Psychological Drivers of Consumer Boycott: Understanding Emotional and Social Identity Influences in Batam

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Abstract
Consumer boycotts have become an increasingly significant form of consumer activism, driven by ethical, political, and social concerns. This study explores the psychological motivations behind boycott participation in Batam, focusing on emotional triggers, social identity influences, and perceived effectiveness. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 30 respondents from Generation X, Y, and Z. Thematic analysis was conducted manually, highlighting key motivations such as moral responsibility, peer influence, and digital activism. The findings reveal that Gen Z engages in boycotts as an expression of online activism, Gen Y is driven by ethical consumption, and Gen X remains skeptical and pragmatic. This research contributes to the literature on consumer activism, ethical consumption, and social identity theory, offering insights for businesses, policymakers, and advocacy groups on how to navigate boycott movements and maintain consumer trust.
Keywords: Consumer Boycott, Psychological Drivers, Social Identity, Digital Activism, Ethical Consumption

INTRODUCTION

Consumer activism has become a powerful force in influencing corporate behavior, policies, and market trends. Among the various forms of consumer activism, boycotting has emerged as a widely used strategy where consumers deliberately refrain from purchasing products from companies they perceive as unethical (Klein, John, & Smith, 2004). Historically, boycotts have played a crucial role in shaping corporate responsibility, government regulations, and social movements (Hoffmann et al., 2018).

However, in the digital era, boycotts have evolved beyond traditional activism, becoming more rapid, widespread, and influential due to the rise of social media and digital connectivity (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). The ability to mobilize online communities and generate public pressure on corporations has significantly altered the way consumers participate in and sustain boycott movements.

One of the most recent and politically charged consumer boycotts is linked to the Israel-Palestine conflict, which has triggered widespread economic and consumer behavior shifts on a global scale, including in Indonesia. The Global Peace Index (2023) highlights that political conflicts contribute to economic instability, influencing consumers' trust and purchasing decisions. In response to the Israel-Palestine conflict, various civil society organizations and activist groups in Indonesia have launched boycott campaigns against multinational franchises and brands perceived to have ties with Israel or its allies (The Jakarta Post, 2023; Tempo, 2023; Al Jazeera, 2023; Jakarta Globe, 2024).

A study by the Indonesian Consumers Foundation revealed that 67% of respondents expressed a willingness to participate in politically motivated boycotts, particularly against international corporations linked to controversial geopolitical events. Despite the growing participation in boycotts, limited research has explored the psychological motivations that drive consumers to engage in such actions, especially in emerging markets like Indonesia.

Most prior studies have focused on economic implications (Farah & Newman, 2010), corporate responses to boycotts (Shi & Wei, 2023), and the effectiveness of consumer activism (Hoffmann & Müller, 2009). However, less attention has been given to the role of emotions, social identity, and perceived effectiveness in shaping boycott behavior (Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021).

The psychological underpinnings of consumer boycotts are deeply rooted in moral emotions, social identity, and perceived efficacy (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011; Hoffmann et al., 2018). Consumers do not simply boycott brands for economic reasons; rather, they engage in symbolic acts of resistance driven by anger, guilt, and moral outrage (Hino, 2023; Lindenmeier, Schleer & Pricl, 2012).

Social identity theory further suggests that individuals align their purchasing behavior with their in-group norms, reinforcing collective boycotts as a means of self-expression and group solidarity (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021). While previous studies have analyzed the role of activism, ethical consumption, and corporate accountability, the specific ways in which psychological factors shape boycott participation remain underexplored, particularly across different generational cohorts (Makarem & Jae, 2015; Shi & Wei, 2023).

The rise of digital activism and social media discourse has amplified consumer participation in boycotts, making them more visible, rapid, and influential (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). Unlike traditional boycott movements that relied on physical protests and organized campaigns, today's consumers—particularly younger generations—engage in hashtag activism and viral advocacy, allowing boycott movements to gain momentum at unprecedented speed (Makarem & Jae, 2015; Dens et al., 2012). Younger consumers have been at the forefront of digital boycotts, using platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok to call out unethical brands and rally support (Hoffmann et al., 2018).

In Batam, a strategically located economic hub in Kepulauan Riau Province, the impact of boycott movements has been particularly pronounced. As a city known for its strong international trade connections, duty-free shopping, and diverse consumer demographics,

Batam serves as a microcosm of how global political conflicts influence local consumer behavior. Given its proximity to Singapore and Malaysia, Batam's economy is heavily reliant on foreign franchises and multinational retailers, making it a key area for observing shifts in consumer activism, digital engagement, and ethical consumption trends.

Recent boycott movements in Batam, particularly among Generation Y and Generation Z consumers, have led to changes in brand loyalty, purchasing behavior, and corporate reputation management among businesses operating in the city. It is essential to examine how generational differences shape boycott motivations, decision-making, and sustainability in Batam, where global influences intersect with local economic behaviors. However, despite the increasing popularity of boycotts, their long-term effectiveness remains contested. Studies suggest that while consumer activism can temporarily impact corporate sales and reputation, boycott sustainability is often hindered by emotional fatigue, market alternatives, and brand counter-strategies (Hino, 2023; Shi & Wei, 2023).

In an ideal scenario, businesses and policymakers should be proactive in addressing consumer concerns by recognizing the psychological drivers behind boycott movements. Companies that demonstrate corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical business practices, and transparent communication strategies are more likely to regain consumer trust and mitigate the reputational risks associated with boycotts (Sen et al., 2016). Furthermore, regulators and advocacy groups can use these findings to develop consumer education programs that help bridge the gap between activism and informed ethical consumption.

Currently, however, many businesses lack psychological insights into boycott behavior. Most corporate responses to boycotts are reactive rather than proactive, often focusing on damage control rather than long-term ethical commitments. Similarly, policymakers and consumer advocacy groups face challenges in addressing consumer grievances due to the lack of structured strategies for managing boycotts. Without a clear understanding of the motivations behind boycott participation, businesses risk losing loyal consumers, and regulators may struggle to maintain a balanced marketplace that fosters ethical corporate behavior.

Prior studies have analyzed the economic impact of boycotts (Farah & Newman, 2010), but less attention has been given to the role of emotions, social identity, and perceived effectiveness in shaping boycott behavior. The purpose of this study is to address this gap by examining how anger, guilt, and moral responsibility influence consumer participation, how peer influence and social identity reinforce boycott behavior, and how different generations perceive the impact of their boycotting actions. By understanding these psychological factors, this research contributes to consumer activism, ethical consumption, and behavioral economics, offering practical insights for businesses, policymakers, and advocacy groups on how to navigate ethically conscious consumer movements in an increasingly digitized and politically aware world.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach, which is highly effective in uncovering deeply rooted personal and social motivations behind consumer decisions related to ethical and political issues. Unlike quantitative methods that focus on statistical trends, qualitative research allows for a richer, more contextualized understanding of consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Previous research has shown that consumer behavior is shaped by generational influences, as each group interacts differently with activism, digital engagement, and ethical considerations (Makarem & Jae, 2015; Palacios-Florencio et al., 2019). This study involved 384 survey participants, divided equally among three generational cohorts Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012) to examine how consumer boycott motivations, decision-making processes, and sustainability of participation vary based on experiences, values, and preferences.

This sample size was determined using Lemeshow's formula for an infinite population, with a 5% margin of error, ensuring adequate variation to capture diverse perspectives, trends, and patterns. The survey respondents are referred to as initial informants rather than participants, as qualitative research prioritizes in-depth perspectives over statistical representation.

Table 1. Informants

Generation	Participants		
	Survey (n=384)	FGD (n=60)	In-Depth Interview (n=30)
Gen X (1965-1980)	128	20	10
Gen Y (1981-1996)	128	20	10
Gen Z (1997-2012)	128	20	10

From this survey group, 60 informants were selected using purposive sampling for in-focus group discussions (FGDs) and 30 informants were selected from the FGDs group. Selection criteria included active participation in boycott movements, awareness of ethical consumption, and willingness to share personal experiences. To gain a comprehensive understanding of generational boycott behavior in Batam, multiple data collection techniques were used:

1. The Initial Survey comprises 54 Open-Ended Questions designed to explore various aspects of consumer behavior and encourage participants to articulate their views in their own words, ensuring greater authenticity and a deeper exploration of personal convictions. These questions cover key areas such as Consumer Persona, Boycott Attitude, Boycott Intention, and Boycott Behavior.

Category	Focus Area	Description
Consumer Persona (18)	Demographic	Captures consumers' age, gender, income level, education, occupation, and location.
	Psychographic	Explores consumer lifestyles, personal values, interests, and motivations that influence purchasing decisions.
	Preferences	Examines brand loyalty, purchasing habits, and preferred product categories.
Boycott Attitude (12)	Perceived Legitimacy	Consumers' perception of moral responsibility and the legitimacy of boycotts as a tool to penalize organizations violating societal norms.
	Boycott Emotions	Emotional responses associated with participating in a boycott.
	Perceived Efficiency	The belief that a boycott will have a significant impact on the targeted country or company.
Boycott Intention (12)	Willingness to Act	Readiness to avoid products or services from companies that support specific conflicts.
	Perceived Responsibility	Intention to seek alternative products as substitutes for boycotted items.
	Purchase Avoidance	The act of refraining from purchasing products from companies or countries involved in conflicts.
Boycott Behavior (12)	Rationalization	Factors influencing the decision to boycott, such as brand importance, product substitution, and financial constraints.
	Advocacy	Efforts to encourage others to participate in the boycott and vice-versa
	Self-Enhancement	Commitment to consistently boycotting certain products over the long term.

2. From this survey pool, recurring themes, general attitudes, and key concerns across generations were identified, laying the groundwork for further qualitative exploration. Then selected informants were chosen for in-depth exploration based on their diverse viewpoints or strong thematic alignment with boycott behavior. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 60 informants – 20 from each generation, bringing together participants to debate, reflect, and contextualize their reasons for engaging in—or rejecting—boycotts. FGDs provided an opportunity to explore collective narratives, peer influence, and intergenerational contrasts, further refining the themes identified in the survey. Previous studies suggest that group discussions enhance data richness, particularly in research on moral and ethical decision-making (Dens et al., 2012; Hoffmann & Müller, 2009).

3. To gain a more personalized and nuanced perspective, 30 individual informants across all generations were selected for in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions. This method allowed informants to describe their experiences, motivations, and decision-making processes in greater depth.

Section	Semi-Structured Questions
Connecting Survey Insights to Personal Experiences	• In the initial survey, you indicated that you [agreed/disagreed] with boycotting certain brands or products. Can you share your personal experience with a boycott? What led you to this decision? • How did you first learn about the boycott movement you participated in (e.g., news, social media, family, community)? • Were you already aware of the issues related to the boycott before deciding to act, or did something specific influence your awareness?
Emotional Triggers & Psychological Motivations	• What emotions did you experience when you decided to join (or reject) a boycott? Did you feel anger, disappointment, empowerment, or any other strong emotions? • Was there a particular moment or piece of information that made you feel strongly about boycotting? If so, what was it? • Do you think your values and beliefs played a role in your decision to boycott? If so, can you describe how? • Have your emotions toward the boycott changed over time? If so, what influenced this change? • Have you ever felt conflicted about boycotting a product you previously enjoyed or depended on? How did you navigate that conflict?
Social Influence & External Factors	• Did friends, family, or social media influence your decision to boycott? How? • Have you ever encouraged others to join a boycott? If so, how did they respond? • How do you perceive the role of social media activism in boycott movements? Does it strengthen or weaken consumer commitment? • In your experience, do generational differences affect how people approach boycotts? For example, do you notice differences in how Gen X, Y, and Z react to boycotts? • Have you ever participated in a boycott because of pressure from your social circle or community? If so, how did that influence your long-term commitment? • Have you ever experienced backlash for supporting or rejecting a boycott? If so, how did you handle it?
Decision-Making &	• How long have you maintained a boycott? Have there been instances where you returned to purchasing a previously boycotted product? Why or why not?

Section	Semi-Structured Questions
Boycott Sustainability	• What factors make it easier or harder for you to sustain a boycott? (e.g., availability of alternatives, personal habits, financial constraints, social pressure) • What would need to happen for you to reconsider a boycott? For example, if a company made ethical changes, would that influence your decision? • Have you ever felt fatigue or frustration with maintaining a boycott, especially when others around you did not participate? If so, how did you deal with it? • Do you believe boycotts have a real impact on companies or industries? What examples can you think of where a boycott led to meaningful change? • Looking ahead, do you see yourself continuing to engage in boycotts? If so, why? If not, what would make you stop?
Closing Reflection	• If you could send a message to brands or businesses regarding consumer boycotts, what would you say? • Do you think boycotts are an effective long-term strategy for social or political change, or do you think other approaches might be better?

Data Analysis & Reliability Measures

This study employs thematic analysis to examine data collected from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews, allowing for an in-depth exploration of consumer boycott behavior across generational cohorts. Rather than relying on software-assisted analysis (e.g., NVIVO), the study adopts a manual coding approach, ensuring a nuanced, context-sensitive interpretation of consumer responses. The analysis follows six key stages to systematically extract insights and patterns from the data.

The first stage, familiarization with the data, involved transcribing all interviews and FGDs verbatim, followed by multiple readings of the transcripts to identify recurring themes, linguistic patterns, and key insights. This immersive approach ensured a deep understanding of participant narratives. The next stage, generating initial codes, applied open coding to label significant portions of the text, focusing on aspects such as consumer motivations, perceived boycott effectiveness, emotional responses, and social influences. These codes were then refined and grouped into overarching themes in the searching for themes stage, where relationships among codes were identified and dominant patterns emerged.

Once preliminary themes were established, the reviewing themes stage involved cross-checking coded data against raw transcripts to maintain accuracy and consistency in representation. This step helped ensure that the identified themes reflected consumer perspectives rather than researcher bias. The defining and naming themes stage further refined these themes, emphasizing generational differences in boycott behavior and illustrating how motivations varied between Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. At this stage, supporting direct participant quotes were incorporated to provide depth to each theme.

Finally, the writing and reporting stage-structured these themes into a coherent narrative, integrating direct participant responses with references to existing literature to situate the findings within a broader academic and theoretical framework. By doing so, the study not only presents its findings but also contextualizes them within the ongoing discourse on consumer activism and boycott behavior.

To strengthen reliability and validity, several methodological safeguards were implemented. Multiple coders were involved in the thematic analysis process, ensuring inter-coder reliability through consensus meetings where discrepancies in theme identification were discussed and resolved. Additionally, triangulation was conducted by comparing data from

survey responses, FGDs, and in-depth interviews, reinforcing the depth and accuracy of the findings and minimizing potential biases. This multi-layered approach ensured that the themes identified were not only internally consistent but also reflective of real consumer attitudes and behaviors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Batam, Indonesia, is a strategic economic hub located in the Riau Islands, known for its industrial zones, free-trade area status, and strong international trade connections (Jakarta Globe, 2024). As a major manufacturing and logistics center, Batam attracts significant foreign direct investment, particularly from multinational corporations in the electronics, shipbuilding, and automotive industries. The city's economic structure is deeply integrated with global markets, making it susceptible to international economic trends, political developments, and consumer activism.

Socially, Batam is a melting pot of diverse cultural and generational influences, with a large working-class population, expatriate communities, and a growing base of digitally active young consumers. The rise of social media penetration and e-commerce has further transformed consumer behavior, leading to an increase in digitally-driven activism and ethical consumption movements (Dedeoglu et al., 2020). These factors make Batam an ideal case study to examine how consumer boycotts are shaped by emotional, social, and identity-driven factors in an emerging economy.

This study focuses on the Israel-Palestine boycott as a relevant and timely case, given its widespread impact on global consumer behavior. Recent reports indicate that Indonesian consumers have actively engaged in boycott movements against multinational corporations perceived to have ties with Israel or its allies (Al Jazeera, 2023; Tempo, 2023). This movement gained strong traction in Batam, with various civil society groups and influencers amplifying the boycott call through social media campaigns, urging consumers to switch to local alternatives or ethical brands (The Jakarta Post, 2023).

Table 2. Data Analysis Criteria & Findings across Different Generations.

| Analysis Criteria	Method Applied	Key Findings	Generational Comparisons
Triangulation	Data compared across surveys, FGDs, and interviews	Ensured that key themes were consistently reflected across different methods	1. Digital activism: Gen Z (74% survey, 78% FGDs, 72% interviews) 2. Scepticism toward boycotts: Gen X (41% survey, 45% FGDs, 39% interviews)
Member Checking	30 participants (10 per generation) reviewed and validated thematic findings	Helped refine categories by incorporating participant insights	Peer influence initially categorized as social media validation was refined to peer pressure and digital activism
Negative Case Analysis	Identified outliers to capture diverse motivations within each generation	Highlighted variations in boycott participation	1. Gen X: 13% participated due to direct corporate misconduct 2. Gen Y: 9% admitted external pressures influenced their boycott decisions

Analysis Criteria	Method Applied	Key Findings	Generational Comparisons
Reflexivity & Bias Control	maintained a reflexivity journal and conducted peer debriefing sessions	Prevented bias and refined thematic interpretations	Gen X initially assumed disengaged, but findings later categorized as pragmatic scepticism due to economic self-interest
Coding Consistency	used a structured codebook to ensure uniform coding across datasets	Ensured clarity & comparability of themes	1. Moral outrage: Gen Z (78%), Gen Y (52%), Gen X (31%) 2. Scepticism toward boycotts: Gen X (41%), Gen Y (29%), Gen Z (19%)

Source: Data analyzed by the author (2024)

The findings reveal distinct generational differences in how consumers engage in boycotts, aligning with prior studies on consumer activism and psychological motivations (Klein et al., 2004; Hoffmann et al., 2018). Thematic analysis identified three key psychological drivers behind boycott participation: emotional triggers, social identity influences, and perceived boycott effectiveness.

These findings are strongly connected to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and the concept of Digital Activism (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020), which explain how consumers use boycotts as a mechanism for collective identity expression and ethical decision-making. The psychological factors driving consumer boycotts among three-generation cohorts in Batam are not unique to this particular case but can be applied to other instances of consumer activism worldwide.

Figure 1. Psychological Drivers of Consumer Boycott in Batam.
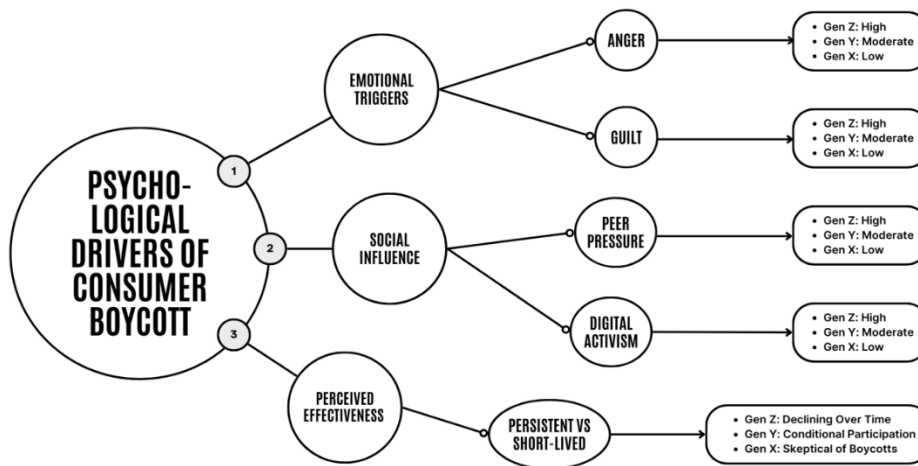
Source: Data compiled and processed by the author (2024)

Emotional Triggers in Boycotts and Generational Differences

One of the key findings of this study is the pivotal role of emotions in shaping consumer participation in boycotts, particularly among younger generations. Data coding analysis revealed distinct generational differences in emotional engagement, influencing the motivations, sustainability, and intensity of boycott participation. Thematic analysis of interviews and FGDs indicated that moral outrage, anger, and guilt were the primary emotional drivers for Gen Z and Gen Y, whereas Gen X exhibited a more pragmatic and skeptical stance. These findings align with previous research suggesting that consumer boycotts are often emotionally charged

responses to perceived ethical violations (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011; Hino, 2023). Emotional engagement plays a fundamental role in mobilizing consumer activism, with moral indignation, guilt, and ethical concerns acting as key catalysts (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2009; Hoffmann et al., 2018).

1. Generation Z was engaged in digital activism and emotional outrage.

    Gen Z participants demonstrated the highest emotional intensity, often responding impulsively to boycott movements. Their engagement was reactionary and emotionally charged, frequently triggered by viral social media posts, influencer activism, or trending online movements. When describing their motivations for boycotting brands perceived as unethical, Gen Z participants frequently used terms such as "rage," "disgust," and "betrayal."

    "I stopped buying from those affiliated Israeli brands because everyone was talking about how they were supporting injustice. It felt wrong to continue supporting them, so I joined the boycott." (Gen Z informant)

    Their participation was largely shaped by peer influence and social media trends, reinforcing the role of digital activism as a key driver of boycotts within this generation. Many participants believed that viral boycotts could exert pressure on corporations, forcing them to implement ethical changes. The dominant emotions extracted from data coding included anger, betrayal, and disgust, with viral campaigns and influencer endorsements serving as primary motivators for their engagement.

    These findings align with Hoffmann et al. (2018), who noted that younger consumers tend to overestimate the impact of online activism, believing that boycotts can compel corporate accountability. Dedeoğlu et al. (2020) further argue that Gen Z equates digital activism—such as Twitter and TikTok campaigns—with direct corporate pressure, reinforcing their high participation rates in social media-driven boycotts.

    However, despite their strong initial engagement, Gen Z participants exhibited boycott fatigue, leading to short-lived participation. Their commitment diminished when corporate responses were deemed unsatisfactory or when new social issues gained online traction (Farah & Newman, 2009). This suggests that while Gen Z is highly effective in initiating boycott movements, their long-term commitment tends to wane more rapidly than that of other generations.

2. Generation Y prioritized ethical consumption over emotional reaction.

    Unlike Gen Z, Gen Y participants exhibited moderate emotional engagement, prioritizing ethical consumption principles over impulsive reactions. Their boycott decisions were deliberate and research-driven, as they were more inclined to evaluate a brand's ethical track record before making purchasing decisions.

    "I boycott brands that don't align with my values. It's not just about one incident; it's about long-term corporate responsibility." (Gen Y informant)

    Rather than reacting to viral trends, Gen Y consumers were influenced by value-driven motivations, aligning their purchases with long-term ethical considerations. Their boycotts were more strategic and sustained, reflecting a commitment to selective consumption, where they actively avoided unethical brands while supporting companies that aligned with their personal values (Makarem & Jae, 2015).

    Moreover, Gen Y participants demonstrated conditional participation—meaning they were willing to resume purchasing from a previously boycotted brand if the company implemented meaningful ethical improvements. This aligns with Sen et al. (2016), who found that Gen Y consumers favour long-term value-based consumption over temporary

outrage or spontaneous activism. Their participation in boycotts was driven by accountability and corporate transparency rather than immediate emotional reactions.

3. Generation X valued pragmatism over emotional engagement

Gen X participants, in contrast, were least emotionally reactive and displayed a high level of skepticism regarding the effectiveness of consumer boycotts. Unlike younger generations, Gen X respondents were highly critical of consumer activism. Questioning the effectiveness of boycotts in generating tangible corporate change.

"Boycotts rarely work. Companies always find a way to recover. Unless it affects my daily life, I don't see the point in participating." (Gen X informant)

Rather than engaging in emotionally charged activism, Gen X viewed boycotts as a matter of practicality. They were less likely to be influenced by collective moral sentiments and instead prioritize corporate reputation, financial stability, and direct economic consequences when making purchasing decisions. While they were not completely opposed to boycotts, their participation was often driven by personal financial concerns, such as price increases or direct economic harm caused by corporate policies.

This perspective is consistent with previous research indicating that older consumers prioritize financial stability over social activism. (Brinkmann, 2004; Klein et al., 2004). Many Gen X participants argued that corporations ultimately adapt to market pressures and that boycotts rarely achieve lasting impact, reinforcing their preference for regulatory interventions over social movements.

Social Identity Influence and Digital Activism Across Generation

This study highlights social identity as a key determinant in consumer boycott participation, particularly among younger generations. Prior research suggests that social identity strongly influences consumer decision-making, as individuals seek to align their behaviors with group norms and collective values (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Dens et al., 2012). However, this study finds that the extent to which social identity reinforces boycott participation varies significantly across generational cohorts.

Gen Z participants exhibited a strong reliance on peer pressure and social media validation, frequently citing online discussions, influencer endorsements, and viral boycott movements as major drivers of their participation. Gen Y respondents demonstrated a more ethically grounded approach, where social identity played a role but was secondary to personal values and independent decision-making. Gen X participants, in contrast, showed minimal reliance on social identity, with only 27% referencing peer influence in their responses. Instead, their decisions were shaped by historical brand reputation and personal purchasing experiences rather than external social pressures.

1. Generation Z experienced peer pressure and social media validation.

Gen Z participants exhibited the strongest reliance on social identity when engaging in boycotts, with peer influence and digital activism playing a dominant role in shaping their decisions. Thematic analysis revealed that Gen Z consumers often viewed boycotting as a form of social belonging and empowerment within digital communities. Many participants described feeling compelled to participate in boycotts to align with group expectations and avoid social exclusion.

"When I see influencers and my friends posting about a boycott, I feel like I have to join. Otherwise, it looks like I don't care." (Gen Z informant)

This sentiment reflects Tajfel & Turner's (2004) social identity theory, which posits that individuals conform to in-group behaviors to strengthen their sense of belonging and

moral alignment. Gen Z participants frequently referenced social validation and peer encouragement as their primary reasons for engagement, reinforcing the notion that their boycott decisions are heavily influenced by collective identity rather than individual evaluation.

Additionally, Dens et al. (2012) support this finding, noting that young consumers are more likely to engage in collective online movements that align with their peer expectations. However, while Gen Z demonstrates high engagement in boycotts, their reliance on digital validation contributes to short-term participation. As online attention shifts to new issues, their commitment often diminishes, leading to boycott fatigue and a lack of sustained activism.

2. Generation Y embraced ethical identity and independent decision-making.

Unlike Gen Z, Gen Y participants were also influenced by social identity, but their boycott decisions were more independent and value-driven. Rather than engaging in boycotts due to peer pressure, Gen Y consumers approached boycotts through the lens of ethical evaluation, sustainability, and corporate responsibility. Social identity played a role in their decisions but in a more principle-based manner rather than reactionary social validation.

"I don't join boycotts just because others do. I do my research and decide based on what aligns with my values." (Gen Y informant)

Gen Y participants emphasized that their boycotts were intentional, informed, and aligned with long-term ethical commitments rather than being driven by trending social movements. Thematic analysis revealed that corporate ethics, environmental concerns, and human rights violations were key factors influencing their boycott participation.

These findings align with prior research by Farah & Newman (2010) and Palacios-Florencio et al. (2021), which suggest that Gen Y consumers engage in boycotts as part of a broader ethical consumption strategy, rather than as a reactive response to peer influence. This perspective contrasts with Dedeoğlu et al. (2020), who argued that young consumers are primarily influenced by digital trends. This study showed that while Gen Z is highly reactive to digital movements, Gen Y's engagement is more intentional and rooted in ethical beliefs.

3. Generation X displayed minimal reliance on social identity

In contrast, Gen X participants exhibited the lowest reliance on social identity when deciding whether to participate in a boycott. Thematic analysis revealed that only 27% of Gen X participants cited peer influence as a factor in their decision-making. Instead, their choices were driven by personal experiences, historical brand reputation, and pragmatic considerations rather than social expectations.

"I don't care what people say online. If I have a bad experience with a brand, then I might stop buying, but not because of a boycott." (Gen X informant)

Unlike Gen Z and Gen Y, who often engaged in collective activism, Gen X participants viewed boycotts as an individual decision rather than a group-driven movement. Their skepticism toward digital activism aligns with previous research by Hoffmann & Muller (2018), which found that older consumers are less likely to be influenced by social movements and more concerned with brand trust and historical reputation.

Perceived Effectiveness of Boycott and Sustainability of Participation

The final theme identified in this research is perceived boycott effectiveness, which plays a crucial role in determining whether consumers sustain their participation in boycott

movements. Prior research suggests that consumers are more likely to maintain their efforts if they believe their actions will lead to tangible corporate change (Hoffmann et al., 2018). However, generational differences emerged in how consumers assess the impact of boycotts and whether they continue their engagement over time.

1. Gen Z's boycott participation was often short-lived and persistent declining over time

   Gen Z participants displayed high confidence in the power of social media activism, believing that viral boycotts could directly pressure companies into making ethical changes. They viewed social media engagement as a direct form of activism, assuming that trending hashtags and widespread online discussions would hold corporations accountable. While previous studies support this notion (Hoffmann et al., 2018; Dedeoğlu et al., 2020), this study found that Gen Z's boycott participation was often short-lived. When brands fail to respond or implement noticeable changes, frustration sets in, leading to boycott fatigue and disengagement. This suggests that Gen Z's perception of boycott effectiveness is highly conditional. They sustain participation only when they see immediate corporate reactions.

2. Gen Y's boycott participation was more skeptical and conditional

   In contrast, Gen Y participants were more skeptical and selective about the long-term effectiveness of boycotts. They practiced conditional boycott participation, meaning they engaged strategically and over extended periods. Unlike Gen Z, whose engagement was driven by immediacy and social media trends, Gen Y consumers evaluated corporate transparency and policy changes before making boycott decisions. They were willing to resume purchasing from previously boycotted brands if they observed genuine ethical improvements and corporate accountability reforms. This aligns with Sen et al. (2016), who found that young consumers engage in ethical consumption selectively, preferring to support brands that demonstrate measurable social responsibility reforms rather than simply reacting to viral movements.

3. Gen X's boycott participation was the most skeptical and pragmatic consideration

   On the other hand, Gen X remained the most skeptical, with many questioning whether consumer activism had any real impact on multinational corporations. Gen X participants frequently expressed the belief that economic and political forces were stronger determinants of corporate behavior than consumer-led boycotts. Many viewed regulatory actions and legal interventions as more effective than consumer activism. Their participation in boycotts was largely transactional, meaning they would resume purchasing previously boycotted products if no viable alternatives were available. This aligns with studies by Brinkmann (2004) and Klein et al. (2004), which indicate that older consumers prioritize economic stability and practicality over social activism.

Figure 2. Boycott Behavior Among the Generation in Batam
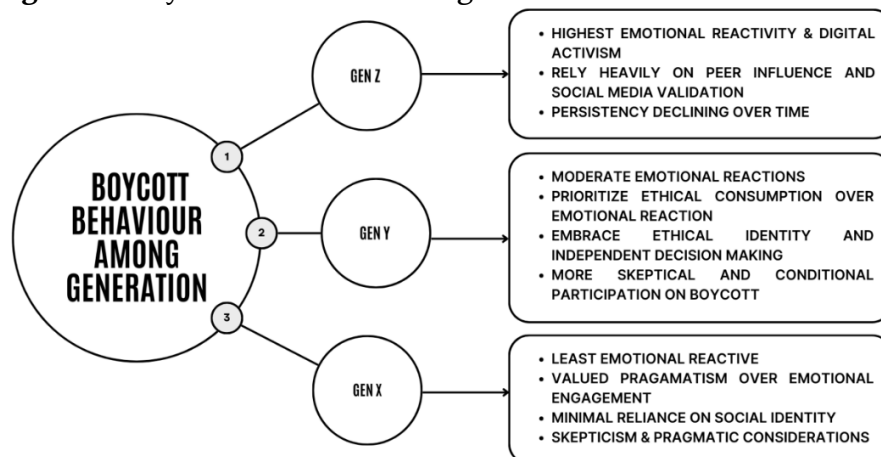
Source: Data compiled and processed by the author (2024)

Contextual Speciality of Boycotts in Batam

Batam presents a compelling case study due to its unique status as Indonesia's free trade zone and a key international business hub. The city's heavy reliance on foreign investment, multinational franchises, and global trade makes it particularly vulnerable to shifts in consumer activism trends. Unlike purely ideological boycotts, consumer activism in Batam is shaped by economic dependencies, raising critical questions about the balance between ethical convictions and economic pragmatism.

The findings suggest that while the Israel-Palestine conflict catalyzed recent boycott movements, it is not the sole driving force behind consumer activism in Batam. Instead, boycott behavior in the region reflects a broader shift in consumer consciousness, where past movements have also emerged in response to issues such as corporate malpractice, labor exploitation, and environmental concerns (Shi & Wei, 2023). This indicates that the psychological drivers behind boycotts in Batam extend beyond political conflicts, suggesting that businesses operating in the region must adopt proactive corporate responsibility strategies to safeguard consumer trust and long-term brand loyalty.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a deeper understanding of the psychological drivers of consumer boycotts, focusing on emotional triggers, social identity influences, and perceived effectiveness in Batam. The findings reveal generational variations in boycott participation, with Gen Z displaying high emotional engagement and digital activism, Gen Y adopting a more ethical and selective approach, and Gen X demonstrating skepticism regarding boycott impact. These insights contribute to the growing body of literature on consumer activism, ethical consumption, and behavioral economics, while also offering actionable recommendations for businesses, policymakers, and advocacy groups.

The study also confirms that boycotts serve as a psychological response to perceived injustice, aligning with previous research that identifies moral outrage, social identity, and consumer animosity as key drivers (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011; Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021; Shi & Wei, 2023). The rise of digital activism has accelerated boycott movements, particularly among younger consumers, reinforcing findings that social media platforms amplify consumer emotions and increase boycott participation (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Makarem & Jae, 2015).

However, the study also raises critical questions about the long-term sustainability of boycotts. While boycott movements can pressure corporations into policy changes, their effectiveness is often limited by declining consumer engagement, corporate counter-strategies, and shifting social priorities. The findings indicate that while consumer activism is growing, it is also increasingly fragmented, requiring further exploration of how businesses and policymakers can address consumer concerns without escalating brand distrust or reputational risks. Additionally, the study advances theoretical discussions on consumer psychology, demonstrating that boycotts are influenced by deeply ingrained emotional and social identity factors rather than purely economic considerations. The findings align with and expand upon previous research on moral decision-making in consumer behavior, reinforcing the idea that activism-driven consumption is increasingly shaping global markets (Hoffmann et al., 2018; Sen et al., 2016).

Implications and Applications

Businesses facing boycott threats must adopt a proactive and long-term approach to corporate reputation management. Rather than treating boycotts as temporary crises, companies should recognize them as part of an ongoing dialogue with ethically conscious consumers. Strengthening corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives is essential, with a focus on ethical supply chains, environmental sustainability, and fair labor practices. Engaging consumers through authentic storytelling and consistent brand communication on ethical issues can help

rebuild trust and brand loyalty. Open discussions via social media, corporate responsibility reports, and third-party ethical certifications position companies to retain consumer loyalty despite boycott movements. Establishing crisis management teams to monitor consumer sentiment, address grievances in real-time, and mitigate misinformation is crucial to preventing escalation and protecting brand integrity. Reputational risks while demonstrating corporate accountability.

The study also presents strong implications for governments, regulatory bodies, and consumer advocacy groups in strengthening corporate accountability. Stricter corporate disclosure regulations should be enforced, requiring businesses to publicly report on sourcing practices, human rights commitments, and environmental policies. Ethical marketing guidelines are necessary to prevent corporations from misleading consumers through greenwashing or virtue signaling. Consumer protection laws should be refined to promote responsible corporate behavior while educating consumers on ethical purchasing decisions. Independent ethical review boards can help assess corporate compliance with social responsibility standards, bridging the gap between consumer activism and policy enforcement.

For advocacy groups, including Amnesty International, Fairtrade International, and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, strategic, evidence-based digital activism is crucial to ensuring that boycotts are not fuelled by misinformation or viral outrage. Educating consumers on the economic and social impact of boycotts ensures that ethical consumerism is based on informed decision-making rather than reactionary sentiment. Civil society organizations in Indonesia, such as the Indonesian Consumers Foundation (YLKI) and religious-based consumer movements, have played a key role in shaping local activism. Strengthening collaborations between civil society, digital platforms, and advocacy networks can streamline ethical boycott campaigns while maintaining accountability and transparency.

Beyond business and policy applications, consumer boycotts have significant economic ramifications, particularly for local businesses and MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises). As consumers shift away from multinational brands, local businesses may experience increased demand and market share growth. However, this transition poses challenges related to supply chain capacity, scalability, and ethical compliance. MSMEs must ensure they can sustain increased demand while maintaining fair labor practices, transparency, and product quality to differentiate themselves from corporate competitors. Governments and industry associations should provide financial assistance, training programs, and infrastructure support to help local businesses scale responsibly and compete effectively in an ethical marketplace.

Consumer boycotts are no longer isolated acts of defiance but structured movements that reflect shifting consumer expectations and the power of digital activism. Businesses that proactively engage with CSR, ethical accountability, and crisis management will be better equipped to navigate boycott risks and maintain consumer trust. Simultaneously, regulatory bodies and advocacy groups must collaborate to ensure ethical consumerism is based on transparency and accountability. The evolving landscape of consumer activism presents both challenges and opportunities, requiring all stakeholders—businesses, policymakers, civil society, and MSMEs—to adapt to a rapidly changing ethical marketplace.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single geographic region (Batam), limiting the generalizability of findings to other cultural and economic contexts. Future research should expand the scope to different regions and examine cross-cultural variations in boycott participation. Second, the study relies on self-reported data from interviews and FGDs, which may be subject to social desirability bias or recall limitations.

Future research should explore the long-term sustainability of boycotts, particularly those fuelled by digital activism and social media trends. Investigating how corporate responses influence consumer trust and post-boycott purchasing behavior would provide further insights

into how businesses can strategically rebuild consumer relationships. Additionally, research could examine the broader economic impact of boycotts on multinational corporations versus local businesses, offering further clarity on how ethical consumption patterns evolve in a globalized economic environment.

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