

CONSUMER BOYCOTT ISSUES, PURCHASE INTENTION, AND PURCHASE DECISIONS EVIDENCE FROM UNILEVER CONSUMERS IN INDONESIA)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationships among perceived consumer boycott issues, purchase intention, and purchase decisions in the context of Unilever products in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. It uses a quantitative cross-sectional survey of 130 respondents who were aware of the boycott issue and had experience using or purchasing Unilever products. The model was estimated using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The structural results show positive and statistically significant associations for boycott issues with purchase intention ($\beta = 0.972$, $t = 2.744$, $p = 0.006$) and purchase decision ($\beta = 0.602$, $t = 5.017$, $p < 0.001$), while purchase intention is positively associated with purchase decision ($\beta = 0.387$, $t = 4.105$, $p < 0.001$). The positive boycott-related coefficients are counterintuitive because boycott motivation is theoretically avoidance-oriented. We therefore interpret them cautiously as associations produced by the operationalized boycott-issue construct, which combines campaign intensity, boycott intention, boycott participation, and access to substitutes. The study contributes contextual evidence from an Indonesian urban market and highlights the need to distinguish boycott exposure, boycott intention, boycott participation, target-brand purchase intention, and substitute-brand purchase intention in future research.

Keywords: Consumer Boycott; Purchase Intention; Purchase Decision; Unilever; Indonesia

ISU BOIKOT KONSUMEN, NIAT PEMBELIAN, DAN KEPUTUSAN PEMBELIAN (BUKTI DARI KONSUMEN UNILEVER DI INDONESIA)

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan antara persepsi mengenai isu boikot konsumen, niat pembelian, dan keputusan pembelian dalam konteks produk Unilever di Pekanbaru, Indonesia. Studi menggunakan survei kuantitatif cross-sectional terhadap 130 responden yang mengetahui isu boikot dan pernah menggunakan atau membeli produk Unilever. Model diestimasi menggunakan partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). Hasil menunjukkan hubungan positif dan signifikan antara isu boikot dan niat pembelian ($\beta = 0,972$; $t = 2,744$; $p = 0,006$), isu boikot dan keputusan pembelian ($\beta = 0,602$; $t = 5,017$; $p < 0,001$), serta niat pembelian dan keputusan pembelian ($\beta = 0,387$; $t = 4,105$; $p < 0,001$). Arah positif pada jalur isu boikot bersifat tidak intuitif karena motivasi boikot secara teoretis berorientasi pada penghindaran. Oleh karena itu, hasil tersebut ditafsirkan secara hati-hati sebagai hubungan yang dihasilkan oleh operasionalisasi konstruk isu boikot yang menggabungkan intensitas kampanye, niat boikot, partisipasi boikot, dan akses terhadap produk pengganti. Kontribusi penelitian terletak pada bukti kontekstual dari pasar perkotaan Indonesia serta penegasan pentingnya membedakan paparan boikot, niat boikot, partisipasi boikot, niat pembelian merek sasaran, dan niat pembelian merek pengganti.

Kata Kunci: Isu Boikot Konsumen; Niat Pembelian; Keputusan Pembelian; Unilever; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Consumer purchasing is increasingly shaped by social, ethical, and political considerations in addition to conventional attributes such as quality, price, and convenience. Political consumerism uses marketplace choices to express approval or disapproval of companies or practices, with boycotting representing consumption avoidance and buycotting representing supportive purchasing (Kam & Deichert, 2020; Neilson, 2010). Consumers may withhold consumption when they perceive corporate conduct as objectionable and believe their actions can make a difference (Sen et al., 2001; Klein et al., 2004). Recent research also shows that boycott participation is influenced by psychological, normative, and situational factors, including animosity, perceived efficacy, social influence, and substitute availability (Lasarov et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2022; Jedicke et al., 2025). Social media can accelerate information diffusion and collective identification around boycott campaigns (Boulianne, 2022; Mady et al., 2025).

Indonesia provides a relevant setting because boycott campaigns associated with the Israel–Palestine conflict have generated substantial public discussion around multinational brands. Unilever was selected because its products are widely embedded in everyday FMCG consumption and the brand has been included in Indonesian boycott-related discussions. Pekanbaru provides an urban Indonesian consumer context in which such discussions can be examined at the local level. However, the study does not assume that awareness or participation in a boycott necessarily produces lower purchase intention because consumers differ in moral motivation, brand attachment, switching costs, and access to alternatives.

A key research gap concerns the conceptual distinction between boycott exposure, boycott intention, boycott participation, and purchase intention. These concepts represent different stages or forms of consumer response and should not automatically be treated as interchangeable indicators. The present study uses the original composite boycott-issue construct and examines its association with purchase intention and purchase decision. Its specific contribution is therefore empirical and methodological: it documents the relationships observed in Pekanbaru while showing why the direction and magnitude of the coefficients must be interpreted in light of construct operationalization. The study examines three relationships: boycott issues with purchase intention, boycott issues with purchase decision, and purchase intention with purchase decision.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Political Consumerism and Consumer Boycotts

Political consumerism refers to consumer choices that intentionally reward or punish market actors on the basis of political, social, or ethical considerations. Boycotting is an avoidance-oriented form of political consumerism in which consumers deliberately refrain from purchasing a target product or brand (Kam & Deichert, 2020). Unlike ordinary dissatisfaction, a boycott is often collective or communicative: consumers may participate to express disapproval, influence corporate behavior, demonstrate solidarity, or signal their identity to others (Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001). The effectiveness of a boycott is not determined only by the severity of the controversy. Consumers also consider the perceived effectiveness of their action, the cost of abandoning the brand, the availability of substitutes, and the behavior of other consumers. Klein et al. (2004) found that perceived egregiousness, the desire to make a difference, self-enhancement, counterarguments, and constrained consumption costs are relevant to boycott participation. Lasarov et al. (2023) further demonstrate that boycott participation can decline over time, suggesting that consumer responses are dynamic rather than permanent.

Boycott Issues and Purchase Intention

Consumer boycott issues can influence consumers' purchase-related intentions by altering their perceptions of a brand, the perceived legitimacy of the company's conduct, and the moral meaning associated with consumption. In the context of political consumerism, consumers may use marketplace choices to express approval or disapproval of companies involved in controversial social or political issues. Previous research suggests that boycott-related information can activate consumers' moral concerns and strengthen their motivation to avoid targeted brands (Kam & Deichert, 2020; Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001). The relationship between boycott issues and purchase intention, however, requires careful conceptual consideration. When purchase intention refers specifically to the intention to purchase the boycotted brand, stronger boycott motivation would theoretically be expected to reduce such intention. Conversely, when consumers' purchase intention includes consideration of alternative or substitute brands, boycott issues may redirect purchase intentions toward competing products. This distinction is particularly important because boycott behavior involves both the decision to withhold consumption from a target brand and the possibility of reallocating consumption to alternatives (Neilson, 2010; Lasarov et al., 2023).

In the present study, the boycott-issue construct includes campaign intensity, boycott intention, boycott participation, and access to substitute products. Therefore, the construct captures a broader set of boycott-related perceptions and behaviors rather than boycott intention alone. The observed relationship with purchase intention should consequently be interpreted as an empirical association between the operationalized constructs rather than as evidence that stronger boycott activity increases consumers' willingness to purchase Unilever products. Based on the empirical model and the original formulation of the study, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Boycott issues have a negative effect on consumers' purchase intentions towards Unilever products.

Boycott Issues and Purchase Decision

Boycott issues may also influence consumers' purchase decisions by changing the criteria used to evaluate brands and available alternatives. Political, ethical, and social controversies can become part of consumers' decision-making processes, particularly when consumers perceive the issue as morally significant or consistent with their personal and social identities. Previous studies demonstrate that perceived corporate wrongdoing, consumer animosity, social influence, and perceived boycott effectiveness can motivate consumers to alter their marketplace behavior (Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2022). The effect of boycott issues on purchase decisions may occur through several mechanisms. First, exposure to boycott campaigns may increase consumers' awareness of the controversy surrounding a brand. Second, consumers may evaluate the targeted brand more negatively and reconsider whether continued consumption is consistent with their values. Third, the availability of substitute products can reduce the perceived cost of switching and facilitate changes in purchasing behavior (Lasarov et al., 2023). Thus, boycott issues can become an important contextual factor in consumers' final brand choices.

In the present study, purchase decision is measured through need awareness, information search, alternative evaluation, post-purchase behavior, and boycott motivation. Because the measurement includes boycott motivation, the construct should not be interpreted exclusively as the decision to purchase Unilever products. Rather, it reflects consumers' broader decision-making responses in the context of the boycott issue. Accordingly, the hypothesized relationship is formulated as follows:

H2: Boycott issues have a negative effect on consumers' purchase decisions towards Unilever products.

Purchase Intention and Purchase Decision

Purchase intention represents consumers' willingness or motivational readiness to purchase a particular product, whereas purchase decision reflects the consumer's realized choice among available alternatives. The relationship between these two constructs is theoretically supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which proposes that behavioral intention is the most immediate motivational antecedent of actual behavior (Bosnjak et al., 2020). Consumers with stronger purchase intentions are generally more likely to proceed toward a purchase decision. Nevertheless, the translation of intention into actual behavior may be influenced by situational factors, perceived behavioral control, product availability, financial considerations, and the availability of alternative products. Consequently, purchase intention should be regarded as an important predictor of purchase-related behavior, but not as an identical construct to actual purchasing behavior. In the context of consumer boycotts, this distinction becomes particularly important because consumers may express an intention to purchase a product but subsequently change their decision because of ethical concerns, social pressure, or the availability of substitute brands. Conversely, consumers who initially intend to avoid a targeted brand may still purchase it because of habit, product accessibility, price, or limited alternatives. Therefore, the relationship between purchase intention and purchase decision should be understood as an empirical association rather than as deterministic causality. Based on the theoretical argument and the empirical model, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Purchase intention has a positive effect on purchase decision.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. The target population consisted of consumers in Pekanbaru who were aware of the boycott issue and had used or purchased Unilever products. Respondents were screened on these two criteria before analysis. The original study used accidental (convenience) sampling and obtained 130 usable responses. The questionnaire was distributed to eligible consumers and responses were analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The source manuscript does not report the exact data-collection dates, the number of questionnaires distributed, the response rate, or the formal ethics/consent procedure; these details should be inserted by the authors before final submission rather than inferred retrospectively. The sample size of 130 reflects the usable responses obtained in the original study; because the model contains three latent constructs and the sample is non-probability based, the findings are presented as contextual evidence rather than population-representative estimates.

Measurement

All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The boycott-issue construct comprised four indicators in the original instrument: boycott campaign intensity, boycott intention, boycott participation, and access to substitute products (Isalman et al., 2025). Purchase intention comprised transactional, referential, preferential, and exploratory intention (Anugrah et al., 2024). Purchase decision comprised need awareness, information search, alternative evaluation, post-purchase behavior, and boycott motivation (Akbar et al., 2026). The items were adapted from prior studies and translated into the Indonesian consumer context. Because the boycott-issue indicators represent conceptually different dimensions,

the revised manuscript treats the construct operationalization as a methodological limitation rather than assuming that the indicators form a purely reflective, unidimensional concept.

Data Analysis

The original study used SmartPLS to estimate a variance-based structural equation model. PLS-SEM is appropriate for prediction-oriented models with latent variables measured by multiple indicators (Hair et al., 2019). The measurement model was assessed using indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, and AVE. Cross-loadings were also reported as an assessment of discriminant validity. The structural model was assessed using path coefficients, bootstrapped t-statistics and p-values, R², Q², and collinearity diagnostics.

RESULTS

Respondent Profile and Response

The original study collected data from 130 respondents using accidental (convenience) sampling. The sample comprised 126 Generation Z respondents (97%) and 4 millennials (3%); 88 respondents were female (68%) and 42 were male (32%) as seen in Table 1. Most respondents were students or university students (113 respondents; 86.9%). Because the sample was obtained using non-probability sampling, the findings should be interpreted as contextual evidence rather than as statistically representative estimates for the entire population of Pekanbaru. This limitation is important when discussing generalizability.

Table 1. Demographic Profiles of Respondents

Demographic	Category	n	%
Age	Generation Z (10–28)	126	97.0
	Millennial (29–44)	4	3.0
	Total	130	100
Gender	Male	42	32.0
	Female	88	68.0
	Total	130	100
Occupation	Student/university student	113	86.9
	Civil servant	2	1.5
	Private employee	12	9.2
	Entrepreneur	1	0.8
	Freelancer	1	0.8
	Housewife	1	0.8
	Total	130	100

The sample was strongly concentrated among young consumers and students. This profile is relevant to the digital nature of contemporary political consumerism, but it substantially limits generalizability to older consumers and consumers with different occupational and economic profiles. The descriptive scores should therefore be interpreted together with the exact item wording because the boycott construct includes both boycott-related behaviors and access to substitutes. Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis of respondents' responses.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Respondents' Responses

Construct	Mean	Original interpretation
Boycott issue	3.40	Good
Purchase intention	3.14	Moderately high
Purchase decision	3.64	High

Measurement Model Analysis

The research examined the measurement model using indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. The results are shown in Table 3.

All reported outer loadings exceed 0.70, while composite reliability values exceed 0.70 and AVE values exceed 0.50. On these criteria, the reported measurement model demonstrates high internal consistency and convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed using cross-loadings. As shown in Table 4, the outer loading values of the indicators with their respective constructs were higher than their outer loading values with other constructs; thus, the criteria were met.

Table 3. Measurement Model and Scale Reliability

Construct	Indicatos	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Boycott issue			0.980	0.980	0.986	0.945
	Campaign intensity	0.967				
	Boycott intention	0.973				
	Boycott participation	0.976				
	Access to substitutes	0.971				
Purchase intention			0.976	0.976	0.982	0.931
	Transactional	0.962				
	Referential	0.977				
	Preferential	0.957				
	Exploratory	0.966				
Purchase decision			0.982	0.982	0.985	0.932
	Need awareness	0.969				
	Information search	0.965				
	Alternative evaluation	0.966				
	Post-purchase behavior	0.960				
	Boycott motivation	0.966				

Table 4. Cross-Loadings

	Boycott issue	Purchase intention	Purchase decision
Campaign intensity	0,967	0,939	0,938
Boycott intention	0,973	0,938	0,958
Boycott participation	0,976	0,955	0,957
Access to substitutes	0,971	0,947	0,949
Transactional	0,937	0,962	0,943
Referential	0,958	0,977	0,954
Preferential	0,916	0,957	0,916
Exploratory	0,942	0,966	0,940
Need awareness	0,939	0,939	0,969
Information search	0,939	0,933	0,965
Alternative evaluation	0,945	0,941	0,966
Post-purchase behavior	0,954	0,945	0,960
Boycott motivation	0,943	0,933	0,966

The bootstrapping results show statistically significant positive coefficients for all three paths. H3 is consistent with its directional expectation and is supported. H1 and H2, however, are not supported in their hypothesized negative direction: although the paths are statistically significant, their estimated coefficients are positive ($\beta = 0.972$ and $\beta = 0.602$, respectively). This divergence between theoretical direction and empirical sign is central to the interpretation of the study.

Structural Model Analysis

Table 5 presents the results of the structural model analysis. The obtained VIF values, ranging from 1.000 to 3.134, are below the recommended threshold of 5.0, indicating no multicollinearity issues among the predictor constructs. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was assessed to evaluate the explanatory power of the proposed model, and the results demonstrate that the research model has substantial explanatory power. This is supported by a predictive relevance value (Q^2) greater than zero, confirming that the model has adequate predictive relevance. Overall, these

results indicate that the proposed structural model framework has satisfactory predictive capability in explaining purchase intention and purchase decision behaviours.

Table 5. Result of Structural Model Analysis

Endogenous Construct	Predictor	VIF	β	f Square	R Square	Q Square
Purchase intention	Boycott issue	3.134	0.972	7.134	0.945	0.475
Purchase decision	Boycott issue	3.134	0.602	0.573	0.965	0.879
	Purchase intention	1.000	0.387	0.237		

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis was tested using a bootstrapping procedure, the results of which are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Result of Hypotheses Test

Hypothesis	Path	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	Boycott issue → Purchase intention	2.744	0.006	Supported
H2	Boycott issue → Purchase decision	5.017	0.001	Supported
H3	Purchase intention → Purchase decision	4.105	0.001	Supported

The bootstrapping results indicate that the boycott issue has a significant positive effect on purchase intention and purchase decision; thus, H1 and H2 are supported. Similarly, the effect of purchase intention on purchase decision is positive and significant, meaning H3 is also supported.

DISCUSSION

H1 was not supported in its hypothesized negative direction. The estimated path from boycott issues to purchase intention is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.972$, $t = 2.744$, $p = 0.006$). A boycott is theoretically an avoidance-oriented form of political consumerism, so a positive association with purchase intention toward the targeted brand would be counterintuitive. The result should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that stronger boycott activity increases willingness to buy Unilever products. Instead, it points to a measurement-validity problem in the operationalization of the boycott-issue construct. Campaign intensity, boycott intention, boycott participation, and access to substitutes represent different dimensions: exposure can increase awareness, intention reflects willingness to avoid, participation reflects behavior, and substitute access is a situational condition. Combining them into one reflective construct can obscure the direction of individual relationships. Future studies should estimate these dimensions separately and distinguish target-brand purchase intention from substitute-brand purchase intention.

H2 was also not supported in its hypothesized negative direction. The path from boycott issues to purchase decision is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.602$, $t = 5.017$, $p < 0.001$). The result indicates an association between boycott-related perceptions and broader purchase-decision processes, but it should not be interpreted as proof that boycott issues cause consumers to stop purchasing Unilever products. This caution is especially important because the purchase-decision construct includes boycott motivation together with need awareness, information search, alternative evaluation, and post-purchase behavior. The inclusion of boycott motivation creates conceptual overlap with the boycott-issue construct and may contribute to the strong coefficient and high explanatory power.

H3 was supported. Purchase intention is positively and significantly associated with purchase decision ($\beta = 0.387$, $t = 4.105$, $p < 0.001$). This relationship is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which positions intention as an immediate motivational antecedent of behavior (Bosnjak et al., 2020). Nevertheless, because the study is cross-sectional and both constructs were measured in the same survey period, the result should be interpreted as an empirical association rather than temporal causality. In boycott contexts, the translation of intention into behavior may also be affected by habit, price, product accessibility, social pressure, and substitute availability.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among boycott issues, purchase intention, and purchase decision among Unilever consumers in Pekanbaru. The structural model produced significant positive associations for all three paths. H3 was supported in its hypothesized positive direction, whereas H1 and H2 were not supported in their hypothesized negative directions. The central interpretive issue is that the positive boycott-related coefficients

should not be read as evidence that boycott-oriented consumers are more willing to purchase the targeted brand. Rather, the result is plausibly related to conceptual overlap within the operationalized boycott-issue construct and within the purchase-decision construct. The unusually high reliability, cross-loadings, and R^2 values reinforce the need for additional discriminant-validity assessment. Future studies should separate boycott exposure, boycott intention, boycott participation, target-brand purchase intention, substitute-brand purchase intention, and boycott-related decision processes, preferably using longitudinal or experimental designs.

The contribution of this study is primarily contextual and methodological. It provides evidence from an Indonesian urban consumer setting and demonstrates the importance of distinguishing related but non-equivalent boycott constructs. The findings should be generalized cautiously because the sample was obtained through convenience sampling and was dominated by Generation Z respondents and students.

The findings have implications for multinational FMCG companies operating in politically and socially sensitive markets. Boycott controversies should not be regarded merely as temporary promotional challenges but as issues that may affect consumer evaluation and marketplace decision-making. Companies should monitor social-media discussions and emerging boycott narratives, identify the specific concerns underlying consumer resistance, and communicate their corporate position clearly and consistently. Strategic responses should be designed to address consumer concerns without unintentionally intensifying perceptions of inconsistency or insensitivity. Previous research indicates that corporate responses and communication strategies can influence consumers' perceptions of boycott situations (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2009). Managers should also pay attention to the availability and attractiveness of substitute products. When consumers perceive alternative brands as easily accessible and sufficiently similar, the practical barriers to switching may be low. Consequently, maintaining consumer trust, product value, and brand relevance becomes particularly important during periods of boycott-related controversy.

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