The Willingness to Boycott Among Malaysian Muslims

Conference Paper - December 2012

3 authors:

Asmat-Nizam Abdul-Talib
Universiti Utara Malaysia

Samshul-Amry Abdul-Latif
International Islamic University Malaysia

Nursiha Alias
Universiti Utara Malaysia

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

- Conflict Resolution: Applying the Zoning Model to Resolve Biafra Agitation [View project]
- Islamic Brand Model [View project]
The Willingness to Boycott Among Malaysian Muslims

Asmat Nizam Abdul Talib, Samshul Amry Abdul Latif & Nursiha Alias

Universiti Utara Malaysia

The phenomenon of consumer boycotts has been in existence in the marketplace menacing businesses and organizations since more than a century ago (Smith & Li, 2010). Yet, the rightful and deserved attention in understanding consumer boycotts were acknowledged by academicians and researchers only within the last past decade.

Consumer boycott is a form of economic as well as social threat that may threaten the brand image (Klein, Smith & John, 2004) and corporate image of a firm (Lindenmeier, Tscheulin & Drevs, 2012) on a smaller scale. But on a larger scale, consumer boycotts if not carefully dealt with, may affect the host country’s economy and its image. As such, the threats and occurrences of boycott can possibly upset the efforts in attracting and retaining investments in a country. Consequently, it is suffice to state that boycott is a situation where marketers, businesses, organizations or firms would want to avoid at all cost (Klein et al, 2004).

Based on previous empirical researches, there are various psychological (Klein et al, 2004; Smith & Li, 2004) and social motivations underlying a boycott; as the nature of boycott is diverse (Friedman, 1985); nonetheless, boycotts are often used widely as a “coercive marketplace tactic” (John & Klein, 2003) to achieve certain instrumental or expressive goals (Friedman, 1985).
Friedman (1985, pg.97) has 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”. This fundamental definition has been frequently quoted, referred and used as a basis by numerous boycott studies (Smith & Li, 2010; Farah & Newman, 2010; 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”.

Refining the boycott definition as written in The Dictionary of American History, Friedman (1985) argued and unveiled that the scope of boycott does not limit to “unfair employment and trade practices” but goes beyond as both items if stood alone “fail to encompass the wealth of activities revealed in the survey findings” (pg. 115).

**Boycotting of American (and other western) products in Malaysia**

Boycotts are happening not only in the western world, but also increasingly prevalent in the Asian region including Malaysia. Malaysia, predominantly populated by Muslims is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religion country located in the South East Asia. The proportion of religion in Malaysia is approximately 61.3% Muslims, 19.8% Buddhists, 9.2% Christians and 6.3% Hinduism (Census Department Malaysia, 2011).

At the height of the second Palestine Intifada in 2008, a boycott was established based on the alleged direct and indirect involvement or support extended by American and western firms to Zionist Israel in their atrocities against Palestine (Abd-Razak & Abdul-Talib, 2012). The on-going boycott campaign was supported by an alliance of more than 50 Malaysian Non-
Government Organizations (NGO) formerly known as ‘Coalition of Malaysian NGOs against the Persecution of Palestinians’, or in short COMPLETE. Now the coalition is known as Viva Palestina Malaysia (VPM), strongly advocates and promotes the boycott in tandem to their ultimate mission – ending the Palestine-Israel conflict to achieve freedom and independence of Palestine.

Among the globally known firms and brands that were targeted in the boycott include McDonald’s, KFC, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and L’oreal (http://www.vivapalestina-my.org/boycott-israel-info). Through the media, McDonald’s Malaysia responded by distancing themselves from the controversial issue. The firm also stressed that by supporting the boycott, the local economy can be affected as the businesses were localized with Malaysian interests (BBC, 2009/01/09). In their attempt to counter balance and damage control, the firm also highlighted their involvement in free give-aways, charities and fair employment in Malaysia (Sen, 2009). Similar strategies (Knudsen et al, 2008) were also adopted by Coca Cola Malaysia and KFC Malaysia.

This research seek to provide explanation and insights for the following questions: What drives Malaysian Muslims to consider boycotting? Will the psychological factors identified by Klein et al (2004) be applicable in Malaysia and to Muslims? What are the effects on consumers’ perception of products associated with a country having direct or indirect relationship to international controversial/egregious acts? What is the perceived image of an offending country and will that have any impact on the consumers’ willingness to boycott? Does religiosity have any effect on consumers’ consideration and willingness to participate in a boycott?

The key purpose of this study is to examine the effects and applicability of the psychological factors as predicted by Klein et al (2004), in the context of influencing Malaysian Muslims’
willingness to boycott. In a modified boycott model, the researchers also attempt to examine the relationships and effects of additional variables; which are country image and religiosity in predicting willingness to boycott.

**Boycott Participation and the underlying theories**

To date the number of literatures done concerning boycott has gradually increased since the last few decades. The boycott literatures so far has covered the following different areas of research and can be grouped as: 1) the nature and scope of boycott, 2) the antecedents and consequences of boycott, and 3) the strategies to overcome boycotts.

The previous studies were done from either the perspective of the boycott targets (Abosag, 2010; Garrett, 2001; Gelb, 1995; Friedman, 1985; Chavis & Leslie, 2009), or from the consumer perspectives (Klein et al, 2004; Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011; Friedman, 2001; Farah & Newman, 2010).

Among other consumer perspective studies, Kozinets & Handelman (1998) found that consumer boycott decision were influenced by a person’s need in emotionally expressing (Lindenmeier, Schleer & Pricl, 2012; Friedman, 1991) their individuality and used as a vehicle moving toward self-realization. Sen et al. (2001) suggested that three (3) factors underlying the boycott participation decision; the boycott’s perceived success, social pressure and costs associated by boycott participation.

Similarly, John & Klein (2003) also looked at boycott as a collective problem and highlighted the probability of free-rider occurrence especially when there are impressions that the boycott participation is perceived to be high. Another problem highlighted was the small agency stigma, where consumers’ incentives to participate in a boycott could be restricted, based on the assumption that their insignificant effort of small non-purchase will have only trivial impact to the targeted firm.
The helping behavior conceptualized in consumer participations in boycotts can be related to a subset of a major social psychology study of pro-social behavior. Pro-social behavior encompasses many different aspects of behaviors; which “includes helping, comforting, sharing and cooperation behavior” (Klein et al, 2004, pg 93; Batson, 1998). Fundamentally, pro-social behaviors are actions “intended to benefit one or more people other than oneself often accompanied by costs” (Batson 1998, c.f. Klein et al, 2004, pg 93; Twenge, Ciarocco, Baumeister & Bartels, 2007; Frey & Meier, 2004) and hence boycotting can be regarded as pro-social behavior (Lindenmeier et al, 2012).

Over many years, helping studies are further explored and extended to many different contexts and aspects which covered emergency and non-emergency helping, voting, charity (Chambre, 1987, c.f. Klein et al, 2004, pg 93; Piliavin & Charng, 1990), and corporate philanthropy (Piliavian & Charng, 1990). Helping can also be extended to individuals or group of individuals voluntarily (Knickerbocker, 2003).

On a smaller individual scale, customer complaining behavior could also be related to boycotting. Although it is neither a pro-social behavior nor collective action, but as a result from complaining, the customer may decide to shun any future product offerings from the firm in the future (Boote, 1998; Hirschmann, 1970, c.f. Klein et al, 2004). This is very similar to boycott as it also requires a trigger event (egregious act) to evoke dissatisfied customer to start a complaint after considering the costs and benefits of associated with lodging a complaint (Singh & Wilkes, 1991).

To relate with boycott studies, the helping behavior can be viewed as the underlying platform of boycott participations; as the essence of boycott participation is ultimately to achieve a result of a greater good for the society (by helping each other) which can be shared collectively. Outweighing the associated costs with helping, social psychologists suggested
that humans have great desire to belong to a group, hence facilitate group work, akin to consumers answering to boycott calls.

Refining the helping research, Dovidio et al (1991) introduced the arousal: cost-reward model which described that a person will intervene to help another person depending on the seriousness of the situation. The potential helper will experience arousal after the interpretation of the situation is made, followed by the assessment of the costs and benefits associated with helping the person in distress. The potential helper is likely to help if the benefits outweigh the costs associated with helping. The higher the net benefits are, the higher possibility that helping will occur. However, the helping intervention may differ among individuals, societies, cultures, and races.

Applying the arousal model to boycott situation, the egregious acts which is seen as a trigger event will arouse consumers negatively. As consumers seek solutions to ease the negative arousal; assessment and evaluation of the benefits and costs of boycott will be processed (Piliavian, Dovidio, Gaertner & Clark, 1981 c.f. Klein et al, 2004).

Boycott targets are often being targeted for many reasons; accurate or not; some reasons are way beyond the control and influence of the targets themselves (Garrett, 2001). Perhaps, consumers often do not understand the macro perspective or the big picture, and will assume anything – thus demanding a certain course of action to be taken by the firms to resolve the alleged controversial issue. Otherwise the consequences against these firms - will be boycott.

Figure 1 below is the overview of the proposed model.
Perceived Egregious Behavior

Perceived egregious behavior is fundamentally important in boycott literature and is observed to be the main driver if not one of many strong factors that predict boycott participation (Klein et al., 2004). Perceived egregious behavior describes the misconduct of a firm or an organization that will result to a negative, and possibly harmful consequences to the wellbeing of many parties, directly or indirectly. It may also be viewed as an injustice done or wrongdoings by firm or organization towards the boycotters, the surrounding third parties or to the environment (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011). Similarly, firms engaging businesses unethically could also trigger public outrage leading to potential consumer boycott (Lindenmeier et al., 2012(a), Lindenmeier et al., 2012(b)).
Friedman (1985) explained that boycotts can also be in a form of surrogate, where boycotters will decide to boycott the next best entity associated, whether accurate or not, when direct or clear relationship could not be established with the accused. In this case, as several studies (Klein, Ettenson & Morris, 1998; Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Farah & Newman, 2010) have examined a surrogate boycott where a policy or action of a country can lead to a total boycott towards other products originating from the country. Extending that, a firm’s egregious behavior may also trigger a blanket and surrogate boycott based on country-of-origin including other products originating from the same country. Likewise, boycotts can also be exercised on the retailers, wholesalers or related agents of products made by the accused or offending firm (John & Klein, 2003; Tyrant & Engelmann, 2005).

Egregious acts can be rectified and neutralized by the accused by way of changing their behavior, policies, abiding to demands, or disassociate themselves with the egregious acts (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2008; Abosag, 2010; Knudsen, et al, 2008). However, it is questionable whether consumers will resume normal consumption once the controversial issue is rectified if it involves severe damages (Ettenson & Klein, 2005), sufferings or even death.

As the interpretation and extent of perceived egregious behavior may differ across cultures and consumers demographics, some consumers may view a firm’s misconduct as very offensive and detrimental; but somehow were not motivated enough to participate in a boycott against the entity (Klein et al, 2004). Hence the following hypothesis is proposed:

\[ H_1 : \text{Perceived egregiousness positively predicts willingness to boycott. Consumers who find the firms’ actions to be egregious, are more likely to participate in the boycott.} \]

Benefits and Costs
There are many other benefits and costs associated with boycott have yet to be tested empirically. This study will be based on several previously identified and empirically tested factors utilizing the pro-social helping behavior as the foundation. When boycott acts viewed as helping others to achieve objectives; it is akin to helping behavior in participation of voting, blood donation drives, charities, volunteering and helping others in need or distress (Klein et al, 2004).

Amongst many other items which may be applicable under benefits and costs construct, we shall be investigating the items identified by Klein et al (2004); counterarguments, make a difference, and self-enhancement as explained below.

**Counterargument**

Arousal costs and benefits model (Piliavian et al, 1981, c.f Klein et al, 2004), also known as the extended theory of bystander intervention of pro-social theory, suggested that as the costs associated with extending help to a person increase, the chances of extending help might decreases. Applying the model to the boycott context; consumers considering participating in a boycott will assess any negative outcomes of helping which includes embarrassment, and unintended harm caused by extending their help. For example, a consumer might not boycott a firm, although s/he thinks that the firm’s action is egregious, because s/he fears as a result of her boycotting, the employees of the firm might lose their jobs.

Latane & Darley (1968) in their research found that the response of a person towards an emergency which requires help will decrease when it is known that there are others present in the situation as well; hence “diffusing the responsibility among other onlookers” to help.
Relating “diffusion of responsibility” to free riding behavior, a consumer might not participate in a boycott, deeming it unnecessary, when it is known that there are others boycotting on his/her behalf (John & Klein, 2003). This behavior is especially apparent when the costs associated with boycotting are high. The costs and benefits model also explains the costs of not helping (guilt, shame, shun) will be reduced as others are available to extend their help instead.

A ‘pluralistic ignorance’ phenomenon (Latane & Darley, 1968) describes when a group of people look at each other to determine how they should react, but may misinterpret the emergency situation collectively. This second component of bystander apathy effect (Latane & Darley, 1968) can be applied into the boycott context, for example; a consumer may look at another persons’ reaction towards the firm’s egregious acts before determining how s/he should react. This can be connected to how peer groups, families, public figures (Garrett, 1987) or social pressure (Sen et al, 2001; Klein, John & Smith, 2001; Gerber, Green, and Larimer, 2008) have influence on the reaction of a person in boycott context.

Additionally, consumers may have the fear of being seen overreacting towards a perceived egregious act of a firm. This is consistent with the third component of bystander apathy effect (Latane & Darley, 1968) describing ‘Audience Inhibition’ (Darley & Latane, 1968); where a person will not want to risk standing out in public for fear of overreacting and being embarrassed in front of others.

Another counterargument which may put consumers in a dilemma is their belief and feeling of helplessness to intervene effectively in a critical situation. Consumers may perceive that their ‘contribution’ by participating in a boycott to be too insignificant to make any difference or towards making an impact on the decisions made by the firm (John & Klein, 2003).

Similar to pro-social behavior of voting (Shaw, Newholm & Dickinson, 2006); where a large
number of individuals go to polls in hope to achieve a collective benefit. But, an individual might decide not to vote at all, as s/he perceives that his/her single vote is not able to change the outcome of the election. Likewise, the concept of voting can be seen in the marketplace in form of ‘voting system’ by way of consumers’ purchases when faced with societal issues and concerns (Moraes, Shaw, and Carrigan, 2011). This is quite the opposite of the ‘make a difference’ factor described in the next section. A study done by Koku, Akhigbe & Springer (1997) found that boycott campaign actually benefited the target firm in terms of increase of share prices and sales, contradicting the conventional wisdom of boycott where it will create damages to targets. Thus, it is proposed:

_H2a : Counterarguments negatively predicts willingness to boycott. The more consumers engage in counterarguments, the less likely that the consumers will participate in the boycott._

Make a Difference

Contradicting to the previous item, the arousal benefits and costs model can be applied from a positive point of view. For example, when a firm’s action is perceived to be egregious, a consumer can be motivated to participate in a boycott as the consumer’s need to create a positive change in the society is being aroused. Participation in the boycott will occur when there are no or less costs than benefits associated with boycott participation.

While the perceived benefits or motivations for the consumers to participate in a boycott can be either instrumental or expressive in nature (Friedman, 1985; Kozinets & Handelman, 1998), each consumer participating in a boycott believes and view themselves as competent and strong, thus providing enough confidence that the results of their boycott participation
can produce positive outcomes and that the collective goals can be achieved. This is consistent with ‘perceived efficacy’ as explained by Sen, et al (2001).

According to the research by Wiener & Doescher (1991), when confronted with social dilemmas, people will tend to work together the best they could and be as cooperative as possible to achieve their collective goals. This supports the idea that a single consumer will respond to boycott calls believing that his individual participation is important to the boycott effort and cooperate with other consumers acting collectively towards achieving the boycott goals.

Similarly, John & Klein (2003) discussed that consumers participate in a boycott could also be motivated by the ‘exaggerated effectiveness’ of the boycott movement itself. This contradicts and is the total opposite of the counterargument item.

However, there are conflicting findings on the impact of boycotts on target firms. Though boycotters were quick to declare boycott successes (Friedman, 1991) and claiming all efforts done were worthwhile, the true impact on the targeted firms are still questionable as it is very difficult to assess (Klein & John, 2003). Contradicting previous studies that suggested boycotts will cause negative effect on the targets, one study found that the effect of boycott have caused a positive impact on the target’s financial standing (Koku et al, 1997). Based on the above, it is proposed that:

\[ H_{2b} : \textit{Make a difference positively predicts willingness to boycott. The more consumers believe that boycotting can make differences, appropriate and effective, the more likely that the consumers will participate in the boycott.} \]
Self-enhancement

Several helping behavior theories agreed that both the helper and the receiver of help will gain benefits in the long run. Looking from the boycott context, other than instrumental rewards gained from participating in a boycott (Friedman, 1985; John & Klein 2003), there are also intrinsic benefits consumers may potentially gain in several forms.

Among many other intrinsic benefits that could be gained by boycott participants is self-enhancement. Self-enhancement describes the type of motivation that function to make individuals feel good about themselves, simultaneously to maintain their self-esteem. By associating themselves with a boycott cause, the consumers involved may view themselves as morally-concerned or engaged, therefore boosting their image socially. When viewed and admired by the public for being morally concerned or engaged, these consumers will feel good about themselves; thus increasing their self-esteem despite the unknown boycott result.

While Sedikides, Gaertner & Toguchi (2003) maintained that self-enhancement is universal human motive and self-enhance in domains which are important in their identified cultures, Heine (2005) argued that self-enhancement is a phenomenon largely limited to western cultures. However, there are researches that found self-enhancement to be not entirely nonexistent in eastern collective cultures (Falbo, Poston, Triscari & Zhang, 1997; Fahr, Dobbins & Cheng, 1991).

Kozinets & Handelman (1998) observed that by participating in a boycott allows a person under moral obligation to better themselves by “cleansing” themselves and to stay away or refrain from offending products in order to have “clean hands” (Klein et al, 2001) or in other words; clear conscience.
Yet, there are also costs involved to consumers when help is not extended. Research findings have shown that the consequences identified by not helping includes; self-blame, public censure (Dovidio et al, 1991) and guilt.

As boycott functions collectively, social pressures can have a significant strength to influence consumers’ decision to boycott (Friedman, 1985; Garrett, 1987; Witkowski, 1989). Pressures can be pressed on consumers by associating the sense of guilt (Witkowski, 1989) with the cause of the boycott. This could be more pertinent in eastern cultures as importance on collectivistic values are emphasized and outweighs individualistic values. Based on the arguments, it is expected that:

\[ H_{2c} : \text{Self-enhancement positively predicts willingness to boycott. The greater the perceived scope for self-enhancement (and avoidance of guilt or social censure), the more likely consumers will boycott.} \]

**Estimated Participation of Others**

The social dilemma research by Wiener & Doesher (1994) suggested that an increase in estimation of participation will likely lead to an increase of the actual participation. Similarly, the same approach can be applied to a boycott situation as suggested by John & Klein (2003) and Sen et al (2001), that an individual’s boycott participation decision can also be influenced by the individual’s perceived estimated overall participation of the boycott itself.

However, when an individual perceived a boycott to be participated by many, this situation could also trigger the ‘free-riding’ issue (John & Klein 2003), where a consumer can act selfishly and continue to consume at the costs of other boycotting consumers.
Country Image

Country-of-origin (COO) is well researched and has been established since 1965 by Schooler, a pioneer that identified the very existence of COO. Now, COO has completely evolved and relates to many other research areas. One of such area developed from COO is Country image.

Country image can be conceptualized at both the country (macro) level and the product (micro) level (Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2007). Martin & Elorgu (1993, pg 193) defined macro country image as “the total of all descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs one has about a particular country”, and proposed three underlying dimensions which are economics, political and technological.

Nagashima (1970, pg. 68) defined country image as “the total of beliefs one has about the products of a given country”, conceptualizing country image at a smaller scope; the product level. While there are ‘specific’ country image measured for different product category (Han & Terpstra, 1988), a ‘general’ approach to measure micro country image will be taken instead.

Han (1989) stated whenever consumers are unfamiliar with a product; the image of the country associated with product may be served as a halo, which consumers will infer to the product attributes. From their inferential beliefs, consumers’ attitude towards a brand may be negatively related. In contrast, when a consumer becomes increasingly familiar with a country’s product, the image of the country may be used to summarize the consumer’s belief about the product attributes, directly affecting brand attitudes.
However, the question of getting the right country to be associated with a product could rather be a difficult task for consumers (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008; Samiee, Shimp & Sharma, 2005), even for well-known brands. Magnuson, Westjohn & Zdravkovic (2011) found that regardless of whether the country associated with brands by consumers are accurate, perceived brand origin will strongly affects brand attitude. Looking from the boycott context, this could be a potential problem, as consumers unfamiliar with a product, its product category and/or origin, can make inaccurate country association.

As an example, at the height of French nuclear testing in South Pacific by the French in 1996, even locally-owned businesses which were perceived by consumers to be French-related were boycotted, regardless of whether the relationship is direct or indirect or non-existence (Ettenson & Klein, 2005).

Consistent with Klein et al (2004), Dawar & Pillutla (2000) and Smith & Cooper-Martin (1997), the perception of image can be negatively affected by egregious acts. Concurrently, this negative image can be extended to the firms’ products or services by the consumers.

It is also expected that when consumers participate in a boycott towards a particular brand or firm, there will have direct negative impact to the brand itself without even considering any sort of egregious acts committed by the firm.

This is consistent with cognitive dissonance theory where people behave irrationally or destructively, have the motivational drive to reduce their dissonance by changing their attitudes, beliefs and actions. In a state of dissonance, people can undergo contradicting feelings, for example feeling sorry, anger and embarrassment all at one time.
Similarly, a counterintuitive theory of self-perception suggests that a person will develop his/her own attitude by observing their behaviors and decide what attitude might have caused those behaviors (Bem, 1967, c.f. Klein et al, 2004, pg. 99).

Putting both theories into the boycott context, may explain the reason why some consumers participate in a boycott simply because they have participated in many other boycotts previously. Even without egregious acts, some consumers will participate in a boycott. Thus both hypotheses below are proposed:

\[ H_{3a} : \text{Macro Country Image (Country Level) negatively predicts willingness to boycott. The greater consumers negatively perceived the macro country image of a particular country, the more consumers are likely to boycott.} \]

\[ H_{3b} : \text{Micro Country Image (Product Level) negatively predicts willingness to boycott. The greater consumers negatively perceived the micro image of a particular country, the more consumers are likely to boycott.} \]

**Islamic Religiosity**

Religion has an important part in our daily lives. It has major roles in determining the “knowledge, belief, value and the social normative systems” of cultures and societies (Swimberghe, Flurry & Parker, 2011, pg. 453). Religion contains values that may influence individual’s action and decision as it shapes behavior (Kotler, 2000).

Multiple religions with differing beliefs exist in a multicultural society. This is reflected on the differing consumption patterns between different religions due to the commitment towards specific religious groups (Lindridge, 2005).
Recently, Malaysian Muslims have showed positive concerns toward Islamic teachings and practices (Syed, Rohani & Badrul, 2011). As a religion, Islam provides wholesome guidance to its devotees in every aspect of life, including but not limited to acts of worship, interaction, trade, consumption and even to the extent of advertising (Syed et al, 2011; Fam, Waller & Erdogan, 2004). Adherence to Islamic practices however differs depending on the degree of observation (Mokhlis, 2009).

The concept of *Halal* (permissible) and *Haram* (prohibited) is fundamental in Islam, whereby failure to abide is considered sinful. This concept is applied to all aspect in Islam including commerce and consumption. It is considered sinful to consume products that are not compliant as according to the Islamic *Shariah* law. Muslims must ensure that the products intended for consumption does not involve any *Haram* ingredients; does not exploit anyone or the environment; as well as not for harmful uses (Rehman, Shabbir & Gill, 2010).

Numerous studies have been done to measure religiosity (Faulkner & de Jong, 1966; Wilkes, Burnett & Howell, 1986; Worthington et al, 2003). However, most studies done were based on western countries. To accurately measure Islamic religiosity, a measurement index was further developed by Rehman et al (2010) based on the five dimension of religiosity originally developed by Glock & Stark (1965) [c.f Faulkner & de Jong, 1966]. The dimensions identified were ideological, intellectual, ritualistic, experiential, and consequential.

Generally, consumer religion has a significant role in determining the attitudes and beliefs towards dubious and problematic consumer practices (Vitell et al, 2005, 2006; Vitell et al, 2007). Combining this with the concept of *Halal* and *Haram*, religious Muslims are expected to be doubtful or even ought to reject products and services from firms which practice and/or
behave unethically, as it contains the elements of *Haram*. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

\( H_4 : \text{Religiosity positively predicts willingness to boycott. The greater consumers perceived themselves as religious, the more likely they are to boycott.} \)
Methods

The usage of university students to represent consumers is common in boycott studies (Klein et al, 2001; Yuksel & Mryteza, 2008) as well as in other boycott related studies (Klein, Ettenson & Krishnan, 2005). Using students as samples tend to produce generally homogeneous samples and “fairly uniform in terms of age and experience thus eliminating the possibility of uncertainty and confusion” (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2008, pg. 4). Aside from that, students represent a large key market for many consumer products (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2008) and as consumers; they have the possibility, potential and power to participate in a boycott.

This study is the first quantitatively consumer-focused study of an on-going boycott in South East Asian context focusing on Muslim consumers. Our study was based on an actual ongoing boycott similar to several previous boycott studies (Klein et al, 2004; Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Hoffman & Muller, 2009; Smith & Li, 2010; Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011, Farah & Newman, 2009). This boycott is focused on particularly American firms and their brands in Malaysia based on the boycott list obtained from VPM’s website.

Following a similar approach adopted by Klein et al, (2001) and Sen et al, (2001), this study selected two (2) brands based on strong market presence and brand familiarity among Malaysian consumers – McDonald’s and Coca-Cola. Additionally, these brands / products are generally affordable to most consumers including students.

The researchers adopted self-administered questionnaire technique and distributed the questionnaires in purposive selected (Cooper & Schindler, 2008) lecture halls with large number of students (above 100 students per class). After obtaining permission from lecturers,
the questionnaires were distributed to seven (7) purposive selected lecture halls. All samples were collected within a period of three (3) full-working days.

In the lecture halls, the researchers briefly explained the purpose and objectives of the study. The respondents were asked to voluntarily participate in this study. At the end of the lectures, respondents were given approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

The respondents were given a one-page summary attached to the questionnaire summarizing Israel’s egregious acts and the involvement of selected US originated firms. The information for the summary was sourced from VPM’s website.

**Respondents**

The participating respondents were students of a large public university in Malaysia. With 98% response rate, a total of 566 usable samples of Muslim students were obtained. 98% of the samples were ethnic Malays, while 2% belonged to other ethnic and/or indigenous groups of the Peninsular, Sabah and Sarawak. 96% of the samples were undergraduate students, while the remaining 4% were post-graduate students. 81% of the respondents were females with average age of 22. 93% of the samples aged between 19 to 25 years old.

**Instrument**

A brief description of the questionnaire is summarized in Appendix 1.

In the first part of the questionnaire, the respondents were required to select their religion (Islam, Buddhism, Christian, Taoism and others) apart from other crucial details such as their age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and education level. Respondents were asked to indicate
their response to questions concerning six (6) constructs on a seven (7) point Likert-type scale (1 = “strongly disagree or bad” and 7 = “strong agree or excellent”).

First, the respondents were required to complete their demographic details followed by the 6-item measurement of willingness to boycott adopted from Smith & Li (2010).

The respondents then answered the ‘Benefits and Costs’ measurements adopted from Klein et al (2004) that were formed by four (4) identified sub-dimensions; 1) to make a difference, 2) self-enhancement, 3) counterargument, and 4) constrained consumption. Unlike Klein et al (2004), the measurements for these items were standardized to a scale of seven (7), mainly to avoid respondents’ probable confusion in answering. Respondents then required to estimate the level of boycott participation by the customers of the said firms. This question was measured in percentage.

Following that, the respondents answered two (2) levels of ‘Country Image’ construct that measured Macro (Country) and Micro (Product) levels adopted from Pappu, Quester & Cooksey (2007).

Finally, the respondents were required to answer the measurements Islamic Religiosity Index developed by Rehman et al (2010).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics for the seven predictors of willingness to boycott are presented below in Table 1.1. The mean for willingness to boycott (M = 4.76, SD = 1.13) suggested that respondents were between “neutral” and “willing to boycott”.

MALAYSIAN MUSLIMS’ WILLINGNESS TO BOYCOTT
Five of the scales (egregious behavior, make a difference, self-enhancement, macro country image and religiosity) averaged above the score of five. Only one scale (counterargument) averaged below the score of four.

Overall, seventy eight percent (78%) of the respondents agree that the firms behaved egregiously and sixty eight percent (68%) expressed their willingness to boycott. Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents feel that their participation can make a difference, while seventy seven (77%) percent believed that by participating in a boycott will increase and enhance their self-image.

Eighty six percent (86%) and fifty nine percent (59%) of the respondents believed that the macro and micro country image are not bad, respectively. Finally, ninety five percent (95%) of the respondents believed that they are religious. Refer to table 1.1.

Table 1.1 : Descriptive statistics of the variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>% of respondents (Disagree/Bad) 1 ≤ M &lt; 4</th>
<th>% of respondents (Neutral) M=4</th>
<th>% of respondents (Agree/Excellent) 4 &gt; M ≥ 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to boycott</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egregious</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Enhancement</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>77.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterargument</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Level</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Level</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>59.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor Analysis

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 0.891 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 fourteen items were discarded from willingness to boycott (1), religiosity (5), macro
country image (4) and micro country image (4). After removing the items, eight components were revealed and found to be unidimensional which explained 65% of the variance.

Reliability of Scales

Cronbach’s alpha was used to measure the internal consistency of the scales. Referring to table 1.3, the coefficient alpha estimates ranged between 0.68 and 0.91. The scale for willingness to boycott has a slight lower score of 0.68. However, it is common to score a low Cronbach value with scales of less than 10 items (Pallant, 2001). Hence, when faced with such situation, it is recommended to report the mean inter-item correlations for the items, with optimal range of 0.2 to 0.4 (Briggs & Cheek, 1986). Table 1.4 below is the inter-item correlation matrix.

Table 1.3 : Comparison of Cronbach’s Alpha score between previous and current study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Previous Study Cronbach Score α</th>
<th>Current Study Cronbach Score α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to Boycott</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egregious Behavior</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a Difference</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Enhancement</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterargument</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Image (CL)</td>
<td>0.77-0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Image (PL)</td>
<td>0.82-0.96</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4 : Inter-Item Correlation Matrix for Willingness to Boycott

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WB3</th>
<th>WB4</th>
<th>WB5</th>
<th>WB7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WB3</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>0.274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB4</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.432</td>
<td>0.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB5</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>0.432</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB7</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>0.355</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation Results

As shown in Table 1.5, willingness to boycott is positively and significantly correlated ($p < 0.01$) with all of the independent variables except for micro country image (product level).
This is an indication that respondents with high scores on the independent variables would tend to have higher willingness to boycott. Counterargument is 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 conducted to examine the relationship between willingness to boycott and the independent variables – 1) egregious behaviour, 2) benefits and costs, 3) religiosity and 4) country image.

The multiple regression model with all seven independent variables produced \(R^2 = 0.351\), \(F(7, 566) = 43.03, p < 0.001\) indicating that the model explained approximately 35% of the variation in the respondents’ willingness to boycott. As shown on in table 3.1 below, egregious behavior \([t(558) = 3.327, p < 0.05]\) as well as the sub-constructs of benefits and costs i.e. make a difference \([t(558) = 2.723, p < 0.05]\) and self-enhancement \([t(558) = 8.493, p < 0.01]\) had significant positive regression weights, indicating that respondents with high scores on these scales were expected to have higher willingness to boycott.

While micro country image \([t(558) = -0.099, p < 0.1]\) had significant negative regression weight, indicating that respondents with high score on this scale was expected to have lower level of willingness to boycott.

However, macro country image (country level), religiosity and counterargument were not significant and thus, did not contribute to the model.

Based on the result, self-enhancement was the highest contributor on the model, while the least contributing variable was micro country image.
In summary, four hypotheses (H1, H2b, H2c, and H3a) were supported, while three hypotheses (H2a, H3b, and H4) were not supported. Refer to table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1: Summary statistics, correlations and regression analysis results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Correlation with Willingness to boycott</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to boycott</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egregious</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a Difference</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Enhancement</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.55**</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterargument</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>-0.19**</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Level</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.13**</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Level</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.10*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at 0.1 level
** significant at 0.05 level
*** significant at 0.01 level
Discussion

This study examined a localized on-going boycott based on an international conflict. Based on the results, there is enough evidence to establish relationships between the variables as most proposed hypotheses are supported. These findings may have important impacts as well as implications on the key actors of boycott occurrences; the consumers, targeted firms, boycott organizers (NGOs) and policymakers (i.e. the Government).

According to the results, it is important to recognize that the respondents ‘identified’ with the firms’ inappropriate involvement on the egregious acts (M=5.38) of Zionist Israel towards the Palestinians. This indicates that the respondents are still relatively angry and dislike any association of any sort with regards to the atrocities, despite low or declining mass media coverage on this issue over the years. Perhaps the element of animosity exists and adds up to the anger among the respondents as a result from the ‘economic attack’ in 1997/98 (Ang et al, 2004).

These respondents believed that they could make a difference (M=5.38) to the atrocities and situation faced by the Palestinians, if they decide to participate in the said boycott. By participating, these respondents strongly believed that they will be ‘rewarded’ with a sense of personal gratification, satisfaction and relieve. These ‘feel-good’ rewards will satisfy the respondents’ need to enhance and maintain their self-esteem (Sedikides & Strube, 1995, Klein et al, 2004), especially when the respondents were exposed to social pressure to participate (Sen et al, 2001), thus threatening their self-esteem (Beauregard & Dunning, 1998; Krueger, 1998; Wills, 1981).

Unexpectedly, the respondents did not entirely respond to the arousal benefits and costs model (Dovidio, et al, 1991) as hypothesized. According to the results, the respondents did
not consider the costs involved in boycotting (counterargument with M=3.62) and did not agree that by boycotting the targeted firms and their brands/products; the local economy might be negatively affected. Nor did they agree that there might be negative repercussions on the employees and related businesses. This is contradicting, unusual and strange as the respondents are willing to help the Palestinians but completely disregard the well-being of their fellow Malaysians. It is akin to helping a stranger in a far foreign land, but ignoring the well-being of a close family member.

Perhaps in the minds of the respondents, employments are abundant and easily available in Malaysia, and that the employees affected by the boycott can seek other employment elsewhere. On the other hand, this may imply that the respondents’ perception on the economic conditions in Malaysia to be fairly stable.

As evidenced in the results, the respondents rated an acceptable level of country image (M=4.5) for both firms, and that the positive country image can reverse their willingness to boycott. Hence, respondents with high regards of the firms country image, will have lower level of willingness to boycott. This could possibly be explained through the fact that these firms/brands have been in existence in the Malaysian market for decades (Coca Cola and McDonald’s have been in Malaysia since 1950s and 1982, respectively), which could have helped developed high level of consumer-based brand equity (Pappu et al, 2007). The key elements of brand equity (Pappu et al, 2007) which are brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty could have played significant roles in suppressing the respondents’ willingness to boycott.

Also, the results showed that religiosity was insignificant in respondents’ willingness to boycott. Most if not all religion promotes good behavior and good deeds. If supporting the boycott is seen as performing a good deed by extending help to fellow human in need, then
why is it insignificant? Is it *Halal* for Muslims to consume products of a firm which ‘help’ to shed blood in other part of the world? This study revealed the opposite of the religiosity-boycott participation concept proposed by Al-Hyari, Alnsour, Al-Weshah, & Haffar, (2012). Also, looking at boycott as the reverse of purchase behavior, the results of this study also contradict the Islamic religiosity and consumer behavior findings of Syed, Rohani & Badrul, (2011), including the findings of Farah & Newman (2010), where Muslims in Lebanon were more receptive to participate in boycott against US-related products. This is because the respondents were found to be very religious (M=6.24), but however, they did not “behave in relatively more matured, disciplined and responsible manner” (Syed et al, 2011, pg. 93) as they should be. Interpreting how one should behave in a matured, disciplined and responsible fashion would probably involved taking in consideration the damage effect occurred as a result from one’s action (in this case describing the counterargument factor).

Possibly, the only explanation to this issue is that respondents may consider the boycott in question as more of a humanitarian or moral issue rather than religious.

Interestingly, the respondents estimated a whopping average of 51% of the firms’ customers to be involved in the boycott, which is considered to be high (in contrast to Klein et al, 2004 where the average estimation of customers involved in boycotting was merely 27%). This indicates that the respondents have high expectation of others to participate in the boycott as well, consistent with previous studies (Klein et al, 2004; Ettenson & Klein, 2005). However, through simple observation of several McDonald’s restaurant outlets in Alor Setar and Kuala Lumpur, this was not the case. From a boycott-social dilemma perspective (Sen, et al, 2001), undeniably there are large number of Muslim free-riders consuming the boycotted products at the cost of the boycotters as suggested by John & Klein (2003).
Ultimately, it can be summarized that Malaysian Muslims who are willing to participate in a boycott sought 1) to enhance and maintain their self-esteem, 2) believe that by boycotting they can make a difference, 3) to the egregious acts, and at certain degree when deciding to boycott, the consumers will 4) consider the image of the country that the products are associated with.

Managerial Implications

Depending on how these results are interpreted, it can be seen either as opportunities as well as challenges to different opposing ends. The results from the proposed model are very much important and beneficial to both targeted firms and organizing NGOs, to understand and capitalize on.

First, the proposed model is useful for firms associated with American (and perhaps other western countries as well), operating in Malaysia specifically in the F&B industry. Additionally, the proposed model can also be applied in similar markets where significant Muslim consumers reside (i.e. Indonesia, Bosnia, Turkey).

Second, the proposed model could provide results for managers to obtain feedbacks from their customers. The results can be used to understand their customers as means to strategize their (counter neutralizing) responses as according to their available resources and capabilities. Further, the results can also be used as means to improve certain business areas as well as activities.

Similarly, managers of organizing NGOs could utilize the proposed model to understand how to ‘wage a war’ with their target firms and how to gain continuous support from their supporters and the general public. This can be done as the results will reveal the vulnerable
areas of the target firms (for example - their country image) and the ‘hot buttons’ of the supporters to ‘press’ (for example - egregious acts, self-enhancement, and make a difference). By revealing which ‘buttons’ to press, managers can determine which ‘buttons not to press’ (i.e. religiosity).

**Limitation and Future Research Direction**

Despite being able to research based on an actual on-going boycott, there were several limitations faced in completing our research. The samples used for this research were students collected from a single university in Malaysia which may or may not reflect the reality. Hence, to generalize the results to the wider population must be done with care and reservation. However, future research could consider non-students with bigger sample size, multiple ethnicities and religions from multiple locations representing the regions of Malaysia for better and reliable results.

Further, future researchers could consider examine how consumers might react towards boycotting on different product categories, for example automobiles, electronic gadgets and clothing. Perhaps, consumers will have different perception, attitude or motivation towards different product categories in relations to boycotting. Researchers could also examine boycott from the perspectives of the target firms.

As highlighted by Al-Hyari et al (2012), Muslims have high potential for social desirability bias as respondents may engage in ‘sinful activities’ in private without admitting. This could have caused bias in the results, which could lead to further future research on why Muslim consumers prefer to appear ‘pious’ in reflection of their consumption behavior. Another
interesting area to investigate would be the relationship and its level of influence of religiosity on humanitarian issues.

As mentioned in the earlier part of this research, there are several types of boycotts which are currently on-going in Malaysia. As examples, boycotts which are motivated by racial related issues; and the boycott of the Malaysian mainstream mass media (TV3, TV2, Utusan Malaysia) which is spurred by political differences. These examples would provide valuable information and results for researchers to capture the ‘diversity’ of boycotts in Malaysia.

Additionally, future researches could also incorporate other factors of boycott motivations as identified by western-based researches, or examine boycott occurrences from different or opposing perspectives.
Appendix

Description of Survey Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>No. of Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 1</strong> Personal and Demographic Information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This section consists of questions pertaining to respondents’ age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion and education level</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 2</strong> Willingness to Boycott</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 3</strong> Firms’ egregious behavior</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 4</strong> Benefits and Costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Make a Difference</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Self-Enhancement</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Counterargument</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 5</strong> Estimated Participation of Others</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 6</strong> Country Image</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Country Level</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Product Level</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 7</strong> Islamic Religiosity</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>