A study on the boycott motivations of Malaysian non-Muslims

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine non-Muslim consumers’ willingness and motivation to boycott American-based companies operating in Malaysia, where Islam is prominent. The underlying base used in this study is an on-going boycott spurred by the Palestinian/Israel conflict in the Middle East.

Design/methodology/approach – Two products were selected based on their market presence: consumer familiarity and product affordability. A total of 340 completed questionnaires were obtained from non-Muslim university students and validated by partial least squares approach.

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 addresses 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 as consumers.

Keywords Islamic lifestyle markets, Malaysia, Advertisements and promotions to Muslims, Islamic markets, Country image, Religiosity, Boycott, The Muslim consumer

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In this era of globalization, multinational corporations transcend boundaries in search of seizing 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 and Klein, 2005, p. 200). Yet, savvy marketers may view business threats as a step toward discovering new opportunities.

There are many forms and causes of consumer boycotts (Friedman, 1985, 1991, 2001), spurring from environmental concerns (Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011), factory relocation (Hoffmann and Müller, 2009), difference in political affiliations (Fischer, 2007), foreign policies (Ettenson and Klein, 2005) and can even be inflicted by religious reasons (Abosag and Farah, 2014; Abosag, 2010; Jensen, 2008). Boycotts can occur when

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consumers find certain acts by a country or a firm to be offensive and egregious (Abosag and Farah, 2014; Klein et al., 2004).

There have been several occurrences of boycott in Malaysia over the past decade, with the most prominent boycott being 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 (Abdul-Talib and Abdul-Latif, 2015).

In a country where Islam is the official religion, the Muslim majority of Malaysia may relate to the boycott and Palestine/Israel conflict based on mutual religion as the common ground (Abd-Razak and Abdul-Talib, 2012). 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 per cent of the total population (Census, 2011) be willing to participate? Non-Muslims in Malaysia are generally from the higher income bracket (Harun et al., 2012), which can be translated to better purchasing power. Additionally, these groups should not be ignored, as collectively, their population is quite sizable in numbers at approximately 11 million (Census, 2011) and therefore 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 which could influence their participation?

The key purpose of the study is to examine and address the motivations of the Malaysian non-Muslims’ willingness to boycott US-related products based on an international issue closely related to Muslims and Islam. This study will examine this phenomenon in a Muslim majority-dominated environment and context.

The model used in this study will incorporate psychological factors (Klein et al., 2004), country images (Pappu et al., 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 influencing their willingness to participate, in an attempt to understand and predict their behavior.

Boycott definition and background
Fundamentally, Friedman (1985, p. 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 to in most boycott-related studies (Farah and Newman, 2010; Klein et al., 2004; Knudsen et al., 2008; Sen et al., 2001; Smith and Li, 2010b). Adding further, John and Klein (2003, p. 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 and Klein, 2003; Sen et al., 2001), economic (Koku et al., 1997), religion (Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Jensen, 2008), ethics (Swimberghe et al., 2011) and many more. The previous studies and literatures undertaken covering both
boycott perspectives, i.e. from the boycott targets (Abosag, 2010; Chavis and Leslie, 2009; Friedman, 1985), as well as from the consumers’ perspective (Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011; Ettenson and Klein, 2005; Friedman, 2001; Klein et al., 2004).

Consumer boycott decision can be influenced by a person’s need of expressing emotionally (Friedman, 1991; Kozinets and Handelman, 1998) of their individuality toward self-realization, together with other factors including but not limited to; perceived success and efficacy (Ettenson and Klein, 2005; Smith and Li, 2010b), social pressure (Klein et al., 2003; Sen et al., 2001; Witkowski, 1989), 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, p. 93) that describe “actions intended to benefit one or more people other than oneself” often accompanied by costs (Twenge et al., 2007; Klein et al., 2004, p. 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 cited from Klein et al., 2004) described that a person will be aroused to help another person depending on the costs and benefits associated with the 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 et al., 2001; Myers, 2010) between group members; defined narrowly or more inclusively (Levine et al., 2005; Myers, 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 (Klein et al., 2004). Figure 1 below is the overview of the proposed model.

**Figure 1.**
The proposed model of non-Muslims’ willingness to boycott.
Perceived egregious behavior

Based on previous studies (Abdul-Talib and Abdul-Latif, 2015; Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011; Klein et al., 2004; Lindenmeier et al., 2012a, 2012b), 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 (Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011; Klein et al., 2004). However, the impact is not limited to only the surrounding third parties but may also concern the environment (Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011). Looking from business ethics perspectives, any business activities deemed unethical may also prompt a boycott (Lindenmeier et al., 2012a, 2012b).

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 et al. (1998) examined the effect of surrogate boycott, where a policy of a particular country has lead to a boycott toward products originated and/or associated with the said country. Similarly, in a form of case study, Abosag (2010) and Jensen (2008) 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 and Klein, 2003; Tyran and Engelman, 2005). To overcome or minimize the damage effects, several studies (Abosag, 2010; Knudsen et al., 2008; Yuksel and Mryteza, 2009) 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 on the above, it is proposed that:

$H1$. Perceived egregiousness positively predicts willingness to 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 (Klein et al., 2004). Applying this in a boycott environment, a consumer might fear of his action of boycotting that will have a negative impact on the employees of the targeted firm (i.e. job loss). Similarly, with the presence of other onlookers, a consumer’s response to help will decrease, hence “diffusing the responsibility” (Latane and 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 and Klein, 2003). This behavior which describes “free riding” will be apparent especially when the costs related to boycotting are generally high (John and Klein, 2003; Sen et al., 2001). However, the cost of helping can be reduced when other consumers are available and are prepared to extend their help and participation (Ettenson and Klein, 2005; Sen et al., 2001).
The decision to help can also be misinterpreted collectively in a group when each individual’s decision was based on each other’s before determining their own reaction (Latane and Darley, 1968). This phenomenon known as “pluralistic ignorance” can be viewed from a boycott perspective, where consumers only decide to boycott after observing how other consumers react toward a firm’s egregious acts, influenced through peer groups, families, public figures (Garrett, 1987) or social pressure (Klein et al., 2003; Sen et al., 2001).

Perhaps “audience inhibition” is more apparent in a collective society, where consumers prefer not to be seen overreacting toward any egregious acts in fear of “standing out” or being embarrassed in front of others (Darley and 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 and Klein, 2003). Thus, it is proposed:

\textit{H2a. Counterarguments negatively predicts willingness to boycott.}

\textit{Costs and benefits: make a difference}

Contradictory to the counterargument factors discussed above, consumers may perceive that there are social benefits in boycott participation, either instrumentally or expressively (Friedman, 1985; Kozinets and Handelman, 1998). Cooperating consumers believe that their voices and actions can be competent and strong enough to push for positive actions toward the desired outcomes, and each individual participants’ effort matters (Sen et al., 2001). This is consistent with collective behavior where consumers will respond and be as cooperative with each other as they best can to achieve common and collective goals (Wiener and Doescher, 1991) especially when faced with social dilemma or crises.

Consumers who participate in a boycott desiring to make a change may also perceive the “appropriateness” and “effectiveness” to the collective boycott effort (Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001). However, it is equally important to note that factors such as the leadership presence, group heterogeneity, group size, temptation to free ride and the size of the collective benefits at stake, among many others, may influence consumers’ participation in a boycott toward making a difference (Ostrom, 2014). 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:

\textit{H2b. Making a positive difference predicts willingness to boycott.}

\textit{Costs and benefits: self-enhancement}

Self-enhancement describes the motivation to maintain one’s self-esteem in which induces good feelings (Sedikides and Strube, 1995), obtained by giving as well as receiving help (Myers, 2010). Other than instrumental rewards (Friedman, 1985; John and 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 the form of self-image and a boost to self-esteem. Also, boycott participation may offer means to “cleanse” oneself morally (Kozinets and Handelman, 1998), to have clear conscience or “clean hands” (Klein et al., 2004). Consequently, there are costs of not
extending help which may include self-blame, public censure (Dovidio et al., 1991) and

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 et al., 1997), and that it is a universal human motive (Sedikides et al., 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:

\( H2c \). Positive self-enhancement predicts willingness to boycott.

### Country image

Pappu et al. (2007) argued that country image can be conceptualized both at macro and micro level. Defining macro country image, (Martin and Eroglu, 1993, p. 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 the country image construct from a smaller scope and defined as “the total of beliefs one has about the products of a given country” (p. 68).

This construct is important to consumers especially for those who are unfamiliar with a product, as they may have to rely on the country images associated with the product, serving as a halo to infer to the product’s attributes (Han, 1989; Laroche et al., 2005). Consumers can also develop a specific country image for a specific product category (Abdul-Talib and Abdul-Latif, 2015; Han and Terpstra, 1988) or brands equity (Pappu et al., 2007), but the task of associating the right image to the product could be challenging for consumers (Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2008; Samiee et al., 2005), even for well-known brands.

Regardless of whether consumers associate the brands and country accurately, the perceived brand origin strongly affects brand attitude (Magnusson et al., 2011). Should a consumer make an inaccurate country image association to a product in a boycott context, it could potentially be disastrous to the product and the brand if the images associated with it are negative. Likewise, it can be fortunate if there are positive associations (Abdul-Talib and Abdul-Latif, 2015).

Several studies (Dawar and Pillutla, 2000; Klein et al., 2004; Smith and Cooper-Martin, 1997) confirmed that the consumers’ perception of country 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:

\( H3a \). Macro country image (country level) negatively predicts willingness to boycott.

\( H3b \). Micro country image (product level) negatively predicts willingness to boycott.

### Religiosity

Religion is an important factor in certain areas of consumer behavior (Essoo and Dibb, 2004; Hirschman, 1983; McDaniel and Burnett, 1990; Wilkes et al., 1986) as previous studies suggested that “religion can influence a person’s behavior, well-being and life in
general” (Moschis and Ong, 2011, p. 8), in which may influence the differences in purchasing behavior among religious groups (Sood and 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 and 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 (p. 684).

Further defined by Worthington et al., (2003, p. 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 (McDaniel and Burnett, 1990), unlike religious affiliation which focused toward behavior.

Worthington et al. (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 and Vitell (1986, 2006) 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, 2007).

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

*H4*. Religiosity positively predicts willingness 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 and Zionist 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 et al., 2004).

The approach of this study is very similar to previous studies (Abdul-Talib and Abdul-Latif, 2015; 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 and Mryteza, 2009) 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., 2006, 2003; Yuksel and Mryteza, 2009) also used students as their samples, proved to produce homogenous and uniform samples (Calder et al., 1981) which may reduce the possibility of uncertainty and confusion (Yuksel and Mryteza, 2009).

**Instrument**

A total of 1,000 self-administered questionnaires were distributed in phases to the students located in purposive selected (Cooper and Schindler, 2008) lecture halls. The questionnaires took about 15 min to complete. The questionnaires 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” (Klein et al., 2004; Smith and Li, 2010a), “Egregious behavior” (Klein et al., 2004), “Costs and Benefits” (Klein et al., 2004) and “Religiosity” (Worthington et al., 2003) using a seven-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 seven-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. All items used in this study are listed in the Appendix.

**Data analysis and approach**

In analyzing a partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) approach of which this research will be undertaking, the measurement model’s reliability and validity needs to be addressed first. Following that, the structural model will then be assessed and analyzed. According to Hair et al. (2011), PLS-SEM has gained significant attention among researches particularly on marketing and consumer behavior. Recently, this approach is found to be quite useful especially when involving causal-predictive analysis in a situation when the knowledge or understanding of the subject matter is rather limited, scarce and/or complex. In other words, this approach is especially suitable for exploratory purposes. Hair et al. (2014) added that this approach has comparatively high statistical power to the co-variance-based SEM approach, and yet flexible enough to accommodate for confirmatory theory testing, aside from theory building and prediction. SPSS version 17.0 is used to provide the descriptive analysis results, followed by Smart-PLS version 2.0 (Ringle et al., 2005) to perform the procedures under PLS-SEM.

**Results**

*Demographic profile*

Of the total 1,000 questionnaires distributed, 340 represent non-Muslims students (34 per cent). Three questionnaires were incomplete and hence were removed leaving 337
usable questionnaires. Of 337, the majority of the respondents were ethnic Chinese (85 per cent) of which 55 per cent were females, while the main religion of the respondents was Buddhism[5] (78 per cent), followed by Christianity (11 per cent) and Hinduism (8 per cent). Christianity appeared to be multi-ethnic. Other religions not specified were Taoism and indigenous beliefs. The average age of the respondents was 21 years. The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in Table I below.

The descriptive statistics for the seven predictors of willingness to boycott are presented below in Table II. Four of the scales (willingness to boycott, egregious behavior, make a difference and 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 per cent of the respondents agreed that the firms behaved egregiously, but only 14.2 per cent expressed their willingness, while the majority of the respondents (70 per cent) disagree to participate in the boycott. In all, 40.4 per cent of the respondents felt that their participation can make a difference, while 14.8 per cent believed that by participating in the boycott will increase and enhance their self-image.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Sabah Bumiputera</th>
<th>Sarawak Bumiputera</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<td>Buddhism</td>
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<td>77</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>264</td>
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<td>Hinduism</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>337</td>
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<table>
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<th>Female</th>
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<td>184</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Chinese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
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<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>337</td>
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Table I. Respondents’ profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
<th>% of respondents</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to boycott</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egregious</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterargument</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>53.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a difference</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-enhancement</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro level</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro level</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>70.0</td>
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<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Descriptive statistics of the variables
With mean scores of 5.48 (out of 7), 87.2 per cent of the respondents perceived the macro country image of the USA was fairly acceptable. Similarly, 70 per cent of the respondents perceived the micro image of the USA were adequate at mean score of 4.74. Finally, 66.2 per cent 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 (Table II).

**Outer model evaluation/measurement validity**

To assess the measurement model in PLS-SEM approach, there are four types of reliability or validity analyses that need to be executed. First, each individual indicator (or also known as items) needs to be verified of its reliability. This is then followed by assessing the internal consistency of the indicators through composite reliability (CR). Subsequently, the convergent validity will be assessed through average variance extracted (AVE) analysis. Finally, the discriminant validity assessment needs to be satisfied through the examination of the indicators’ cross-loading, as according to Fornell-Larcker’s criterion. As these indicators are reflective instead of formative measures, the loadings of the indicators are examined, treated and interpreted similarly to principal component analysis.

Referring to Table III, the weights of the indicators are examined to measure the amount of variance of the indicators which can be explained by the latent variables. According to the table, the individual standardized indicator loadings ranged between 0.709 to 0.905. Following recommendations by Hulland (1999); only indicators with loadings of 0.7 or above should be retained. Loadings ranging between 0.4 and below 0.7 “should only be considered for removal from the scale if deleting this indicator leads to an increase in CR above the suggested threshold value” (Hair et al., 2011, p. 145). For reflective measures, indicators with loadings below 0.4 must always be removed (Hair et al., 2011). Thus, based on these guidelines and suggestions, a total of 17 indicators were removed; willingness to boycott (2), self-enhancement (1), counterargument (4), country image (country level – 3 indicators, product level – 4 indicators) and religiosity (3).

In contrast to Cronbach’s alpha, CR prioritized the measurement indicators according to the reliability of each individual indicator. Cronbach’s alpha on the other hand, assumed all indicators are equally reliable and regarded as a whole; hence, this may result in to the underestimation of the internal consistency reliability of the constructs. To overcome this, Chin (1998) suggested that CR scores will be used instead. According to Table V, the scores for CR ranged from 0.822 to 0.919, thus satisfying the recommended range of above 0.700 as suggested in Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Hair et al. (2014). It is also important to note that any values above 0.950 indicate a potential common method bias (Straub et al., 2004).

Next, the AVE which is a common criterion developed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) will be used to measure the convergent validity of the constructs. This method computes the degree of individual indicators in reflecting the construct converging while comparing to other indicators of another construct(s). According to Table V, all AVE values scored more than 0.500 as recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Hair et al. (2014). The AVE scores for all constructs which ranged between 0.598 and 0.726 suggest that the latent variables are able to be explained more than half of the variances of their indicators. As according to Table IV, the AVE score of each latent constructs were found to be higher than the construct’s highest squared correlation with any other latent
constructs, thus satisfying the discriminant validity requirement as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Other than that criterion, each indicator of the latent constructs must score highest on the construct it intended to measure. This was demonstrated in the Table III previously (Chin, 1998; Grégoire and Fisher, 2006) (Tables IV and V).

**Inner model evaluation (structural model)**

After establishing satisfactory confidence in the measurement model as per Figure 2, only then further analyses were executed. Next, the structural equation model was developed and specified as shown in Figure 3. For the structural equation model to be
validated, suggested criterions such as determination of the coefficient ($R^2$), path coefficient and predictive relevance ($Q^2$) were considered and evaluated.

One of the most important steps in PLS-SEM assessment involves the examination of the coefficient of determination ($R^2$), which quantify the relationship of the explained variance of a latent variable to its total variance. According to Table VI, the $R^2$ score is 0.404, which has slightly above average explanatory power as suggested by Chin (1998), whereby values of 0.670 is considered as substantial, 0.333 as average and 0.190 and below as weak. It is also important to note that according to Hair et al. (2011), $R^2$ score of 0.200 may also be considered as high in certain disciplines such as consumer behavior.

Subsequently, the path coefficient must be evaluated to explain the degree of relationship between the latent variables by performing a bootstrapping procedure. Path coefficient scores of above 0.100 with 0.050 significance level may indicate effects or impacts within the model. Paths that were found to be insignificant, or given results contrary to the hypotheses' initial direction, will not support the hypotheses made (Hair et al., 2011). As a result, hypotheses $H2a$, $H2b$, $H3a$, $H3b$ and $H4$ were not supported due to the low coefficient scores and $t$-values. Hence, only two hypotheses ($H1$ and $H2c$) were accepted.

By using blindfolding procedure, the structural model’s predictive relevance can be assessed through Stone–Geisser’s $Q^2$ (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974). This assessment “postulates that the model must be able to adequately predict each endogenous latent construct’s indicators” (Hair et al., 2011, p. 147). According to Table VI, the $Q^2$ value above zero, indicating that the path model has predictive relevance for the selected reflective endogenous variable (willingness to boycott) (Tables VI and VII).

Several prominent PLS-SEM researches (Hair et al., 2014; 2012; Henseler and Sarstedt, 2013) cautioned on the usage of GoF and its interpretation within PLS approach, as they argued that it:

[...] does not represent true global fit measure, and threshold values, for an acceptable GoF can hardly be derived because $R^2$ values depend on the research context and constructs’ role in the model (Hair et al., 2012, p. 426).

**Discussion and future research**

Consistent with previous studies on boycott (Abdul-Talib and Abdul-Latif, 2015; Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011; Klein et al., 2004), this study found that egregious

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Counter-argument</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) CI Country level</td>
<td>-0.101</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) CI Product level</td>
<td>-0.120</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Make a difference</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Egreious behavior</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td>-0.166</td>
<td>0.408</td>
<td>0.852</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Religiosity</td>
<td>-0.126</td>
<td>0.271</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>0.787</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Self-enhancement</td>
<td>0.365</td>
<td>-0.249</td>
<td>-0.149</td>
<td>0.505</td>
<td>0.361</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Willingness to boycott</td>
<td>0.270</td>
<td>-0.268</td>
<td>-0.220</td>
<td>0.312</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>-0.097</td>
<td>0.595</td>
<td>0.773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV. Discriminant analysis results
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items and its loadings, t-values, CR and AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counter-argument</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not need to boycott the firms because other people are boycotting already</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not buy enough of the firms’ products for it to be worthwhile to boycott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country image country level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think USA has high level of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think US citizens have high standard of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think USA has high labor costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think US’ welfare system is good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think USA is highly industrialized nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think USA is highly developed country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religiosity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to me to spend periods in private for religious thought and reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy working in the activities of my religious organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep well informed about my local religious group and have some influence in its decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make financial contributions to my religious organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Make a difference</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boycotts are an effective means to make firms change its actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When all of us support the boycott, the firms will listen to us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone should support the boycott because every contribution, no matter how small, is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By boycotting, I can help change the firms’ decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country image product level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think US products are technological advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think US products are Innovative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I feel proud to own or consume products from USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think US products are reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think US products are of high status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think US products have excellent finishing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
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 both (macro and micro) country image are not predictors in the model. Contrary to previous study (Klein et al., 2004), this study found the two psychological factors within the costs and benefits factor 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 do 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 and associated to Muslims and Islam may not have any effect on 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 per cent of the respondents were not willing to participate in the boycott. However, being liberal does not mean that there should be an absence of morals or ethics. Looking from the perspective of ethical products choice, the results showed that these respondents lack general consumer concern (Belk et al., 2005; Eckhardt et al., 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items Loadings</th>
<th>p-values</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>Composite reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-enhancement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel guilty if I buy the firms' product</td>
<td>SE15</td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends/family are encouraging me to boycott the firms</td>
<td>SE17</td>
<td>0.861</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will feel better about myself if I boycott the firms</td>
<td>SE18</td>
<td>0.868</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud to support the boycott</td>
<td>SE19</td>
<td>0.792</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unacceptable behavior</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.726 0.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the firms should stop associating with immoral activities</td>
<td>UB10</td>
<td>0.756</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find the firms' actions are wrong</td>
<td>UB8</td>
<td>0.888</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think they deserve to be boycotted</td>
<td>UB9</td>
<td>0.905</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Willingness to boycott</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.598 0.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would feel guilty if I bought a US product</td>
<td>WB3</td>
<td>0.724</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would never buy a US car</td>
<td>WB4</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever possible, I avoid buying US products</td>
<td>WB5</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not like the idea of owning US products</td>
<td>WB7</td>
<td>0.761</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** ***p < 0.001**
Possibly the respondents viewed the Palestine/Israel conflict as an “exclusive issue” for Muslims rather than an international humanitarian issue (Abdul-Talib and Abdul-Latif, 2015) which should be concerned by all rational individuals regardless of religion or nationality. Another explanation which can be offered is that negative sentiments may have been developed among the respondents against Muslims and Islam in general as a result of the exposure from negative international media.
(Ayyub, 2015). Of late, there is much negative media exposure on Islam from the West World resulting to Islamophobia (Ayyub, 2015; Gardner et al., 2008).

Based on the descriptive statistics, on average, the respondents have a relatively good impression of US-related products and brands. However, marketers cannot be easily contended, as more than one-third of the respondents (38.9 per cent) still considered their [alleged] involvement as egregious or unacceptable. 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 multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path coefficients</th>
<th>$f^2$ Effect size</th>
<th>$q^2$ Effect size</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$Q^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exogenous latent variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Counter-argument</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) CI Country level</td>
<td>$-0.090$</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) CI Product level</td>
<td>$-0.043$</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>$-0.001$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Make a difference</td>
<td>$-0.032$</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Egregious behavior</td>
<td>0.183</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Religiosity</td>
<td>$-0.037$</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Self-enhancement</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0.257</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Endogenous latent variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Willingness to boycott</td>
<td>0.404</td>
<td>0.237</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VI. Coefficient of determination ($R^2$), predictive relevance ($Q^2$) and effect sizes ($f^2$ and $q^2$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Path coefficient</th>
<th>$t$-values</th>
<th>$p$-values</th>
<th>Decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$H1$</td>
<td>Perceived egregiousness positively predicts willingness to boycott.</td>
<td>0.183***</td>
<td>3.500</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H2a$</td>
<td>Counter-argument negatively predicts willingness to boycott</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>1.106</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td><em>Not Supported</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H2b$</td>
<td>Make a difference positively predicts willingness to boycott</td>
<td>$-0.053$</td>
<td>0.822</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td><em>Not Supported</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H2c$</td>
<td>Self enhancement positively predicts willingness to boycott</td>
<td>0.496***</td>
<td>8.455</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H3a$</td>
<td>Country Image (Country Level) negatively predicts willingness to boycott</td>
<td>$-0.096$</td>
<td>1.579</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td><em>Not Supported</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H3b$</td>
<td>Country Image (Product Level) negatively predicts willingness to boycott</td>
<td>$-0.071$</td>
<td>0.818</td>
<td>0.207</td>
<td><em>Not Supported</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H4$</td>
<td>Religiosity positively predicts willingness to boycott</td>
<td>$-0.068$</td>
<td>0.901</td>
<td>0.184</td>
<td><em>Not Supported</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VII. Hypotheses testing result

Note: *** $p < 0.001$
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 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 and Ong, 2011), future research might consider targeting working non-student adults as samples to examine possible willingness in boycott participation. Possibly, this group could relate better to the international issue used in this study. In the same breath, it would be interesting to examine how the non-Muslims would relate or react toward Islamic marketing generally.

Further, future researchers could consider examining how consumers might react toward 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. While the official religion of Malaysia is Islam as per Article 3(1) of the Federal Constitution, other religions can be freely practiced by non-Muslims in harmony.
2. The religion of Malaysians Malay is usually ascribed to Islam.
3. In this study, the non-Muslims are referred to Malaysians of ethnic Chinese, Indians and indigenous groups. However, there are a small percentage of Muslims belonging to these ethnic groups.
4. Since the 1980s, Islamization started to have influence in the Malaysian government at both observable and structural levels including its policies and agencies (Aziz and Shamsul, 2004). The issue of whether Malaysia is a secular or an Islamic country is often debated, but has yet to reach a conclusive end.
5. There might be differences between cultures and/or subcultures in interpreting Buddhism as a religion. This study interprets Buddhism as a religion.

References


Boycott motivations


Ringle, C., Wende, S. and Will, A. (2005), SmartPLS 2.0 (M3) Beta, SmartPLS, Hamburg.


Boycott motivations


Further reading

Appendix. Measurement items

Willingness to boycott
I would feel guilty if I bought a US product.
I would never buy a US car.
Whenever possible, I avoid buying US products.
Whenever possible, I would prefer to buy products made in USA.
I do not like the idea of owning US products.

Firms’ unacceptable/egregious behaviors
I find the firms’ actions are wrong.
I think they deserve to be boycotted.
I think the firms should stop associating with immoral activities.

Make a difference
Boycotts are an effective means to make firms change its actions.
When all of us support the boycott, the firms will listen to us.
Everyone should support the boycott because every contribution, no matter how small, is important.
By boycotting, I can help change the firms’ decision.

Self-enhancement
I would feel guilty if I buy the firms’ product.
I think consumers in other parts of the world are not doing enough.
My friends/family are encouraging me to boycott the firms.
I will feel better about myself if I boycott the firms.
I am proud to support the boycott.

Counterargument
I do not need to boycott the firms because other people are boycotting already.
I do not buy enough of the firms’ products for it to be worthwhile to boycott.
Boycott will not affect their revenue, they are big firm and financially stable.
Boycotting will do more harm to Malaysia’s economy.
Boycotting will hurt innocent employees and related businesses; they will lose their job and businesses.
Boycott is a hype/propaganda, and we should not overreact.

Country image: macro (country) level
I think […][…].
[…] USA has high level of technology.
[…] USA citizens have high standard of living.
[…] USA has high labor costs.
[…] USA’ welfare system is good.
[…] USA is highly industrialized nation.
USA’s civilian non-military government is good. USA is highly developed country. USA’s free market system is good. USA is a democratic nation.

**Country image: micro (product) level**
I think [...] [...].
USA’s products are technological advanced. USA’s products are Innovative. I feel proud to own or consume products from USA. USA’s products are reliable. USA’s products are of high status. USA’s products have excellent finishing. USA’s products are dependable. USA’s products are up-market.

**Religiosity**
My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life. I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection. Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life. Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life. I often read books and magazines about my faith. I enjoy working in the activities of my religious organization. I enjoy spending time with others of my religious affiliation. I keep well informed about my local religious group and have some influence in its decisions. I make financial contributions to my religious organization.

**Corresponding author**
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