

The Attitude Towards Boycotts: Determining Factors

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Abstract

According to the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior, the precedent to any human conduct is the intention to display such conduct. People's attitudes are one of those precedents. Our work is framed within this line of research, as it seeks to analyze and explain the main determinants of attitudes towards boycotts. Thus, we understand that consumers' attitudes towards boycott behavior depend on three fundamental beliefs: perceived legitimacy of the behavior, ethical idealism towards such behavior, and finally, ethical relativism towards boycott behavior. We emphasize legitimacy since the relevance of legitimacy processes in the business-client relationship lies in the validation of actions that allows their subjective recognition and, therefore, differentiates them from the legal nature of the acts. The research is carried out with 371 people and the hypotheses presented are verified through structural equation models. Discussion of the results and their implications contribute to a better understanding of the factors that determine the attitudes towards customer boycotts by business managers and academics.

Keywords

Legitimacy, boycott, ethical idealism, ethical relativism.

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It is necessary to develop conceptual models and empirical research that attempt to identify the causes that condition different determining aspects of boycott behavior

1. Introduction

Local, national and international campaigns aimed at boycotting the purchase of certain products can have significant effects on outcomes for companies, including a reduction in sales volume, a loss of market share, a reduction in profits, adverse effects on image and reputation, etc. (Cossío-Silva, Revilla-Camacho, Palacios-Florencio & Garzón-Benítez, 2019). The final effect of such campaigns ultimately depends on the personal decisions of consumers. In other words, the effect depends on how willing each consumer is to engage in conduct that involves the avoidance of buying certain products.

The willingness of the consumer to display a certain type of behavior has been addressed in marketing literature according to two theoretical approaches: the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988). According to these theoretical approaches, human behavior is explained by the intention of the individual to carry it out. In addition, the intention of an individual to adopt a certain behavior may depend on different antecedents; one of the most relevant is the individual's attitude towards the behavior itself.

Studies related to consumer behavior focusing on the desire to stop buying certain products (boycott) have emphasized several aspects. First, there is some research that has attempted to explain boycott behavior and its different typologies (Friedman, 1991, 1999; Koku, 2011; Cruz & Botelho, 2015; Cruz, 2017). A second line of research has focused on identifying and describing the background of boycott behavior (Klein, Smith & John, 2004; Rose, Rose & Shoham, 2009; Cruz, Pires & Ross, 2013; Abdul-Latif & Abdul-Talib, 2015; Feng & Yu, 2016). Finally, research that has focused on determining the effectiveness of boycott campaigns should be noted (Ashenfelter, Ciccarella & Shatz, 2007; Chavis & Leslie, 2009; Heilmann, 2015; Pandya & Venkatesan, 2015).

One deficient aspect of the literature on consumer boycott behavior lies, in our belief, in the absence of research attempting to identify and explain the triggers of boycott behavior and their antecedents. In other words, we believe that it is necessary to develop conceptual models and empirical research that, on the basis of the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior, attempt to identify the causes that influence different determinants of boycott behavior. For us, it is a matter of explaining and identifying the determining factors of a person's attitude towards the boycott of certain products.

This paper pursues two objectives. One of them is to offer a theoretical model that explains the attitude of consumers towards the boycott of certain products. The second goal is to determine the degree of validity and generate predictions from the proposed theoretical model. To this end, the article is structured as follows. The first section deals with the review of the scientific literature related to the subject of this paper with the aim of proposing a conceptual model. The following section presents the methodology used in our research. Next, the most important results derived from the empirical analysis are presented. Finally, we present the main conclusions and implications derived from our work.

2. Literature analysis

2.1. Boycott intention and background

In the introduction to this paper, we have indicated the relevance of the theories of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988) as scientific approaches

What are the factors that ultimately determine whether or not consumers choose to boycott certain products or services?

focused on trying to explain consumer boycott behavior. Such theories indicate the intention to display a human behavior as a basic antecedent of that behavior. Thus, studies of consumer boycott behavior have tried to identify and explain the causes, reasons, and antecedents of an individual's intention to engage in a boycott of a certain product, country, region, organization, etc.

The various studies have considered different aspects as antecedents to the intention to stop buying certain products:

- a) animosity towards a country, region, religion, ideology or brand (Sirgy, Grewal, Mangleburg, Park, Chon, Claiborne, Johar & Berkman, 1997; Rose et al., 2009; Al Ganideh & Elahee, 2014; Abdul-Latif & Abdul-Talib, 2015; Feng & Yu, 2016; Duman & Ozgen, 2018);
- b) consumer preferences for certain products, both for their characteristics and image (Hellier, Geursen, Carr & Rickard, 2003; Abosag & Farah, 2014) and for the place of origin (De Nisco, Mainolfi, Marino & Napolitano, 2013);
- c) the consequences or effects of the boycott action (Cissé-Depardon & N'Goala, 2009; Klein et al., 2004);
- d) social pressures (Klein et al., 2004);
- e) the consumer's purchase history (Klein et al., 2004).

However, what are the factors that ultimately determine whether or not consumers choose to boycott certain products or services? The authors of this paper have not identified any research that has addressed this issue to date. Therefore, this article attempts to answer that question.

2.2. The attitude towards the boycott of products or services

Based on the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) it can be stated that a person's attitude towards a given behavior is based on a limited set of beliefs relevant to the object towards which that behavior is directed. Such a repertoire or set of beliefs is limited, ranging from five to nine beliefs; although only the first two or three (those with the greatest strength) are truly important in transmitting valid, peremptory and nonredundant information. The consideration of those beliefs is made on the basis of the consequences and effects that can be derived from the behavior concerned. These effects and consequences are evaluated on the basis of two essential elements: the expectation or subjective probability that the effects and consequences will take place, and the value or importance (valence) of the effects and consequences for the individual. These concepts clearly evoke the ideas of expectation and valence of the theory of expectations (Vroom, 1964).

In this article, we propose three beliefs of people as determinants of their attitudes towards boycotts: the first coming from the theory of organizational legitimacy (Cruz-Suárez, 2012; Cruz-Suárez, Díez-Martín, Blanco-González & Prado-Román, 2014); the other two derived from the approach of personal moral philosophies (Forsyth, 1980) and their relations with consumers' ethical behaviors (Lu & Lu, 2010; Culiberg, 2015).

The discussion of organizational legitimacy began with the contributions of the sociologist Max Weber, who suggested that the origin of legitimacy lies in the realm of social and legal norms (Cruz-Suárez, 2012). These initial contributions have been extended during the last years of the 20th century and throughout the current century. The most classical definition of the term legitimacy has been posed by Suchman: "the generalized perception or assumption that the activities of an entity are desirable, correct or appropriate within some

Consumers' beliefs about the legitimacy of the boycott may determine their attitude towards the boycott by evaluating the consequences and effects of the boycott: usefulness, desirability, and morality

socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). According to Cruz-Suárez (2012), who supports the ideas of Deephouse and Suchman (2008), the legitimacy of a behavior is composed of three dimensions: pragmatic, moral and cognitive. Pragmatism responds to the interests of the specific environment in which the individual operates, emphasizing the degree to which the actions considered will be useful and effective. Morality, on the other hand, starts from the existence of a positive normative evaluation (negative in the case of illegitimacy) with respect to the considered behavior: is the action undertaken correct or not? Finally, cognitive behavior focuses on evaluating the conduct to be displayed in terms of its convenience or efficacy, that is, whether such behavior represents the best way to put the individual’s strategy into practice.

In relation to consumer boycott behavior, these three aspects of legitimacy could be described in the following terms. Pragmatic legitimacy would take into consideration its usefulness; moral legitimacy, if the conduct to be displayed is correct; and cognitive legitimacy, if its realization and effectiveness are appropriate. In other words, these aspects are composed of the desirability, appropriateness and effectiveness of boycott behavior towards a product or service. Therefore, consumers’ beliefs about the legitimacy of the boycott may determine their attitude towards the boycott by evaluating the consequences and effects of the boycott: usefulness, desirability, and morality.

Derived from this theory of legitimacy, we propose the first hypothesis of our model.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). The perception of the boycott’s legitimacy has a positive effect on the willingness to boycott.

We may think that the decision to boycott the purchase of a product or service is a way of practicing ethical consumer behavior (Hunt & Vitell, 1986, 2006) and that, consequently, it will be conditioned by ethical and moral considerations. The decision to stop purchasing a product can have pernicious effects on other people or entities and could therefore be in conflict with the moral beliefs of the consumer. Both the approach to consumers’ ethical decisions (Hunt & Vitell, 1986; Thong & Yap, 1998) and personal moral philosophies (Forsyth, 1980, 1992; Forsyth & Nye, 1990; Forsyth, O’Boyle & McDaniel, 2008) hold that individuals’ moral conduct depends on moral judgment. This moral judgment of the behavior or the formation of the individual’s ethical philosophy is based on two, nondichotomous dimensions of ethical behavior: the deontological dimension (or idealism) and teleological dimension (or relativism).

In the case of the deontological dimension (or idealism), the individuals are concerned with respecting universal moral principles (Revilla & Gallego, 2007). In other words, the individual, when evaluating a certain behavior, tends to consider the effects of his actions on the well-being of other people (Revilla & Gallego, 2007). In terms of the attitude towards boycott, the idealism dimension reflects the concern of the consumer towards the possible adverse effects that such conduct may have on others, conditioning, in sum, the value given to such attitude. Studies on the relationships between idealism and consumer moral behaviors seem to indicate that people with strong scores in idealism try to avoid behaviors harmful to others (Culiberg, 2015; Lu & Lu, 2010). We, therefore, propose the following hypothesis in our model.

The decision to boycott the purchase of a product or service is a way of ethical consumer behavior, and it will be conditioned by ethical and moral considerations

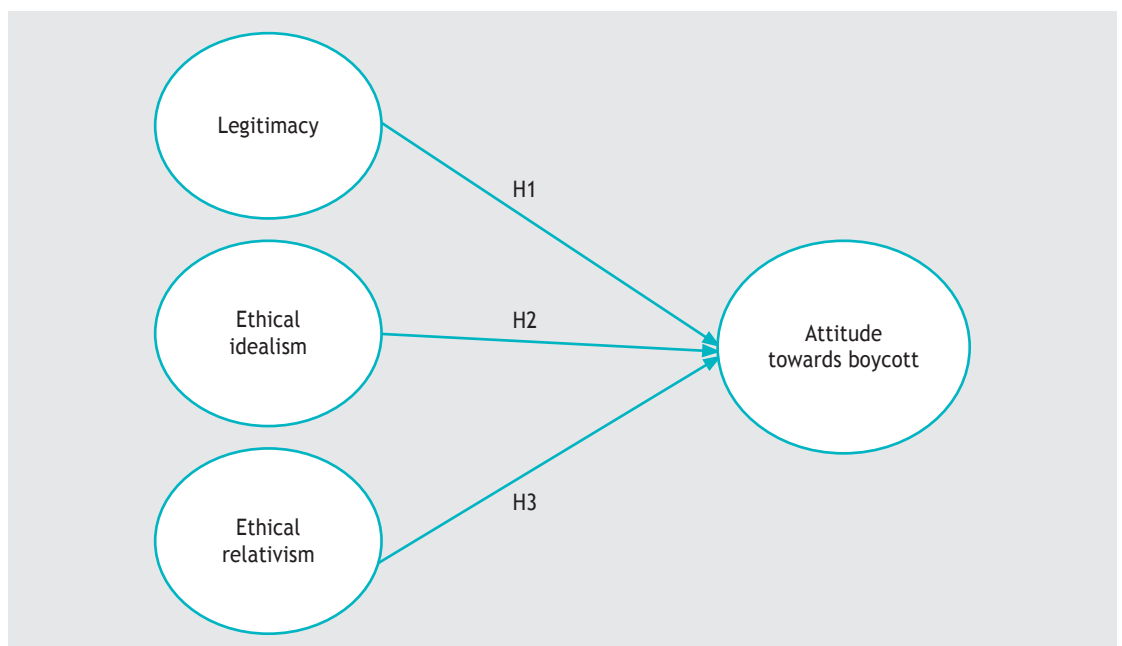
Hypothesis 2 (H2). The more idealistic a person is, the lower the predisposition to boycott.

On the other hand, the relativism (teleological) dimension implies the rejection of universal moral principles or rules when moral judgments are made (Forsyth, 1992). In this case, individuals tend to display a more flexible attitude, taking into consideration the situation and consequently establishing exceptions to the universal norms. This dimension, from the perspective of the boycott attitude, can affect both the subjective probability of unwanted effects of the boycott behavior and the value attributed to such effects. The results of various studies (Singhapakdi, Vitell & Franke, 1999; Steenhaut & Van Kenhove, 2006; Lu & Lu, 2010; Culiberg, 2015) seem to indicate that people with higher scores in the relativism dimension tend to engage in a greater number of behaviors that could be cataloged as unethical (piracy, product theft, seller error, etc.). The third and last hypothesis of our model is posed as follows.

Hypothesis 3 (H3). The more relativistic a person is, the greater the predisposition to boycott.

For all these reasons, the model proposed to explain the attitude of subjects towards the boycott of a product or service is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Proposed model



The proposed model contemplates four variables: attitude towards boycotts, ethical idealism, ethical relativism and boycott perceived legitimacy

3. Empirical study

Next, we present the empirical study's main characteristics, with a focus on the methods of information collection, the design of the measurement instrument and the statistical techniques used in the data analysis.

3.1. Data collection and research instrument

The proposed research hypotheses have been verified from the data obtained after the electronic administration of a questionnaire designed to this effect and focused on a specific political boycott: the boycott of products and services made and/or commercialized by firms established in the region of Catalonia (Spain). For the choice of the sample, given that there were no special requirements as to the characteristics of the individuals, we opted for a convenience sampling system, following the guidelines of Martín-Crespo and Salamanca (2007). The field study was done in January 2018, obtaining a total of 351 valid questionnaires.

All the measures of the variables contemplated in the study were previously validated and extracted from the theoretical review. The variables were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). To measure the boycott's perceived legitimacy, we followed the scale of four indicators recommended by Cruz-Suárez (2012) and based on the three dimensions proposed by Suchman (1995). The measurements of ethical idealism and ethical relativism are an adaptation for our study of the Ethics Position Questionnaire or EPQ, developed by Forsyth in 1980 (Forsyth, 1980). Finally, to measure the attitude towards boycotts we used a scale made up of three indicators, which is an adaptation of the scale used by Klein et al. (2004), Rose et al. (2009), Abosag and Farah (2014), and Abdul-Talib Abd-Latif and Abd-Razak (2016).

3.2. Data analysis techniques

In this work, we opted for the statistical technique based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) variance since it neglects to impose any assumptions on the specific distribution for the indicators and it does not require the observations to be independent of each other (Chin, 2010). The hypotheses of the proposed model have been tested using Smart-PLS 3.2.4 software (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2015). The minimum size of the sample required for a correct analysis of regressions, a power of 0.80 and an alpha of 0.05 is 84 observations (Green, 1991). Given that we had 351 observations, we can accept the suitability of the analysis technique.

3.3. Measurement model

The proposed model contemplates four variables: attitude towards boycotts, ethical idealism, ethical relativism and perceived legitimacy of the boycott. The variables are modeled as composite factors with a reflective design (Mode A). To evaluate the constructs, we have valued each item's individual reliability, the constructs' reliability, the convergent validity and the discriminant validity.

To evaluate the item's individual reliability, we studied the loadings of the indicators with their respective construct. Table 1 shows the items contemplated after the depuration process. The constructs' reliability has been evaluated via composite reliability. As can be noted in Table 1, the composite reliability surpasses the value 0.80 in all the cases, and therefore, all the constructs are considered reliable. The convergent validity is examined through the average variance extracted (AVE). In accordance with the recommendations of Fornell and Larcker (1981), this indicator must be over 0.5, a condition that is met in all the constructs considered in the research.

The study is focused on a specific political boycott: the boycott of products and services made and/or commercialized by firms established in the region of Catalonia (Spain)

Table 1
Reliability measures

	Loading	Composite reliability	AVE
Ethical idealism		0.935	0.674
People should make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another even to a small degree.	0.797		
Risks to another should never be tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be.	0.781		
The existence of potential harm to others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained.	0.865		
One should never psychologically or physically harm another person.	0.779		
One should not perform an action that might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual.	0.830		
If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done.	0.861		
It is never necessary to sacrifice the welfare of others.	0.830		
Ethical relativism		0.907	0.662
Moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another person.	0.802		
Different types of morality cannot be compared to "rightness."	0.829		
Questions of what is ethical for everyone can never be resolved since what is moral or immoral is up to the individual.	0.860		
Moral standards are simply personal rules that indicate how a person should behave and are not be applied in making judgments of others.	0.671		
The determination of right and wrong is a personal matter, which is a function of the value system of each one of us.	0.889		
Legitimacy		0.884	0.656
The boycott of Catalanian products is useful.	0.706		
The boycott of Catalanian products must be done, even if it is useless.	0.845		
The boycott of Catalanian products could have been proposed more efficiently.	0.829		
The boycott of Catalanian products is desirable, proper and appropriate.	0.850		
Boycott attitude		0.922	0.798
I do not like the idea of participating in a boycott.	0.840		
I would feel guilty if I participated in a boycott.	0.917		
I would never take part in a boycott.	0.921		

Last, the existence of discriminant validity can be concluded since the correlations between the constructs are lower than the square root of the average variance extracted (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Likewise, we have checked the discriminant validity through the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). All the values are below 0.9 (Gold, Malhotra & Segars, 2001) (see Table 2).

The perception of boycott's legitimacy explains 34.05% of the variance of the attitude towards boycotts

Table 2
Discriminant validity

Fornell-Larcker*	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Ethical idealism	0.821			
(2) Ethical relativism	-0.026	0.814		
(3) Legitimacy	-0.296	0.166	0.810	
(4) Boycott attitude	-0.371	0.114	0.617	0.894
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio. HTMT	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Ethical idealism				
(2) Ethical relativism	0.061			
(3) Legitimacy	0.333	0.146		
(4) Boycott attitude	0.404	0.092	0.724	

* Diagonal elements (bold) are the square root of variance shared between the constructs and their measures (AVE). Off-diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs.

3.4. Structural Model

First, we have tested the possible existence of multicollinearity between the antecedent variables of the endogenous construct. According to Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt (2014), signs of multicollinearity will exist when the VIF indicator is over 5. In the structural model, potential problems of multicollinearity do not exist. Via bootstrapping (5000 resamples, one-tailed Student's t distribution with (n-1) degrees of freedom), standard errors, t-statistics, and 95% confidence intervals were generated (Table 3).

Table 3
Hypotheses test

Hypotheses	Suggested effect	Path coefficient (β)	T value	Confidence interval	
				5.0%	95.0%
H1: Legitimacy \rightarrow Boycott attitude	(+)	0.552***	11.501	0.470	0.628
H2: Ethical idealism \rightarrow Boycott attitude	(-)	0.207***	4.783	-0.279	-0.137
H3: Ethical relativism \rightarrow Boycott attitude	(+)	0.022 ^{ns}	0.311	-0.088	0.091
					No Sig.

***p<0.001

**p<0.01

*p<0.05

ns: not significant

t (0.05; 4999) = 1.64791345; t (0.01; 4999) = 2.333843952; t (0.001; 4999) = 3.106644601

Sig. denotes a significant direct effect at 0.05

The coefficient of determination (R^2) represents a measure of predictive power. It indicates the construct's quantity of variance that is explained in the model by this endogenous construct's predictor variables (Table 4). In the model proposed, ethical idealism explains 7.7% of the

If consumers consider that the boycott is legitimate, useful and morally acceptable, then their participation in the boycott will be more likely than in the case in which they question that legitimacy

variance in the attitude towards boycotts, while ethical relativism only explains 0.25%. The explanatory power of the perception of boycott legitimacy also stands out. This explains 34.05% of the variance in the attitude towards boycotts.

Table 4
Effect on the endogenous variables

	R ²	Q ²	Direct effect	Correlation	Variance explained
Boycott Attitude	0.420	0.311			
H1: Legitimacy			0.552	0.617	34.05%
H2: Ethical idealism			-0.207	-0.371	7.7%
H3: Ethical relativism			0.022	0.114	0.25%

The f^2 statistic represents the degree to which an exogenous construct contributes to explaining a specific construct in terms of R^2 . According to this indicator, the effect of the variable legitimacy on the attitude towards boycotts can be considered large (0.469). The rest of the effects are small since they fall below the threshold of 0.15.

The Stone-Geisser test (Q^2) is used as a criterion to measure the predictive relevance of the reflective dependent constructs. Given that Q^2 is greater than zero for the endogenous construct, it can be concluded that the model has predictive relevance. The SRMR fit index is 0.063, which is less than the maximum recommended value, 0.08. This confirms the global model's good fit.

4. Discussion

This work deals with the analysis of the antecedents of attitudes towards boycotts, i.e., the decision to forego specific products for the mere fact of their production in a specific region. According to the results obtained, it appears that the perception of legitimacy has a positive and significant effect on the attitude towards engaging in this kind of protest or punishment. In particular, ethical idealism has a significant and negative effect on this attitude.

The effect of ethical idealism in the attitude towards a boycott is in line with other investigations about consumer moral behaviors (Lu & Lu, 2010; Culiberg, 2015) and confirms hypothesis H2. This variable explains 7.7% of the variance of the attitude towards boycotts. It can therefore be stated that people with strong scores in idealism try to avoid behaviors harmful to others, so they will probably have a negative attitude towards boycott and will prefer not to participate in them.

Legitimacy, for its part, has contributed to explaining 34.05% of the variance in the attitude towards boycotts (hypothesis H1). This implies that if consumers consider a boycott to be legitimate, they are more likely to view it as useful and morally acceptable to participate in the boycott than they would be in the case in which they question that legitimacy.

The main theoretical implications of this study relate to the variable of legitimacy as a key construct for understanding attitudes towards the boycott behavior. It is important to point out that social acceptance of a boycott gives it legitimacy. This legitimacy can be moral when the individual understands that the boycott is morally correct. It must also be pragmatic; that is to

The boycott, therefore, must be delegitimized; the idea must be transmitted that it is not morally correct and that it has negative effects on real people

say, it must be useful. In this case, a boycott is legitimate if it manages to influence the decisions of organizations or hold back political movements, as is the case. Obviously, it must also be well proposed; that is, it must have cognitive legitimacy. If the boycott is considered morally appropriate, some usefulness is perceived and it is organized appropriately, the individual will grant it legitimacy, and this legitimacy will act as a driving factor of the boycott behavior. The boycott, therefore, must be delegitimized. The idea must be transmitted that it is not morally correct and that it has negative effects on real people. Emotional marketing must here play a leading role. On the other hand, it is necessary to question the boycott's usefulness. If the boycott does not serve to counter the political decisions that brought it about, it will not be legitimate from the pragmatic point of view and, probably, many consumers will decide to abandon it and again buy those products that they decided to stop consuming and that were their first choice before the boycott (Cossío-Silva et al., 2019).

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