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Online #Boycotts: Consumers Calling for Accountability and Social Responsibility

Kimberly Legocki kvl4@stmarys-ca.edu

Kristen Walker

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Introduction

68% of consumers believe they have the power to force corporations to change (2021 Edelman Trust Barometer)



- > The term *boycott* is used for any kind of social violation by a company, individual or government entity (Cruz 2017).
- > Online boycotts have increased 33 percent in the past 15 years, 2000 to 2015 (Eth. Cons. Mkt Rpts. 2015).
- > Not only do boycotts damage a brand's reputation (Bartley & Child 2011), they also negatively impact consumer purchase intention (Ettenson & Klein 2005); brand loyalty (Abosag & Farah 2014); and firms' financial value (e.g., van den Broek et al. 2017).
- > While scholars have examined boycotts in the context of participant motivations (Hahn & Albert 2015) and boycott targets (Makarem & Jae 2016), there is limited data on consumer participation in online boycotts.

Research Questions

- (1)What is the frequency that consumers participate in online boycotts?
- (1)Which industries are most frequently targeted by online boycotts?

Literature Review

- \succ In exchange for the right to exist and be profitable, companies offer advantages to society (Donaldson 1989).
- > Companies are expected to be accountable for some societal welfare (Carroll 2000).
- \succ In order to balance the power asymmetry between consumers and companies, the accountability framework positions government to enforce certain codes of practices if there is an assumption that opportunism will prevail where no regulation exists (Swift 2001).
- > We build on this view of consumers attempting to mitigate company behavior through the use or threat of online boycotts.
- If companies violate compacts, or broad longterm agreements, legislation may be implemented for the purpose of monitoring or prevention.
- If the company violates an unstated social norm or commits a perceived injustice or acts in a greedy, opportunistic manner, **consumers may** hold the company accountable through boycotts (Swift 2001).
- Online activists are often not dealt with effectively (van den Broek et al. 2017).

Conceptual Framework

The following figure conceptualizes online boycott participation.



Methodology¹

- This study uses statistical data mining to conduct an exploratory analysis of social media content.
- > Data set includes 2,147,710 tweets from 663,987 unique users containing the hashtag #boycott between August 2014 and June 2017.
- > The first step in our analysis was to use thresholds to separate boycotters into meaningful subgroups using centroid clustering.
- Classification was done through automatic rule mining using WEKA (Witten et al 2016).

Frequency of Online Boycott Participation

% of	No. of #	No. of
Dataset	Boycott	Unique
	Tweets	Users
57%	1	378,473
21%	2	139,437
7%	3	46,479
15%	4+	99,598
	TOTAL	663,987

- > 78% of unique Twitter users tweeted about boycotts two times or less between August 2014 and June 2017.
- This contradicts extant research on serial activism participation (e.g., Bastos et al. 2013).
- > Our findings do not support the concept of habitual boycotters.
- \succ The top 1,000 most active unique users out of 663,987 - in our data set posted only an average of 15 times across thirty-five months.

Fast Foo

Food & I

Politics



Industries Targeted by Online #Boycotts



- \succ All tweets in the data set contained the hashtag #boycott; **11 hashtag co**occurrences identified.
- Consumer behavior in technology and politically motivated boycotts participated in novel ways.
- Consumers participated in just a few technology boycotts but were the most active in the dataset; mostly retweeted.
- Consumers participated in a wide range of political boycotts - serial boycotters. Wrote original tweets rather than retweeting.

Industry or Topic	Hashtag Co-occurrence	
Consumer Goods	#BoycottLego #BoycottSony #Boycott84Lumber	
Beauty & Cosmetics	#BoycottLoreal #BoycottGarnier #BoycottLancome	
Clothing & Fashion	#BoycottNewBalance #BoycottDolceGabbana	
Automotive	#BoycottTesla #BoycottBMW #BoycottMercedes #BoycottFord	
Finance	#WellsFargoFraud #PwC	
Fast Food	#BoycottPanera	
Food & Beverage	#DumpYuengling #BoycottNestle #BoycottPepsico #BoycottHershey #BoycottBudweiser #BoycottPepsi	
Travel	#BoycottMarriott #BoycottUnited #United	
Technology	#BoycottMicrosoft #BoycottGoogle #BoycottApple #BoycottAmazon #DeleteUber #GoDaddy	
Politics	#BoycottIvanka #StopFundingHate #TrumpProtest #BoycottTrump #BoycottDenmark #GrabYourWallet	
Entertainment	#BoyCottStarWarsVII #MakeMulanRight #BoycottDisney #Boycotthamilton #JusticeForHarambe (Cincinnati Zoo)	

References

References available upon request.