western related products. This particular surrogate (Friedman, 1991) on-going boycott headed by Viva Palestina Malaysia started in 2008 as a form of retaliation against US' foreign policy and its involvement (or lack of) on the decade-long Palestine/Israel conflict.

In a country where Islam is recognized as the main religion, the Muslim majority of Malaysia may relate to the boycott and Palestine/Israel conflict based on religion as a mutual and common ground. However, to what extent will the non-Muslims (predominantly ethnic Chinese, followed by Indians and other ethnic minorities) in Malaysia, which overall constitute about 39% of the total population (Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, 2011) be willing to participate? As non-Muslims in Malaysia generally are from the higher income bracket (Harun, Che Mat, & Abdul Jalil, 2012) which may be translated to better purchasing power; these group should not be ignored as they are significant consumers.

To date, scholars have yet to examine the non-Muslims' willingness to participate in a boycott based on an issue strongly relating to Muslims. Will the non-Muslims be willing to participate and if so, why and what are the factors considered?

The key purpose of the study is to examine and address the motivations of non-Muslims' willingness to boycott of US-related products in Malaysia based on an international issue closely related to Muslims and Islam.

The model used in this study will incorporate psychological factors (Klein, Smith, & John, 2004), country image (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2007) and religiosity (Worthington, et al., 2003). The objectives of the study are to determine which factors will be considered and which is the strongest predictor in their willingness to participate, in attempt to understand their behavior.

### **Boycott definition and background**

Fundamentally, Friedman (1985, pg.97) defined boycott as “an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace”, which is often referred in most boycott (related) studies (Smith & Li, 2010; Farah & Newman, 2009; Knudsen, Aggarwal & Maamoun, 2008; Klein et al, 2004; and Sen, Gurhan-Canli & Morwitz, 2001). Adding further, John & Klein (2003, pg. 1198) described that a boycott occurs “when a number of people abstain from purchase of a product, at the same time, as a result of the same egregious act or behavior, but not necessarily for the same reasons”.

To date, previous studies examined various motivations of boycotts, with variation of underlying scenarios encompassing literatures including psychology (Klein et al, 2004), social psychology, consumer behavior (John & Klein, 2003; Klein, 2001; Sen, et al, 2001), economic (Koku, Akhigbe, & Springer, 1997), religion (Al-Hyari, Alnsour, Al-Weshah, & Haffar, 2012), ethics (Swimberghe, Flurry, & Parker, 2011) and many more. The previous studies and literatures done covering both boycott perspectives i.e from the boycott targets (Abosag, 2010; Garrett, 2001; Gelb, 1995; Friedman, 1985; Chavis & Leslie, 2009), as well as from the consumers' perspective (Klein et al, 2004; Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011; Friedman, 2001).

Consumer boycott decision can be influenced by a person's need of expressing emotionally (Friedman, 1991; Kozinets & Handelman, 1998) of their individuality toward self-realization, together with other factors including but not limited to; perceived success and efficacy (Smith

& Li, 2010; Ettenson & Klein, 2005), social pressure (Witkowski, 1989; Sen et al, 2001; Klein et al, 2003), costs associated by boycott participation (Sen et al, 2001).

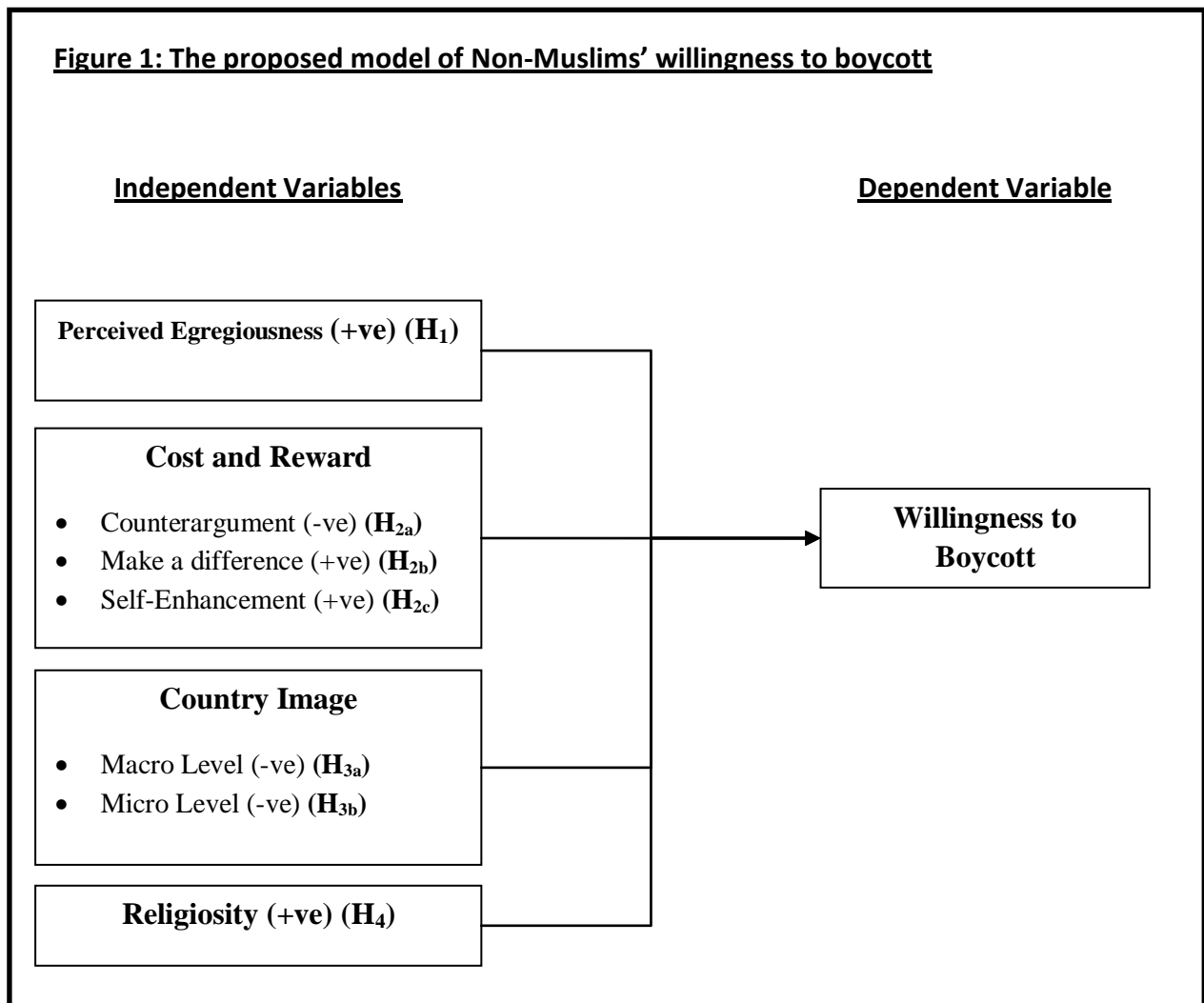
The helping behavior conceptualized in consumer boycott participations is very much related to pro-social behavior of social psychology, which “includes helping, comforting, sharing and cooperation behavior” (Klein et al, 2004, pg 93; Batson, 1998) that describe “actions intended to benefit one or more people other than oneself” often accompanied by costs (Twenge, Ciarocco, Baumeister & Bartels, 2007; Batson 1998, c.f. Klein et al, 2004, pg 93).

Helping behavior can be applied in boycott studies as the underlying essence, as eventually the purpose of boycott participation is to achieve greater good for the society which can be shared collectively. Social psychologists suggested that humans have great desire to belong to a group (Johnson, et al, 2006); hence by facilitating group work, it is akin to consumers answering to boycott calls.

In the arousal: cost-reward model introduced by Dovidio et al (1991) [c.f. Klein et al, 2004], described a person will be aroused to help another person depending on the costs and benefits associated with helping action. Help will most likely to occur only if the benefits outweigh the costs. However, the helping intervention may differ among individuals, societies, cultures, ethnicities and perhaps the situation itself. Help is also likely to occur when similarities exist (Miller, Kozu & Davis, 2001 c.f. Myer, 2010) between group members; defined narrowly or more inclusively (Levine, et al, 2005 c.f. Myer, 2010).

In a boycott situation, the consumer will be aroused by the egregious acts, which will trigger consumers' assessment and evaluation pertaining to the benefits and costs of boycott participation (Piliavian, et al, 1981 c.f. Klein et al, 2004).

Figure 1 below is the overview of the proposed model.



### Perceived Egregious Behavior

Based on previous studies (Klein, Smith & John, 2003; Klein et al, 2004; Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011), perceived egregious behavior was found to have predicted boycott participation as well as negatively effecting brand images.

Egregious behavior describes a firm's or organization's misconduct, injustice or wrongdoing which could result to possible harmful [social] consequences directly or indirectly affecting various stakeholders concerned (Klein et al, 2004; Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011). However, the impact is not limited to only the surrounding third parties but may also concern the environment (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011). Looking from business ethics perspectives, any business activities deemed unethical may also prompt a boycott (Lindenmeier, Tschevlin & Drevs, 2012).

Boycott occurrences can be in a form of surrogate (Friedman, 1985), when firms or organizations becomes the target if no direct relationship with the perpetrator can be established (Friedman, 1991). Klein, Ettenson & Morris (1998) examined the effect of surrogate boycott, where a policy of a particular country has lead to a boycott towards products originated and/or associated with the said country. Similarly, in a form of case study, Abosag (2010) captured the intensity and effect of surrogate boycott focusing on Dutch dairy products in the Middle East.

The boycott damage effect could be extended and exercised on the retailers, wholesalers or even the agents of the targeted firm or organization (John & Klein, 2003; Tyrant & Engelmann, 2005). To overcome or minimize the damage effects, several studies (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2008; Abosag, 2010; Knudsen, et al, 2008) suggested that firms need to distance or disassociate themselves; change their behaviors and policies; and abide to the demands if possible.

The intensity of egregiousness can be perceived differently across cultures and demographics, as Klein et al (2004) argued that consumers may view an act as egregious but not enough to motivate their participation in a boycott. Hence based above, it is proposed that :

*H<sub>1</sub> : Perceived egregiousness positively predicts willingness to boycott. Consumers who perceived the firms' actions and alleged relationship to be egregious, are more likely to participate in the boycott.*

### **Costs and Benefits : Counterarguments**

According to the theory of bystander intervention, it was suggested that should a cost associated with helping a person increases, the chances of extending help might decrease

(Piliavian et al, 1981, c.f Klein et al, 2004). Applying this in a boycott environment, a consumer might fear of his action of boycotting will have negative impact on the employees of the targeted firm (i.e job loss). Similarly, with the presence of other onlookers will decrease a consumer's response to help, hence 'diffusing the responsibility' (Latane & Darley, 1968) among those present.

On the other hand, while consumers might be participating in a boycott, some might not participate knowing that other consumers are boycotting 'on their behalf' justifying their actions as unnecessary (John & Klein, 2003). This behavior which describes 'free riding' will be apparent especially when the costs related to boycotting are generally high (Sen et al, 2001; John & Klein, 2003). However, the cost of helping can be reduced when other consumers are available and prepared to extend their help and participation (Sen et al, 2001; Ettenson & Klein, 2005).

The decision to help can also be misinterpreted collectively in a group when each individual's decision was based on each others' before determining their own reaction (Latane & Darley, 1968). This phenomenon known as 'pluralistic ignorance' can be viewed from a boycott perspective; where consumers only decide to boycott after observing what other consumers' reaction towards a firm's egregious acts, influenced through peer groups, families, public figures (Garrett, 1987) or social pressure (Sen et al, 2001; Klein, Smith & John, 2003).

Perhaps 'audience inhibition' is more apparent in a collective society, where consumers prefer not to be seen overreacting towards any egregious acts in fear of 'standing out' or being embarrassed in front of others (Darley & Latane, 1968). Additionally, consumers may be placed in a dilemma where they believe their involvement or contributions are meaningless, ineffective and/or miniscule to significantly bring any changes (John & Klein, 2003). Thus, it is proposed:

*H<sub>2a</sub> : Counterarguments negatively predicts willingness to boycott. The more consumers engage in counterarguments, the less likely that the consumers will participate in the boycott.*

### **Costs and Benefits : Make a Difference**

Contradicting the previous item, consumers may perceive that there are benefits in boycott participation, either instrumentally or expressively (Friedman, 1985; Kozinets & Handelman,

1998). Participating consumers believed that for collective benefit; their voice and actions can be competent and strong enough to push for positive outcomes (Sen et al, 2001). This is consistent with collective behavior where consumers will respond and be as cooperative as they best can, to achieve collective goals (Wiener & Doescher, 1991) when faced with social dilemma or crises.

Boycotters are quick to declare boycott successes (Friedman, 1991), yet the true impact and success may be quite difficult to assess (John & Klein, 2003). Contrary to general understanding, boycott can lead to unprecedented effect on the target itself. One study found that a boycott actually benefited the target firm, and caused positive impact on the share prices and sales (Koku, et al, 1997). Based on the above, it is proposed that:

*H<sub>2b</sub> : Make a difference positively predicts willingness to boycott. The more consumers believe that boycotting can make differences, the more likely that the consumers will participate in the boycott.*

### **Costs and Benefits : Self-enhancement**

Self-enhancement describes the motivation to maintain one's self-esteem in which induces good feeling (Sedikides & Strube, 1995), obtained by giving as well as receiving help (Myer, 2010). Other than instrumental rewards (Friedman, 1985; John & Klein, 2003), boycotters can possibly obtain intrinsic benefits in many different forms.

By participating in a boycott or associating with a cause, consumers might obtain rewards in form of self-image and self-esteem boost. Also, boycott participation may offer means to 'cleanse' oneself morally (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998); to have clear conscience or 'clean hands' (Klein et al, 2003). Consequently, there are costs of not extending help which may include self-blame, public censure (Dovidio et al, 1991) and guilt. These consequences may have damaging effect on self-image and self-esteem.

It has been argued that self-enhancement is only limited to western cultures (Heine, 2005). However, previous studies found that self-enhancement also exist in eastern collective cultures (Falbo, Poston, Triscari & Zhang, 1997; Fahr, Dobbins & Cheng, 1991), and that it is a universal human motive (Sedikides, Gaertner & Toguchi, 2003). As eastern cultures tend to be collective, perhaps the social pressure to participate in a boycott (Friedman, 1985; Garrett,



1987; Witkowski, 1989) would be more pertinent; especially when the sense of guilt (Witkowski, 1989) is emphasized. Based on the arguments, it is expected that:

*H<sub>2c</sub> : Self-enhancement positively predicts willingness to boycott. The greater the perceived scope for self-enhancement (and avoidance of guilt or social censure), the more likely consumers will boycott.*

### **Country Image**

Integrating previous studies, Pappu et al (2007) argued that country image can be conceptualized both at macro and micro level. Defining macro country image, Martin & Elorgu (1993, pg. 193) stated as “the total of all descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs one has about a particular country” with economic, political and technological as the underlying dimensions. While Nagashima (1970) looked at country image from a smaller scope and defined as “the total of beliefs one has about the products of a given country” (pg. 68).

Consumers whenever unfamiliar with a new product will tend to rely on the country image associated with the product; serving as a halo to infer to the product attributes (Han, 1989). However, consumer can develop a specific country image for a specific product category (Han & Terpstra, 1988), but the task of associating the right image to the product could be challenging for consumers (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008; Samiee, Shimp & Sharma, 2005), even for well-known brands.

Regardless of whether consumers associate the brands and country accurately, the perceived brand origin will strongly affects brand attitude (Magnuson, Westjohn & Zdravkovic, 2011). Perhaps, should a consumer make an inaccurate country association to a product in a boycott context, could potentially be disastrous (or fortunate) to the product and the brand.

Several studies (Klein et al, 2004; Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Smith & Cooper-Martin, 1997), confirmed that the consumers' perception of image can be affected negatively by egregious acts and, that the negative image can be further extended to the firms' products or services.

Thus both hypotheses below are proposed:

*H<sub>3a</sub> : Macro Country Image (Country Level) negatively predicts willingness to boycott. The greater consumers negatively perceived the macro country image of a particular country, the more consumers are likely to boycott.*

*H<sub>3b</sub> : Micro Country Image (Product Level) negatively predicts willingness to boycott. The greater consumers negatively perceived the micro image of a particular country, the more consumers are likely to boycott.*

### **Religiosity**

Religion is an important factor in certain areas of consumer behavior (Hirschman, 1981; Wilkes et al, 1986; McDaniel & Burnett, 1990) as previous studies suggested that “religion can influence a person’s behavior, well being and life in general” (Moschis & Ong, 2011, pg. 8), in which may influence the differences in purchasing behavior among religious groups (Sood & Nasu, 1995). Gould (1999) suggested that religiosity has significant impact on particularly Eastern consumers because of their stronger religious orientation.

However, religion is under-researched (Swimberghe et al, 2011) even in the western world. Perhaps, there are many reasons why it is so; as the subject matter could be considered quite sensitive (Hirschman, 1983) to be discussed, lack of consensus on its dimensions as well as measurements (Wilkes et al, 1986).

There are two approaches identified in measuring religion; which are religious affiliation and religious commitment. Essoo & Dibb (2004) explained religious affiliation as “the adherence of individuals to particular religious group, while religious commitment often termed religiosity is the degree to which beliefs in specific religious values and ideals are held and practices by an individual” (pg. 684). Further defined by Worthington et al, 2003, pg. 85, religious commitment is “the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs and practice and uses them in daily living covers”, and is considered to be quite wholesome as it contained both cognitive and behavioral dimensions (McDaniels & Burnett, 1990), unlike religious affiliation which focused towards behavioral.

Worthington (2003) proposed ‘Religious Commitment Index-10’ and found the scale applicable to most religions including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism (which

reflects the variety of religions practiced in Malaysia), as it covers most of the religious dimensions previously identified.

Hunt & Vitell (1986, 1993) suggested that the experience and practices of a person may influence ethical judgments, which is followed by similar studies examining from a different perspective involving dubious and questionable consumer practices (Vitell et al 2005; 2006; Vitell et al, 2007).

Thus, based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H<sub>4</sub> : Religiosity positively predicts willingness to boycott. The greater consumers perceived themselves as religious, the more likely they are to boycott.*

## **Methods**

This study addresses quantitatively an on-going boycott related to an international issue associated closely to Muslims spurred by the conflict between Palestine/Israel. The focus of this study will be on Non-Muslim consumers living in a multi-ethnic and “multi-cultural Malaysia where Islam is the main religion” (Fam, Waller, & Erdogan, 2002).

The approach of this study is very similar to previous studies (Klein et al, 2003; Sen et al, 2001) engaging on-going boycotts. Our study used prominent US-originated brands in Malaysia namely; McDonald's and Coca Cola. The selection of these brands were based on market presence, brand familiarity, product affordability and accessibility to most consumers; specifically students.

## **Respondents**

The participating respondents for the study were students of a large public university in Malaysia. Student samples were used as they represent a significantly large key market for many types of consumer products (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2008) with fair purchasing power and influence. With power and influence, students may have the potential to be boycott participants. Previous studies relating to boycott (Klein et al, 2003; Yuksel & Mryteza, 2008; Klein, Ettenson & Krishnan, 2005) also used students as their samples, proved to produce

homogenous and uniform samples (Calder, Phillips & Tybout, 1981) which may reduce the possibility of uncertainty and confusion (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2008).

### **Instrument**

A total of 1,000 self-administered questionnaires were distributed in phases to the students located in purposive selected (Cooper & Schindler, 2008) lecture halls. The questionnaires took about 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire were divided into sections namely; the background of the respondents, a brief bulleted information sheet on the MNCs' alleged misconduct/relations to the oppression, followed by scales adapted from previous studies.

In the background section, respondents were required to select their religion (Islam, Buddhism, Christian, Taoism or other) and ethnicities (Malay, Chinese, Indian or other), followed by other details namely age, gender, nationality and education level. Respondents were then required to answer the scales for 'Willingness to boycott' (Smith & Li, 2010), 'Egregious behavior' (Klein et al, 2004), 'Costs and Benefits' (Klein et al, 2004) and 'Religiosity' (Worthington et al, 2003) using a 7 point Likert-type scale; whereby 1 indicates "Strongly Disagree", 4 means "Neither Disagree or Agree" and 7 as "Strongly Agree".

However, 'Macro and Micro country image' (Pappu et al, 2007) were also measured with a 7 point Likert-type scale; but instead, 1 indicated "Bad", 4 is "Neutral" and 7 means "Excellent". The measurement scales were standardized at '1 to 7' mainly to avoid respondents' potential confusion and to facilitate ease of answering the questionnaire.

## **Results**

### **Demographic Profile**

Of the total 1,000 questionnaires distributed, 340 represent Non-Muslims students (34%). 3 questionnaires were incomplete, and hence were removed leaving 337 usable questionnaires. Of 337, majority of the respondents were ethnic Chinese (85%) of which 55% were females, while the main religion of the respondents were Buddhism (78%), followed by Christianity (11%) and Hinduism (8%). Christianity appeared to be multi-ethnic. Other religions not specified were Taoism and indigenous beliefs. The mean age of the respondents was 21. The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 : Respondents' Profile**

Religion	Ethnicity					Total
	Chinese	Indian	Sabah Bumiputera	Sarawak Bumiputera	Others	
• Buddhism	260 (77%)	0	0	0	4 (1%)	264 (78%)
• Hinduism	0	28 (8%)	0	0	0	28 (8%)
• Christianity	21 (6%)	6 (2%)	4 (1%)	5 (1%)	1	37 (11%)
• Others	4 (1%)	1	0	0	3 (1%)	8 (2%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>285 (85%)</b>	<b>35 (10%)</b>	<b>4 (1%)</b>	<b>5 (1%)</b>	<b>8 (2%)</b>	<b>337 (100%)</b>
Gender						
• Male	101 (30%)	12 (4%)	1 (0%)	0	4 (1%)	118 (35%)
• Female	184 (55%)	23 (7%)	3 (1%)	5 (1%)	4 (1%)	219 (65%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>285 (85%)</b>	<b>35 (10%)</b>	<b>4 (1%)</b>	<b>5 (1%)</b>	<b>8 (2%)</b>	<b>337 (100%)</b>

The descriptive statistics for the seven predictors of willingness to boycott are presented below in Table 2. Four of the scales (willingness to boycott, egregious behavior, make a difference, self-enhancement) averaged below the neutral value of 4, whereas the other four sets of scales (religiosity, counterargument and both of the country images at product and country level) averaged above the neutral value.

The mean for willingness to boycott ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) suggested that respondents were unwilling to participate in the boycott. Overall, 38.9% of the respondents agreed that the firms behaved egregiously but only 14.2% expressed their willingness, while the majority of the respondents (70%) disagree to participate in the boycott. 40.4% of the respondents felt that their participation can make a difference, while 14.8% believed that by participating in the boycott will increase and enhance their self-image.

With mean scores of 5.48 (out of 7), 87.2% of the respondents perceived the macro country image of US was fairly acceptable. Similarly, 70% of the respondents perceived the micro image of US was adequate at mean score of 4.74. Finally, 66.2% of the respondents believed that they were religious. The mean score of 4.69 (out of 7) may suggest that the respondents may be fairly liberal samples. Refer to Table 2.

**Table 2 : Descriptive statistics of the variables**

Variable	Mean	SD	% of respondents (Disagree/Bad) $1 \geq M > 4$	% of respondents (Neutral) $M=4$	% of respondents (Agree/Excellent) $4 < M \leq 7$
Willingness to boycott	3.02	1.22	70.0	15.0	14.2
Egregious	3.96	1.30	35.0	26.1	38.9
Counterargument	4.39	1.28	26.1	20.2	53.7
Make a Difference	3.96	1.35	40.4	19.3	40.4

<b>Self-Enhancement</b>	3.20	1.21	63.8	21.4	14.8
<b>Macro Level</b>	5.48	1.00	7.1	5.4	87.2
<b>Micro Level</b>	4.74	1.04	16.3	13.6	70.0
<b>Religiosity</b>	4.69	1.16	16.9	16.9	66.2

### Construct Validity

The suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. The correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients scoring above 0.3 and above. The KMO value was 0.822 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance.

All scales were then subjected to principal components analysis with Varimax rotation. A total of seventeen items were discarded from willingness to boycott (1), religiosity (5), self-enhancement (1), counterargument (2), macro country image (4) and micro country image (4). After removing the items, eight components were revealed and found to be unidimensional which explained 68% of the variance.

### Reliability of Scales

Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the scales. Referring to Table 3, the coefficient alpha estimates ranged between 0.77 and 0.86.

**Table 3 : Comparison of Cronbach's Alpha score between previous and current study**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Previous Study Cronbach Score <math>\alpha</math></b>	<b>Current Study Cronbach Score <math>\alpha</math></b>
<b>Willingness to Boycott</b>	0.91	0.77
<b>Egregious Behavior</b>	0.73	0.82
<b>Counterargument</b>	0.61	0.81
<b>Make a Difference</b>	0.78	0.86
<b>Self-Enhancement</b>	0.73	0.82
<b>Macro CI</b>	0.77-0.90	0.87
<b>Micro CI</b>	0.82-0.96	0.80
<b>Religiosity</b>	0.78	0.85

### Correlation Results

As shown in Table 4, willingness to boycott is positively and significantly correlated ( $p < 0.01$ ) with all of the independent variables except for religiosity and counterargument. This is an indication that respondents with high scores on the independent variables would tend to have higher willingness to boycott. Macro and micro country image are negatively correlated ( $p < 0.01$ ) with willingness to boycott, indicating higher score for counterargument will have lower willingness to boycott.

### Multiple Regression Results

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the relationship between willingness to boycott and the independent variables. The multiple regression model with all seven independent variables produced  $R^2 = 0.296$ ,  $F(7, 336) = 21.19$ ,  $p < 0.001$  indicating that the model explained approximately 29% of the variation in the respondents' willingness to boycott.

As shown on in Table 4 below, the sub-construct of benefits and costs which is **self-enhancement** [ $t(329) = 7.491$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ] has significant positive regression weights and is the highest contributor to the model, followed by **egregious behavior** [ $t(329) = 3.194$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ]. This indicates that both independent variables uniquely contribute to the prediction of willingness to boycott, in which supports  $H_1$  and  $H_{2c}$ .

On the other hand, **macro country image** [ $t(329) = -2.321$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ] displayed significant negative regression weight, indicating the least unique contribution towards the prediction of willingness to boycott, thus supporting  $H_{3a}$ .

In summary, three hypotheses ( $H_1$ ,  $H_{2c}$ , and  $H_{3a}$ ) were supported, while four hypotheses ( $H_{2a}$ ,  $H_{2b}$ ,  $H_{3b}$  and  $H_4$ ) were not supported. Refer to Table 4 below.

**Table 4 : Summary statistics, correlations and regression analysis results**

Variable	Mean	SD	Correlation with Willingness to boycott	B	Std Error	B	t	Sig.
Willingness to boycott	3.02	1.22						
Constant				2.31	.454		5.090	.000
Egregious ( $H_1$ )	3.96	1.30	.336**	.158	.049	.169	3.194	.002**
Counterargument ( $H_{2a}$ )	4.39	1.28	(.064)	(.023)	.045	(.024)	(.521)	.602
Make a Difference ( $H_{2b}$ )	3.96	1.35	.298**	.009	.051	.010	.176	.860
Self-Enhancement ( $H_{2c}$ )	3.20	1.21	.501**	.415	.055	.412	7.491	.000***
Religiosity ( $H_4$ )	4.69	1.16	(.039)	.020	.051	.019	.388	.698
Macro CI ( $H_{3a}$ )	5.48	1.00	(.225) **	(.160)	.069	(.132)	(2.321)	.021*
Micro CI ( $H_{3b}$ )	4.74	1.04	(.198) **	(.084)	.067	(.072)	(1.249)	.213

\* significant at 0.1 level

\*\* significant at 0.05 level

\*\*\* significant at 0.01 level

## **Discussion and Future Research**

Consistent with previous studies on boycott (Klein et al, 2004; Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011), this study found that egregious behavior and self-enhancement to be significant predictors to the research model, with the latter being the most significant contributor. As pointed out by Klein et al (2004), this study demonstrated that an act can be perceived to be egregious, but is still insufficient for boycott participation. Further, this study found that (macro) country image is a predictor in the model, but with lesser significance. However, contrary to previous study (Klein et al, 2004), this study found the two psychological factors within the costs and benefits construct which are counterargument and make a difference, to be insignificant in the research model.

Although previous related studies found that religion and religiosity were important factors in consumer activism and boycott literature (Swimberghe et al, 2011), this study however found that religiosity does not have correlation and contribution as a factor in consumers' decision making process for boycott participation. This finding demonstrates that ethnic minorities does not necessarily or can be easily influenced by the majority's decision and action despite sharing common nationality. Also, this study could also reveal that an issue strongly related to Islam will not affect Non-Muslims.

Gould (1999) suggested that religiosity may have significant impact on Eastern consumers due to their stronger religious orientation, however the research findings revealed otherwise; as the respondents were found to be more or less liberals. This perhaps could to some extent explain why almost 70% of the respondents were not willing to participate in the boycott. However, being liberal does not mean that there should be an absence of moral or ethics. Looking from the perspective of ethical products choice, the results showed that these respondents lack general consumer concern (Belk, Devinney & Eckhardt, 2006).

On average the respondents have relatively good impression of US related products and brands. However, marketers cannot be easily contended since more than a third of the respondents (38.9%) still considered their [alleged] involvement as egregious. Perhaps, a single related well-orchestrated event could push this group of consumers to support the boycott, and the results could be catastrophic for marketers. On the other hand, pro-boycott NGOs could re-evaluate their strategies to 'entice' consumers over to their cause, possibly through manipulation of self-enhancements factors.



Consequently, this study also may lead to the question of how NGOs (and marketers alike) may strategize to gather support for a cause in a multiethnic and multi-religious society.

### **Limitation and Future Research Direction**

Despite being able to research based on an actual on-going boycott, there were several limitations faced in completing this study. Although students may be very significant consumers of certain consumer products, the usage of student samples from only a single university may not be adequate for the results to be generalized. However, future research could consider with bigger non-students sample size, from multiple cities representing the regions of Malaysia for better and reliable results. Additionally, as age might be strongly correlated with religiosity (Moschis & Ong, 2011), future research might consider targeting 'matured youths' or adults as samples to examine possible willingness in boycott participation. Possibly, 'matured youths' could relate better to international issues used in this study.

Further, future researchers could consider examining how consumers might react towards boycotting on different product categories or brands, for example automobiles, electronic gadgets and clothing; with different underlying issues and reasons. These examples would provide valuable information and results for researchers to capture the 'diversity' of consumer boycotts in Malaysia.

Additionally, future researches could also incorporate other boycott motivations from other boycott researches, or examine the boycott occurrences from different or opposing perspectives.

### **Notes**

1. The religion of Malay Malaysians is usually ascribed to Islam. In this study, non-Muslims will refer to Malaysians of ethnic Chinese, Indians and indigenous groups. However, there are a small percentage of Muslims belonging to these ethnic groups.
2. There might be differences between cultures and/or subcultures in interpreting Buddhism as a religion. In this study, Buddhism will be presented as a religion.

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