

The Role of Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence and Religiosity on Consumer Willingness to Boycott among Malaysian Muslim Youth

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Abstract: *In the current times, boycott is a major protest tool among consumer protest groups and its importance is likely to increase in the future. In this study, the role of susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII) and religiosity on the willingness of consumers to boycott American fast-food chains among Malaysian Muslim youth is examined. Data was obtained from 402 samples, after which descriptive analysis and exploratory factor analysis and AMOS were utilized for data analysis. Based on the results, individuals' SII and their religiosity antecede the willingness to boycott among Malaysian Muslim youth and this consequently results in their intention towards participating in the boycott. This study contributes to literature on consumer boycott, particularly when it comes to SII and religiosity roles. This finding can assist practitioners and non-government organizations to develop suitable strategies to use.*

Keywords: Susceptibility to interpersonal influence, religiosity, consumer willingness to boycott.

1. Introduction

The behavior of consumers is affected by their concerns over what those important to them think or how they act towards them when it comes to their product choice and use. When consumers stop purchasing a specific product or a specific brand, consumer boycott arises. The phenomenon occurs when a number of people stop from buying a product simultaneously, owing to some act or behavior but, this may not be attributed to one reason [1]. Consumer boycott studies have been conducted in developed countries, but only a few of them have been carried out in developing and Islamic countries, with the inclusion of Malaysia [2]. In this regard, majority of studies dedicated to consumer boycott among developing and Islamic countries mainly focused on their religious beliefs in Saudi Arabia e.g., [3], psychological motivations in the Malaysian context [2], and religiosity and animosity on Malaysian purchase actions [4].

In other words, despite the several studies on boycott ([5]; [6]; [4]), no study focused on the level of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII) and its persuasion of him to participate in the boycott. This is especially significant in the context of Malaysia as Malaysians follow a collectivistic culture [7] [8].

More specifically, a collectivistic culture among Malaysians, make them have a higher tendency to be concerned of others' opinions, because the collectivistic group orientation puts more importance on the group rather than on the individual. Hence, the call for a global boycott on Israeli products/companies has made developments through consumer rights owing to the country's attack on Palestinians and their homeland. Malaysian boycott of Israeli products and companies supporting Israel have notably increased in the past ten years. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate the role of susceptibility to interpersonal influence and religiosity of Malaysians on the consumer willingness to boycott American fast food chains among the youth.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The conceptual framework designed for the study is presented in Figure 1, with the determinants of consumer willingness to boycott. The framework is developed on the basis of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) that illustrates the impact of attitudes on behavior. TPB is a theory that was brought forward by [9] and it posits the sensible behavior of human beings.

In relation to this, perceived ease/difficulty of behavior performance represents the beliefs concerning the existence of internal and external factors that may facilitate/prevent the doing of the behavior [10]. The theory attempts to shed light on the decision-making process among individuals [11] and this theory is aligned with the aim of this study which is to examine the boycott decision of young adult Malaysian Muslim consumers. The social factors from TPB [12] were adopted as background factors, particularly susceptibility to interpersonal influence and the religiosity of consumers.

The study's conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1, where factors that determine consumer willingness to boycott are illustrated. The model is based on the theory of reasoned action, where an individual's intention is a function of two fundamental determinants (personal and social influence) [13]. This study proposes that SII and REL of consumers affect their willingness towards boycotting American fast food chains in a way that if both constructs (SII and REL) are important to their decisions, then they will significantly affect their inclination towards boycotting American fast food chains, particularly in the context of Malaysian youth.

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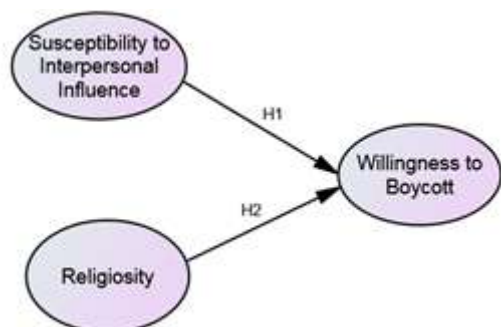


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.1 Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (SII)

A society's social norms and values affect the consumption of consumers and their decisions when it comes to purchasing. Consumer SII is referred to as the need to identify with or improve the image of one's self in the eyes of their significant others by acquiring and using products and brands that conform to their expectations and by learning about products/services through the observance of others or through the information obtained from them [15]. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII) comprises two dimensions namely, normative and informational influence, with the former reflecting the desire of the individual to adhere to social group pressures/norms in expecting rewards and steering clear of punishments and is value expressive and utilitarian in nature. On the other hand, the latter refers to the influence to accept information obtained from another as evidence of the truth [14].

Based on the SII scale proposed by [15], it is referred to as individual multi-dimensional scale that measures the level to which the choices of the consumer are influenced by other people important to him.

In a related study, [16] also evidenced the importance of SII in consumer behavior, where high susceptibility to interpersonal influence score shows an inclination towards others' influence in making decisions, and a low susceptibility score shows an independent decision-making process. Also, [17] indicated that the higher the susceptibility is to normative influence, the more the desire is for social benefit in a brand as the individual wants to improve his image among others and to adhere to their expectations. Added to this, [18] evidenced the significant impact of interpersonal influence on status consumption.

Moreover, in [19] study, consumer susceptibility to both normative and informative influences predicted ecological conscious purchase behavior. Similarly, [20] revealed the significant impact of informational interpersonal influence on purchase intention. Generally speaking, majority of the SII studies showed that consumers that were highly susceptible to interpersonal influence will positively predict their purchase decisions and behavior [17]. Therefore, on the basis of the above findings, this study proposes the following hypothesis for testing;

H1: There is a positive relationship between SII and level of willingness to boycott (WB).

2.2 Religiosity (REL)

Religious commitment, commonly referred to as religiosity (REL) is described as the level to which an individual adheres to his religious values, beliefs and practices on a daily basis [21]. It is evident that religion plays a role in our daily lives.

Religious belief is thus a crucial factor that influences consumption behavior as individuals are inspired by rules and taboos of religion. There are two primary religion dimensions that are frequently examined in relation to consumer behavior and they are religious affiliations and religious commitment. More specifically, religious affiliation is the adherence to a specific religious group and this is deemed to be an ascribed status. It has a key role in the prediction of consumer behavior [22]. Meanwhile, religious commitment, or religiosity, refers to the level to which and individual is committed to his religion and its teachings and this commitment is reflected through his attitudes and behaviors [23]. According to [24], religiosity is significantly related to consumers' behavior and purchase choices. Similarly, [25] indicated that religion and the consumers' religiosity in emerging markets (e.g., India) influence the consumers' purchase intention towards products (external and internal).

In the context of Saudi Arabia, [3] reached to the conclusion that a significant relationship exists between Islamic collectivist cultures and consumer behavior, especially boycotting. In [26] related study on the Middle East, they revealed the effect of religion on consumers' boycott and violations of American brands because of the policy adhered to. The same was reported by [27] who found a significant influence of religiosity on consumers' lifestyle, which in turn, influences their choices or choice behavior. Added to this, because of the role of religiosity on shaping consumer's preferences, it could be stated that consumer could steer clear of buying brands that go against their religious values [28]. Consumer's religion is generally a significant determinant of their attitudes and beliefs towards risky and problematic practices [29]. Religiosity studies show that religion plays a role in consumer behavior and it significantly affects consumers' behavior [3]. Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis for testing;

H2. There is a positive relationship between REL and level of willingness to boycott WB.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach in collecting primary data over a period of five weeks. Survey questionnaires were distributed to students, aged between 18-30, studying in UKM and UPM, Malaysia. The students come from all over the Malaysian region. From the questionnaires distributed, 402 were retrieved and deemed ready for analysis.

The study constructs were adopted from prior studies and were measured through a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1

(strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Moreover, SPSS, version 21, and AMOS, version 21 were utilized to analyze data. As for the measurement items for consumer willingness to boycott, the items were adopted from [30], susceptibility to interpersonal items were adopted and tweaked from [15], and lastly, for religiosity, items were adopted from [21].

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic profile of respondents

The respondents' profiles in light of their gender, level of education, marital status, level of income and state are presented in Table 1. With regards to respondents' gender, majority of them (80%) were female, while the rest (20%) were male respondents, and this is attributed to the higher number of female students in Malaysian universities. [31] Showed that female students in Malaysian public universities are over-represented and based on the report published by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2010), the female ratio in public universities constituted 64.8% in comparison to their male counterparts (35.2%). Moving on to their education level, majority of respondents were degree holders (79%), followed by those with SPM/STPM (12%), and professional qualifications (8%).

The respondents who were single constituted 99.3% of the total respondents as majority of them were not more than 35 years old. As for their income, majority of respondents earned below RM900 (93.0%), as they are still students and thus, they did not receive regular salary. Majority of the respondents (44.5%) came from Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Perak, while others came from other regions in the following distribution, from Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang (23%), from Johor, Melaka and Negeri Sembilan (19%), and from Pulau Pinang, Kedah and Perlis (9.5%) and lastly, from Sabah and Sarawak (4%).

As For the level of Marital Status the majority of respondents 99.3% were single, because the responses are students and young less than 35 years old. Regarding the states of responses 44.5% were from Central (Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Perak), 23% from East (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang), (19%) from South (Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan), 9.5% North (Pulau Pinang, Kedah, Perlis), and 4% Sabah and Sarawak.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents (N = 402)

Characteristic	Category	(n =)	%
Gender	Male	80	20
	Female	322	80
	Total	402	100%
Level of education	Category	(n =)	%
	SPM / STPM	49	12
	Diploma / Professional Qualification	31	8
	Degree	317	79
	STAM	3	0.7
	FOUNDATION	1	0.2
	MATRICULATION	1	0.2
	Total	402	100%
Marital Status	Category	(n =)	%

Characteristic	Category	(n =)	%
	Single	399	99.3
	Married	2	0.5
	Divorced/Separated	-----	-----
	Widowed	1	0.2
	Total	402	100%
State	Category	(n =)	%
	North (Pulau Pinang, Kedah, Perlis)	39	9.5
	South (Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan)	75	19
	East (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang)	93	23
	Central (Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Perak)	179	44.5
	Sabah and Sarawak	16	4

4.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis

This study made use of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to determine the level to which the observed variables are related to the underlying factors. EFA was conducted to assess the items validity used in the survey questionnaire [32]. Based on the results, data was suitable for factor analysis as evidenced by the following; first, most of the correlation coefficients obtained exceeded 0.3, and second, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) values exceeded the cut off (0.6) and they ranged from 0.778 (SII) to 0.802 (WB). Lastly, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity obtained statistical significance and hence confirming the data suitability to be exposed to factor analysis as established by [33].

More specifically, the EFA of SII indicated that items SUS11, SUS12, SUS3 and SUS2 loaded on normative influence, items SUS4, SUS7, and SUS8 loaded on informational influence, while items SUS1, SUS5, SUS6, SUS9, and SUS10 were deleted owing to increased total variance as their removal would gain higher Cronbach alpha values. The findings of the study were aligned with those reported by [15].

As for the EFA of religiosity, the items REL6, REL7, REL8, REL9 and REL10 loaded on intrapersonal religious commitment, and the items REL1, REL2, REL4 and REL5 loaded on interpersonal religious commitment. These results are consistent with those found by [21]. With regards to the consumer willingness to boycott items, they loaded in one component and WB4 was deleted to obtain greater Cronbach Alpha value. The reliability values of the constructs were; for SII, it was 0.823, for REL, it was 0.902, and for WB, it was 0.832. The hypotheses were tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) through SEM.

4.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The constructs factorial structure in the conceptual model was confirmed through the use of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), in AMOS. The three constructs were exposed to the analysis, with the resulting measurement model being $\chi^2 = 343.085$, with 146 degrees of freedom, and $p < .000$, GFI= 0.914; AGFI= 0.888; CFI= 0.948; IFI= 0.948; RMSEA= 0.058, indicating the good fit of the model. Table

2 tabulates the measurement model standardized loadings along with critical ratios.

Table 2: Measurement model

Items	Standardized loadings	Critical ratios
Religiosity		
REL1. Religious beliefs are especially important to me because they answer many questions about the meaning of life.	.843	19.961
REL2. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought or prayer.	.855	20.386
REL4. Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life.	.859	20.490
REL5. I spent time trying to grow in understanding my religious beliefs.	.817	-----
REL6. I often read books and magazines about my religion.	.729	13.557
REL7. I keep myself well-informed about my local religious group and have an influence in its decisions.	.785	14.534
REL8. I enjoy participating in the activities of my religious organization.	.830	15.255
REL9. I make financial contributions to my religious organization.	.671	14.771
REL10. I enjoy spending time with others from my religious organization.	.684	-----
Susceptibility to interpersonal influence		
SII3. It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.	.567	11.304
SII4. To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using.	.652	10.839
SII7. If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product.	.639	10.684
SII8. When buying fast food, I generally purchase those brands I think others will approve of.	.793	-----
SII11. Because other people can see me eating at fast food restaurants, I often eat at the fast food restaurant they expect me to eat in.	.860	16.220
SII12. I achieve a sense of belonging by eating at the same fast food restaurant where others eat.	.851	-----
Consumer Willingness to boycott		
WB1. I would feel guilty if I bought food from USA fast food chain.	.789	-----
WB2. I would never buy food from USA fast food chain.	.788	15.633
WB3. Whenever possible, I avoid buying food from USA fast food chain.	.825	16.194
WB5. I do not like the idea of consuming food from USA fast food chain.	.579	11.223

4.4 Structural Model

In Figure 1, the SEM analysis, involving AMOS demonstrates the following Goodness-of-Fit indices; $\chi^2=343.085$, $df=146$, χ^2 (CMIN/df) = 2.350, $p = .000$, GFI = .914 CFI = .948, IFI = .948, TLI = .939, RMSEA = .058.

Table 3: Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesized relationships	Estimate	t-value	Result
H1 SII →WB	.284	2.911 **	Supported
H2 REL →WB	.513	4.602***	Supported

As tabulated in Table 3, the findings of the construct willingness to boycott US fast food chains, relating to H1-H2, showed the significant influence of SII on WB at (β .284, CR 2.911, $p .000$). Along a similar positive and significant influence, the relationship between REL and WB was confirmed at (β .513, CR 4.602, $p .000$). The above results indicate support for both H1 and H2.

5. Conclusion Findings

This study examined the role of susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII) and religiosity (REL) on consumer willingness to boycott American fast food chains among Malaysian Muslim youth. The results indicated support for the above influence.

In this study, the first examined antecedent of boycotting American fast food chains is SII, in that when consumers are influenced by those important to them to scorn foreign brands, they made decide to boycott them. Susceptibility to other's opinions and perceptions arises, particularly under uncertain circumstances.

Aligned with prior studies ([16]; [18]; [20]), this study showed that SII is positively related to consumer behavior, and as such, boycott behavior is affected by SII. In this case, the consumers' susceptibility to interpersonal influence affects their willingness to boycott American fast food chains in Malaysia.

The second antecedent examined is religiosity, where the construct was found to positively affect willingness to boycott. Majority of prior studies of this caliber also reported a positive influence of religiosity on the behavior towards foreign made products (e.g., [3]; [26]; [24]).

The findings obtained in this study can assist marketing management circles to develop suitable strategies and non-government organizations (NGOs) to comprehend the factors that influence the consumers and hence, target specific firms to obtain their ongoing support from the public.

6. Limitation and Future Work

In this study, susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII) and religiosity (REL) were evidenced to positively relate to the willingness of consumers (Malaysian Muslim youth) to boycott. The empirical findings however should be interpreted based on the limitations of the study. The first limitation is the sample that constituted Malaysian youth studying from two Malaysian universities – they may not represent the total population and in this regard, future studies are recommended to include a more extensive population with different ages.

Another limitation relates to the quantitative approach to data collection and analysis adopted. Future studies can adopt a qualitative approach instead or a combination of both (qualitative and quantitative approaches) involving in-depth interviews to support the validity and accuracy of findings.

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