The why, what, and how of Brand Boycott

Reasons, Outcomes and Responding Strategies

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List of Abbreviations

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
BDS	Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions
BLM	Black Lives Matter
CBD	Customer Brand Disidentification
CSA	Corporate Social Activism
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NRA	National Rifle Association
RQ	Research Question
SWU	Starbucks Workers United
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Abstract

  Brand boycotts are becoming more and more common. There is an increased focus on ethical brand behavior. Consumers boycott brands that are not living up to their expectations. The advancement of social media makes boycotts easy to organize. While the number of brand boycotts has been increasing, the literature on the subject is still quite limited. This study is looking into the reasons behind brand boycott, the outcomes of brand boycott, and the strategies brands can use to respond to brand boycotts.

  Prior literature has focused on factors affecting consumer participation in boycott. The literature review gives an overview of previous topics covered within brand boycott. Mostly, the studies have been correlational and examined brand boycott in particular environments. With recent developments in the field there is a need for conceptual study.

  Secondary data was used in this study. The authors collected data from YouTube videos, news articles, and blogs or other websites. The data was sorted in an Excel document and sorted into open codes by both the authors. From the open codes, aggregate dimensions and subcategories were generated. The authors found the aggregate dimensions of reasons behind brand boycott, outcomes of brand boycott and strategies for brands to respond.

  The results showed that brands can respond to brand boycotts using passive or active strategies, there are negative and positive outcomes for both the organization and the consumer, and there are four main reasons why brand boycotts occur. The disidentification theory and complexity theory are used to help further contextualize the findings.

  Contributions of this study are filling the gaps in the literature, and providing a framework which brands can use to navigate between brand boycotts today. Consumers and brands must prepare for an increasing amount of brand boycotts in the future. The findings of this study present a framework for both consumers and brands on how to navigate the increasing amount of brand boycotts.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank our supervisor Amandeep Dhir for all the help during the period of working with our master thesis. In addition, we would like to thank him for not boycotting us during this challenging process. This thesis would not have been possible without him.

Over the past two years at UiA, we have grown academically and personally. The master's degree in Business Administration program has provided us with future oriented and meaningful knowledge, which will be useful when entering the corporate sector after the summer.

The past six months have been exciting, but at the same time challenging. To be able to explore a topic in such depth and write a whole thesis about it, has been interesting and very rewarding. We have had to use interdisciplinary knowledge, and the courses we have had earlier during the master's program have proven to be very useful when writing our thesis. This has put our last two years in perspective, highlighting the importance and the usefulness of the courses we have taken.

During the past semester, with good help from Amandeep, we can confidently say that we have prepared a thorough assignment that can be enlightened on the topic of brand boycott and useful for further studies.

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1. Introduction

This section will introduce the topic, the historical background of boycotts which have developed into brand boycotts. Gaps in the literature, research objective and research questions will be presented. In addition, theoretical framework, delimitations, contributions, and structure of the study will all be presented and discussed in this section.

1.1 Background

Boycotts have been used throughout history as a way of driving societal change. Boycotts have led to success for groups that have had less power (Klein et al., 2004). Examples of historical successful boycotts are Ghandi´s boycott of British salt in the fight for India´s independence from Britain, and the boycott of the British bank Barclays Bank. Barclays Bank were operating in South Africa during the apartheid regime (Klein et al., 2004). Boycotts of the apartheid regime in South Africa started in the 1950´s (Skinner, 2017, p.106). The boycott movement lasted for decades until the regime fell. Boycotts have been a major part of many historical, societal changes.

Early historical boycotts tended to focus on achieving broader, social goals such as ending racism and oppression. Since the 1990´s there has been a shift of focus towards corporations. Corporations started to become boycott targets. The reasons behind the boycott are still the same, but it is the corporations that are chosen as the agents of change. After the 90´s there have been several examples of boycotts of large multinational organizations. Boycott is an old phenomenon, brand boycott is something newer. Brand boycott is becoming more and more common. Consumers will boycott brands that participate in activities they do not condone, or the brand´s political alignment differs from their owns. Mainly due to the advancement of social media, it is easy to spread a message to boycott a brand. Brand boycotts tend to receive notable media attention, putting brands in the spotlight. With the media attention comes pressure from stakeholders to respond to the brand boycott in a good way.

Once consumers start spreading the message on social media, like-minded consumers will join the boycott. Like that, the snowball starts rolling and the boycott will affect the brand. After the Israel-Hamas war broke out in October 2023, there has been an explosion of boycotted brands. Western brands operating in Israel are being linked to the Israel-Hamas war and boycotted by consumers in pro-Palestine, Muslim countries. The link to Israel is often weak and

several Western brands have tried to distance themselves from Israel in the media. Once a brand boycott occurs, the situation escalates quickly.

Brand boycotts are almost becoming the norm in United States, where a polarized political landscape leads to boycotts of brands that does not align with consumers political values. Liberal consumers boycott conservative brands, and conservative consumers boycott liberal brands. The United States have seen a rise of political consumerism, often called "*dollar voting*." (Dubé and Bronnerberg, 2022, p. 28). The boycott of the parent company of the beer brand Bud Light, called Anheuser-Busch, has received particular media attention.

A consumer boycott can be defined as "*the act of stopping to buy products or services from the company if one does not agree with a specific action, or even the whole set of specific actions from the company*" (Cruz, 2017, p. 6). There are numbers of reasons why a consumer would boycott products or services from a company. Socially and ethically conscious consumers have strong opinions on how brands should operate. If they disagree with the brand´s operations or behaviors, they may stop buying the brand.

The literature on brand boycott dates all the way back to two decades, with the first study being from 2004. Previous studies have mostly focused on consumers motivations behind boycott participation, and other factors that influence the consumer. These studies are correlational and explore brand boycotts in specific settings. This study is qualitative, and focuses on the reasons for brand boycotts, how brands can respond to brand boycotts, and the outcomes of brand boycotts. Prior literature has not focused much on these areas of brand boycotts. A few studies have explored different strategies brands can utilize to deal with brand boycotts. There is a lack of qualitative, conceptual studies that are looking to conceptualize brand boycotts.

The goal of this study is to fill the gaps in the prior literature on brand boycotts by exploring the outcomes of brand boycotts, responding strategies to brand boycotts and reasons behind brand boycotts. Previous studies have looked at brand boycotts in a specific setting, this study gives a broader view. With the recent explosions of brand boycotts, there is a need for up-to-date data on the topic. Brand boycotts are receiving increased media attention. A media discourse analysis is needed to analyze these new trends.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

  The primary objective of this study is to present a comprehensive overview of the various reasons behind brand boycott, the negative and positive outcomes of brand boycott, and the strategies brands can use to respond to brand boycotts. This led to the development of the following research objective and research questions (**RQs**).

Research Objective – What, why, and how of brand boycott, with focus on understanding reasons, outcomes, and response strategies.

RQ 1. What are the different reasons behind brand boycott?

RQ 2. What are the different positive and negative outcomes of brand boycotts?

RQ 3. What are the different strategies brands can use to respond to brand boycotts?

1.3 Theoretical Framework

  This section will introduce the two theoretical frameworks used in this study. Complexity theory and disidentify theory combined, conceptualize brand boycott.

1.3.1 Complexity theory

  Johnson (2011, section 1.1) explains complexity theory as "*the behavior of a whole system, rather than its individual parts, and is the study of the whole phenomenon which emerges from a collection of interacting objects*". Pippenger (1978), on the other hand, describes complexity theory as "*a theory that seeks to establish the number of components needed to perform a given task*". Peng & Ren's (2018, p. 819) approach to complexity theory is "*how variables of complex systems interact and give rise to the system´s collective behavior and how such a system interacts with the environment at the same time*".

Figure 1. Overview of Complexity Theory
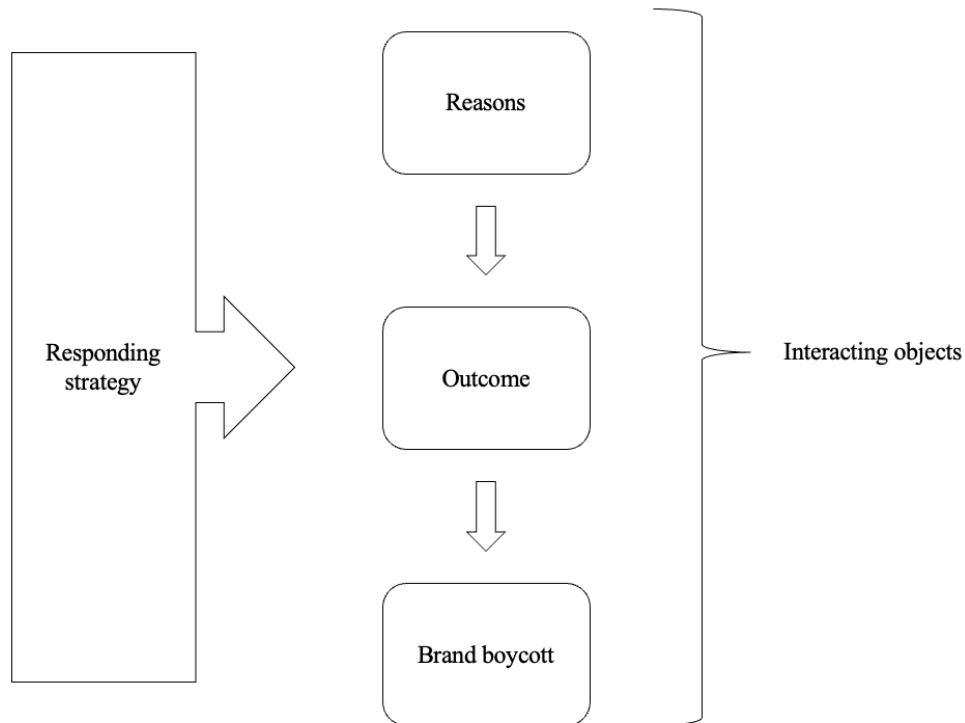
In terms of brand boycott, complexity theory helps to clarify all the components affecting each other when a brand is experiencing boycott. Figure 1 above explains brand boycott as a process and can be described as a reason, which triggers a boycott which, in turn, affects the brand. Response strategy is the last step in the process of brand boycott, and it can either be active or passive. Each of these steps are objects that interact and affect each other, and each "perform a given task", that leads to brand boycott which is the "phenomenon". Within each of these steps are several components, that combined, activate either reason, outcome or response strategy to brand boycott. It maps an overview of how each of these variables, in the complex system of brand boycott, collectively behaves and interacts with society.

1.3.2 Disidentification theory

Disidentification is "*psychological phenomenon that occurs when individuals belong to groups they do not wish to belong to*" (Becker & Tausch, 2014, p. 295). The groups' identity is something that the individual don't wants to be involved with anymore. If the individual cannot escape physically, the individual may attempt to construct a psychological barrier between the individual and the group (Becker & Tausch, 2014, p. 295). Disidentification as a concept has

primarily been studied in physiological and sociological sciences. It has been applied to the disidentification from political or religious groups (Anaza et al., 2021). Recently, the theory of disidentification has been applied to the consumer-brand relationship called customer-brand disidentification (CBD). The disidentify theory has been applied to studies on brand hate as well (Kumar et al., 2023).

Consumers find meaning and identity in the brands and products they are purchasing (Ruppel & Einwiller, 2021, p. 186). CBD can be defined as "a *cognitive rejection of a brand wherein a consumer consciously views a brand as misrepresenting his or herself and impeding self-motives"* (Ruppel & Einwiller, 2021, p. 187). The relationship between brands and consumers can be so strained that the consumer chooses to disidentify from the brand (Anaza et al., 2021). This explains why consumers boycott brands, and the disidentifying can be viewed as the boycott of the brand itself. Brand boycotts tend to get substantial media attention and generate a lot of talk on social media platforms. Consumers who boycott often declare on social media that they will not purchase the brand anymore. Applying the disidentify theory to this case, explains that it's the consumers leaving the group, by boycotting the brand.

1.4 Delimitations

Delimitations are the limitations that the authors of the study set for themselves. It is challenging to achieve the study objective without setting clear boundaries of the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018, p.157). If the authors do not set any clear boundaries, the objectives will be too broad.

There are four delimitations with this study. Firstly, this study has utilized media discourse as the research method. No other research method has been used. Media discourse, as with every other research method, carries limitations. Qualitative studies like the one used in this study are subjective in nature and there is a risk that bias, as well as subjectivity influences the findings. There are little knowledge of the independency or potential bias of the article authors. Themes that have been widely discussed in the media will reemerge in the data.

Secondly, brand boycott after the Israel-Hamas conflict have received massive media attention. The boycott of Bud Light in the United States has also received substantial media attention. This is heavily reflected in the data and boycott of Bud Light and Israel appeared the most frequently. There is a chance that the boycott of Bud Light and Israel received an un-

proportional share of the media attention. On going brand boycotts that have not received as much media attention as the Bud Light and Israel boycotts, may not have appeared during the data collection phase. The authors took several measures to ensure reliability and validity. All data is secondary, and there was no primary data collected. When utilizing secondary data, the authors did not know how the data was collected in the first place. This is a disadvantage of using secondary data (Johnston, 2014).

Thirdly, reasons behind brand boycott, outcomes of brand boycott, and strategies companies can use to respond were the topics examined. Brand boycott is a diverse and complex topic, and the authors had to narrow the main themes down. Other possible interesting findings beyond outcomes, reasons, and strategies to respond have not been included.

Lastly, the data was collected from 24.01.2024 to 15.03.2024. On 16.05.2024, the authors conducted another search for articles, to ensure that all relevant data was included. Articles published after 16.05.2024 are not included in this study. The articles were all written in English. Articles written in any other language were excluded to avoid translation inconsistencies. These delimitations are consistent with the research objectives of the study.

1.5 Contributions

There exists limited qualitative literature on the outcomes of brand boycott, the reasons for brand boycott, and strategies that brands can use to respond. This study contributes to the literature on brand boycott by addressing these gaps. The authors provide a comprehensive overview of the reasons, outcomes, and strategies of brand boycott and developed a process model on brand boycott which brands can use to navigate through brand boycotts. This process model advances the theoretical understanding of brand boycotts, which can be broken down into a sequential process.

Managerial implication in this study is that the process model can be used by brand managers to respond to brand boycotts. Brands who experience boycott can respond using either an active or passive strategy. Similarly, brands that have not yet been boycotted may also utilize passive and active strategies. The model contributes as a framework, making it easier for brand to utilize a responding strategy.

This study contributes knowledge consumers can use to navigate the complex and ever-changing landscape of brand boycotts. The results of this study offer an opportunity for consumers to understand the reasons behind and outcomes of brand boycotts. An enhanced understanding of the reasons and outcomes makes it easier to take educated decisions about participating in brand boycotts or not.

1.6 Structure of the study

This study is divided into 7 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic and the problem statement, explaining the background of brand boycotts, and how the concept has evolved. In Chapter 2, the literature on brand boycott is reviewed. The authors review the available literature, identify gaps, and present concepts related to brand boycott. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology used, which was media discourse analysis. In chapter 4, the authors present the results of the study. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings. In chapter 6, the practical and theoretical implications of the study are presented. Chapter 7 is the conclusion, where the authors answer and reflect around the research questions of the study. The study concludes with recommended future areas of research.

2. Background of Literature

The literature review is the documents that are available on a topic, both unpublished and published (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020, p. 64). The literature review is a crucial part of the research process for several reasons. Reviewing the prior literature makes sure that your study builds on the existing knowledge from the field. It makes sure that you do not "*reinvent the wheel.*" Lastly, the authors will get important input on how prior studies on the topic have been conducted (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020, p. 64).

The authors examined the relevant literature on brand boycotts, using the databases Google Scholar, Oria, and Scopus. The keyword "brand boycott" was used on these databases, where 201 articles appeared on Google Scholar, 14 on Scopus, and 20 on Oria. Some of the articles appeared on all the databases, indicating that the amount of relevant literature was smaller than first assumed. Searching for articles with "brand boycott" in the title on Google Scholar gave 13 articles. After reviewing all the articles, the authors narrowed it down to a total of 30 articles that deemed the most relevant. The majority of the articles conducted a quantitative study, typically launching a survey to investigate motivations behind brand boycotts and willingness to participate. Several of the articles one Google Scholar were master theses. Some of the articles the authors did not have access to, and some articles were deemed irrelevant after reviewing them.

The literature review is divided into two sections. Part one presents the literature review and what studies have been done on the topic of brand boycott. Further, the study will introduce and define brand boycott and related concepts of importance that emerged during the literature review. In the final part, the theoretical framework of the study will be presented.

2.1 Brand boycott

Friedman (1985, p. 97-98) defines a boycott as "*an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace.*" Garret (1987, p. 47) defines a boycott as "*organized, group effort to make a target change its policies.*" No clear definition of brand boycott has emerged in the literature. Brand boycott, consumer boycott and company boycotts are used interchangeably in many of the articles reviewed.

A boycott is a movement or campaign that aims to raise awareness of the public regarding issues in society (Yunus et al., 2020). People will collectively and voluntarily stop dealing with a country or an organization to put pressure on an organization or country (Rosendaal & Reitsma, 2017). There are several different types of boycotts, all aiming for achieving different goals. According to Nussbaum (2007, p. 33) "*there are two types of boycotts with two different intentions*". First, there is social boycott, where the aim is to make a public statement and persuade people of the wrongdoing a certain company has done (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 33). Secondly, economic boycott. Compared to social boycott, the aim here is less symbolic with a primary purpose of making an economic impact on the firm (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 33).

Western brands like Ikea, Apple and McDonald´s pulled out of Russia, due to the geopolitical tension between Russia and Ukraine (Akhtar et al., 2023). Many consumers experience strong feelings of animosity. Animosity can be divided into two types, either situational animosity or stable animosity. Situational animosity is negative reactions to breaking social norms, while stable animosity is hostility resulting from war (Koh, 2014, p. 22). The recent boycott against the Norwegian brand Freia is a good example of stable animosity. Several people stopped buying their products, due to them still operating in Russia, even after they started the war against Ukraine.

After reviewing the literature, the authors became aware that few of the previous studies have focused on outcomes, reasons or strategies of brand boycotts. The literature on strategies to respond to brand boycotts is quite limited. Mcgriff (2012) discusses various strategies aimed for brands to counter online brand boycotts. Kim et al., (2022) discusses how companies can formulate Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) strategies. These two articles are the only ones from the reviewed literature that discusses strategy.

Majority of the studies have been quantitative. Universally, they are all investigating brand boycotts in relation to specific settings. Chiu (2016) investigates the factors influencing consumer boycotts in Taiwan. Ginder, Whitney Kwon, Wi-Suk (2020) investigate three sources of motivation to engage in brand boycott: the issue, others, and self-enhancement. Muhamad (2019) looking into the religious motivations behind boycotts. Klein et al., (2004) investigates the consumer´s motivations to participate in consumer boycotts and used an ongoing boycott at

the time as an example for their survey. The research methods have been quantitative, with data collected via survey. Limited research examines the reasons behind brand boycott holistically.

Few studies have been conducted on the outcomes of brand boycott. Peña, Salazar, Serrano (2021) analyzed credit card transactions in Mexico, to track the sales of American and Mexican gourmet coffee brands in Mexico. Gourmet coffee is easily substitutable, by analyzing both Mexican and Americans brands, the effect of the boycott could be measured. The background is offensive comments from then US President Donald Trump, which led to a widespread boycott of American products in Mexico. The authors found a significant decrease in sales of American established brands (ABE´s) in the first few weeks after the boycott. Dubé and Bronnerberg (2022) studied the impact of the boycott of Goya after their CEO praised Donald Trump. The authors found that Goya´s sales were not negatively impacted in the short-term. However, there was significant negative media coverage, which led to reputational damage.

There are limited qualitative studies which investigate how brands respond to brand boycotts. McGriff (2012) discusses the need to protect brand equity against the threat of online boycotts. As brand boycotts are becoming more common, there is a growing need to understand and develop strategies for the brands to respond. To develop strategies, one must understand the phenomenon and why brand boycotts are taking place.

With the world becoming more digital, brand boycotts are happening more frequently. Words spread fast through social media on platforms such as TikTok or Instagram, where people can review products or businesses online. Consumers are referred to as the business stakeholders, leaving the power to the buyers. The threshold for boycotting is low, making it easier for consumers to stay up to date with ongoing boycotts. Brand boycotts are growing and becoming more common. It can be explained as a form of boycott where consumers try to exercise the power they have. Consumers exercise their power by refusing to buy products or services from brands that they dislike or disagree with. Unique characteristics of brand boycotts are the use of social media to spread the message, the rapid pace of the boycott, and the massive media attention that will follow. Geopolitical tension in the world has led to an increasing number of brand boycotts in the last year. Consumers in Muslim countries have boycotted Western brands for their perceived support of Israel. Starbucks, McDonald´s, and Disney are examples of companies that are currently being boycotted in many Muslim countries.

2.2 Concepts related to brand boycott

In the review of the literature, the authors found several concepts that relate to brand boycott. Consumer boycotts and brand boycotts are used interchangeably in the literature. Firms that are targeted by a consumer boycott have "*apparently failed to sustain a sufficient consumer focus.*" (Klein et al., 2004, p. 92). A brand boycott can be triggered by seemingly everything these days, which is why they present a major challenge for brands. After the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, there has been boycotts of Western multinational companies, which have been widely covered by Western media. Examples of political boycott is when former US President Donald Trump called for a boycott of American brands that condemned the new law SB02 in Georgia (Dalakas et al., 2023).

Political consumerism is also on the rise, where consumers buy from companies whose values align with their own. This can be called "*dollar voting*" and is especially on the rise in the United States (Dubé and Bronnerberg, 2022). Copeland and Boulianne, (2022, p. 4) define political consumerism as "*the deliberate purchase or avoidance of products, goods, or services for political reasons.*" Many companies have experienced this in the last few years. Political consumerism is essentially brand boycott put into system. Consumers will only purchase from companies and brands that have political values which align with the consumers. Companies or brands that do not align with his values are being boycotted. A brand boycott is often a one-time event that fades after some time, while political consumerism is a more permanent concept. In theory, the consumer would boycott the non-aligning brands indefinitely.

Ethical consumerism can be defined as "*the decision-making purchase, and other consummation experiences, affected by the consumers ethical concerns*" (Coopermartin,1993, p. 113). Consumers' product purchase decisions are gradually more affected by ethics (Bezençon, 2010). Ethical products are products which have one or more social environmental principles incorporated, this might affect the consumer purchase decision (Bezençon, 2010). Ethical consumerism aligns somewhat with brand boycott, considering consumers will purchase products based on their ethical standards. Products that do not hold up to their standard will be boycotted.

Figure 2. Related Concepts to Brand Boycott
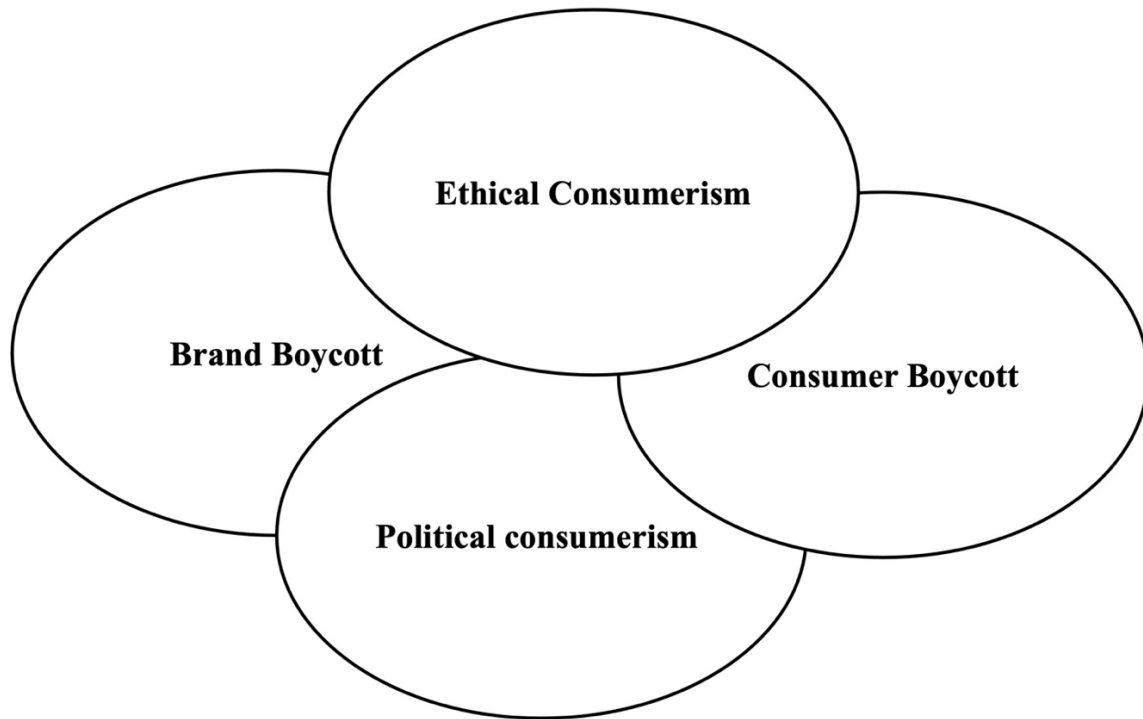
Figure 2 shows the four different concepts related to brand boycott collected in a Venn-diagram. All the four concepts are similar, they are used by consumers to promote a matter they believe in. Figure 2 illustrates that the concepts are overlapping. Consumer boycott and brand boycott are used interchangeably in literature. A consumer concerned with ethical consumerism is likely participating in brand boycotts. On the other hand, a consumer that is participating in political consumerism has adopted brand boycotts in a systemic way.

Table 1 below showcases the relevant literature published on brand boycotts in chronological order.

Table 1. Overview of the prior literature on brand boycott

Research profile	Theory	Research focus	Level of analysis	Key findings	Reasons	Outcome	Strategy
Author(s): Klein, Smith & John (2004) **Method:** Survey **Sample**: N=1216 **Country**: United Kingdom	"Cognitive Dissonance Theory & Self-Perception Theory"	This study takes a cost-benefit approach to investigate individual's motivations to participate in boycotts.	Consumer	Difference making and self-empowerment are motivations for consumers. Costs are constrained consumption and counterarguments.	N/A	N/A	Awareness, Egregiousness boycott (AEB) model
Author(s): McGriff, (2012) **Method:** N/A **Sample:** N/A **Country:** N/A	N/A	This article discusses the need to protect brand equity against the threat of online boycotts.	Company	Strategies suggested to counter online brand boycotts.	N/A	Drop in revenue. Loss of image and reputation, negative effect on brand´s equity.	Adopt new strategies to encounter online brand boycott.
Author(s): Chiu (2016) **Method**: Survey **Sample**: N=233 **Country**: Taiwan	Planned behavior Theory	Examines the elements influencing the boycott behavior of consumers in Taiwan, particularly in response incidents with food society. Negative impact	Consumer	Brand boycott attitude, perceived control, and distrust have a significant impact on consumer boycott behavior.	Perceived risk. Perceived deception.	N/A	Morgan and Hunt (1994): Consistency and honesty.

		on brand trust usually follows.					
Author(s): José, Ángeles, Florencio, Camacho & Benítez (2019) **Method:** Field study **Sample:** N=351 **Country:** Spain		The study examines the factors which tries to explain consumer motivation to boycott a brand from a specific country.		Factors like political animosity increase likelihood of boycott participation. Greater legitimacy increases stronger boycott behavior.	Animosity, legitimacy, the intension that the boycott will have a positive effect.		
Author(s): Prasad & Verma (2019) **Method:** Observation and Interviews **Sample:** N/A **Country:** India	N/A	The study investigates anti-branding practices such as buyer resistance, boycott, brand hate, anti-brand belief, brand detachment, negative information, negative brand belief, brand rejection, and decision making process by customers.	Consumer	Brand negativity was found across all religious backgrounds.	Sensitivity to social issues. Discrepancy between brand and self-identity, persistence of negative attitudes.	Impact on consumer-brand relationship	N/A

Author(s): Platon (2019) **Method:** Case Study **Sample:** N/A **Country:** N/A	N/A	Brand equity is extremely important for companies, this study investigates how an online consumer boycott affects brand equity.	Company	Perceived deception, perceived risk, and record straight have a significant impact on boycott attitude.	Perceived deception, perceived risk, and record straight	Impact on brand equity and loss in sales.	Maintain trust among consumers build a strong emotional connection. Consider the relationship between brand equity, brand trust, affect, and loyalty in relation to consumer boycott attitude.
Author(s): Yuksel, Nguyen, Thai & Lee (2019) **Method:** Two studies - surveys **Sample:** Study 1 - N=313 Study 2 N=228 **Country:** N/A	Small agent rationalization	Too many boycott calls will decrease the perceived significance of each boycott. Challenging to support several boycotts simultaneously, due to limited capacity.	Consumer	Individuals who need to make a choice from a large sample of boycotts are less likely to participate in a boycott than a consumer choosing from a small sample.	Number of potential boycotts affect consumers' willingness to participate.	N/A	N/A
Author(s): Muhamad (2019) **Method:** Survey	Intrinsic Religious motivation factor	Religious groups often boycott goods from certain	Consumer	Religious motivation is related to boycott motivation. Self-	Religious motivation. Self-enhancement,	N/A	N/A

Sample: N=341 **Country:** Malaysia		companies/brands /countries.		enhancement, norms and attitudes have an indirect role when contributing to boycotting US products.	norms and attitudes.		
Author(s): Khanna & Bhargav (2020) **Method:** Interview **Sample:** N=100 **Country:** India	N/A	The study highlights the impact of social media and ethnocentricity on consumer behavior and rejections in India.	Consumer	Need for brand managers to understand and leverage consumer-generated brand stories, respond effectively to negative brand stories, and develop strategies to mitigate the impact of brand boycotts.	Ethnocentricity and social media	N/A	Proactive approach and make a string brand image making costumers more passionate about the brand.
Author(s): Wi-Suk (2020) **Method:** Online experiment /survey **Sample:** N= 185 **Country:** United States	N/A	The study tested three sources of motivation to engage in brand boycott: the issue, others, and self-enhancement. Boycotts tend to	Consumer	In a digital social platform boycott, the higher the number of likes on a Facebook post, the higher the consumers	Issue importance, degree of others participation, scope of self enhancement	N/A	Empathy and acknowledgement

		fall within two categories: passive (invisible to others) and active (visible to others).		intention to participate.			
Author(s): Dessart, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas (2020) **Method:** Online survey **Sample: N**=300 **Country:** N/A	Social Identity Theory Negative Brand Relationships	The study investigates negative emotions towards a brand through collective groups, where like-minded consumers come together.	Consumer	Negative emotional connection makes consumers participate in anti-brand communities. Same with and two-way communication with brands which can cause brand boycott.	Negative social connections	N/A	N/A
Author(s): Abdelwahab, Jiménez, San-Martín & Prodanova (2020) **Method:** Questionaire **Sample: N**=277 **Country** Spain	Social Identity Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory	Investigates dual brands (brands with two countries of origin) and what happens when there is a conflict between the countries.	Consumer	Negative relationship between ethnocentrism and trust level in a dual brand.	N/A	N/A	Public relations engagement. Social community involvement strategies.
Author(s): Rim, Lee & Yoo (2020)	Social network approach	Investigate how brand boycotters	Network between	Many boycotters were more driven	Political disagreement	N/A	Corporate social

Method: Network Analysis **Sample:**5169 tweets **Country:**United States		and brand supporters organized in relation to Budweiser and Starbucks publicly responding to Trump´s ban on immigration in 2017.	consumers/ boycotters	by partisanship (democrat vs republican) than the particular brand in question.			responsibility (CSR)
Author(s): Wang,Chang & Chen (2021) Boycott **Method:** Three Surveys **Sample:** Survey 1 N= 177, Survey 2 N= 247, Study 3 N=253 **Country:** N/A	Attention to Social Comparison	Explores the impact of viewpoint incompatibility (when consumers' view differs from company) on brand boycotts, and the moderating effect of Attention to Social Comparison Information) (ATSCI).	Individual	Consumers have a higher intention to boycott, when there is a viewer point incompatibility. (ATSCI)	Attention to social comparison information. Ideological incompatibility. Consumer brand hatred.	Reputational damage	Sustainability as a strategy
Author(s): Morwitz, Sen & Gürhan-Canli (2021) **Method:**	Social Dilemma Theory, Reference Group Theory	Social dilemmas are situations where individuals are in conflict over pursuing their own goals,	Consumer	Boycott participation is higher when the cost of keeping hold of consumption is	Preference of the boycotted product. Create access to substitutes products.	Achieve the boycotts objectives. Fulfill the objectives of the boycotting	N/A

Sample: **Country:**		or the group's goal. This conflict characterizes all boycotts.		lower. Pro boycott communication should be framed in terms of success, not failure.		group to gain approval.	
Author(s): Tian, Françoise Audrain-Pontevia & Durif (2021) **Method:** Survey **Sample:** N=602 **Country:** Canada	N/A	Exploring the negative impact of firms CSR practices on consumer behavior.	Consumer	Retailers' CSR performance is important in shaping consumer behavior. There is a need for retailers to prioritize those CSR dimensions that are most relevant to their customers.	Social reasons	N/A	CSR as a strategy to improve corporate reputation. Mixed marketing strategies.
Author(s): Gong & Wang **(**2021**)** **Method:** Study 1**:** Online survey Study 2:experiment **Sample:** Study 1**:** N=224 Study 2: N=221 **Country:**	Phycological brand contract	This study investigates dysfunctional consumer behavior towards a brand. Brand boycott is one form of dysfunctional behavior.	Company / costumer	Regarding the expectations, there is a misalignment between brands and customers. Brand boycott, negative word of mouth and brand retaliation are examples of	N/A	Negative impact on consumers brand purchase decision	Fulfillment of Psychological Brand Contract, reducing sense of violation, develop costumer-band relationship, recovery measures,

Study 1: South Korea Study 2: United States				dysfunctional behavior.			apology and restitution.
Author(s): Peña, Salazar & Serrano (2021) **Method:** Analysis of credit/debit card transactions **Sample:** N/A **Country:** Mexico	N/A	Boycotts of American products were quickly launched in social media channels in Mexico after offensive comments by Donald Trump.	Company	A significant drop in sales American established brands for companies in (ABEs) Mexico. 19% decrease in sales in the first week.	Political	Boycotts have a decreasing effect on sales of ABEs.	N/A
Author(s): Dubé & Bronnerberg (2022) **Method:** Case study **Sample:** **Country:** United States	N/A	Political consumerism is on the rise in the western world. Little knowledge about the impact of these boycotts on the companies being boycotted.	Company	The Goya boycott was not very successful. Goya is a private company, it is harder to influence the company. The Goya CEO supported Trump.	Political motive	Increase in sales.	N/A
Author(s): Yu, Legendre, Ding & Madera (2022) **Method:**Two studies and surveys **Sample:**	Terror Management Theory	The article is about the relationship between mortality salience and brand boycotting.	Consumer/ individual	Level of anxiety has a significant effect on brand boycotting behavior.	Anxiety, mortality salience.	Increase in sales of related products/ services	Reactive and pro-active strategies

Survey 1 N= 406 Survey 2 N= 391 **Country:** United States							
Author(s): Kim, Alharbi & Li (2022) **Method:** Case study **Sample:** N/A **Country:** United States	Stakeholder Theory, Involvement Theory	There has been an increase in expectations from stakeholders that companies are socially responsible and engage in CSR. CSA can be viewed as an expansion of CSR and is when companies are actively taking a stance on a social or political issue.	Consumer	Adopting a consumer centric approach is very important when formulating CSA strategies. Consumer involvement in a brand influenced consumers attitudes towards CSA efforts.	N/A	N/A	Segmentation strategy. CSA.
Author(s): Sanak-Kosmowska (2023) **Method:** N/A **Sample:** 59 tweets **Country:** Europe and USA	N/A	Companies who have stayed in Russia after the war against Ukraine have been criticized over Twitter	Company	Active social listening, crisis communication plan, reputation and repair strategy are some ways the firms handled reputation crisis	N/A	N/A	"Wait-out" strategy
Author(s): Changju &	Stimulus - Organism -	This study investigates how	Consumer/ country	The link between CSR contribution	Political motive	Country boycott	CSR

Kinoshita (2023) **Method:** Mixed Method. Qualitative Interview, Quantitative survey **Sample:** Phase 1 Japan N=500 South Korea N=571 Phase 2 Japan N= 500 South Korea N= 528 **Country:** Japan and South Korea	Response (SOR) Theory	company´s CSR contribution affect boycott intention.		and boycott intention are stronger in South Korea than Japan.			
Author(s): Alyahya, Agag, Aliedan & Abdelmoety (2023) **Method:** Survey **Sample:** N=3392 **Country:** Egypt, USA, UK, and Saudi Arabia	Psychological Contract Violation	This study divides eco-innovation into proactive and reactive eco innovation and investigates how this affect customer boycotts.	Individual	Reactive eco-innovation has a positive association with consumer boycott behavior. Proactive has a negative influence. Reactive has higher impact on consumer behavior in developed economies.	Environmental concerns	N/A	Eco-innovation strategy. Reactive or proactive eco-innovation strategy

Author(s): Akhtar, Khan, Siddiqi, Islam & Atanassova (2023) **Method:** structural equation modeling **Sample:** N=411 European consumers **Country:** Europe	Protection Motivation Theory	This study investigates consumer animosity towards Russian brands after the invasion of Ukraine. Furthermore, how this consumer animosity results in brand boycott.	Individual	Consumers has negative feelings towards Russian brands mainly due to hate and anger Positive relationship between European consumers boycott behavior and brand attitude towards Russian brands	Brand attitude. Brand animosity. Brand country image.	N/A	N/A
Author(s): Costa & Azevedo (2023) **Method:** Survey **Sample:** N=178 **Country:** United States	Coombs ´Reputation Repair strategy	This study examines the antecedents and consequences of cancelling culture on brands. Cancel culture is said to be an evolution of brand boycott.	Company	Most consumers who cancel, cancel not to make the brand disappear, they do it to get	Political reasons for brand boycott	Impact on brands trustworthiness	Combs' Reputation Repair strategy
Author(s): Woodside, Akrout, & Mrad (2023) **Method:** Survey **Sample:** France N=314 United States N= 337	Complexity Theory, Stimulus-Organism-response.	This study investigates how consumers perceive the communication of socially irresponsible fashion brands.	Consumer	If consumers experience a brand they usually don't use as irresponsible, the chances for them to boycott	N/A	Brand boycott communication. Consumers who are experiencing brand hate usually calls for brand boycott	N/A

|							
UK N= 326 **Country:** France, UK, and United States				the brand are high.			
Author(s): Dalakas, Vassilis, Melancon, Phillips & Szczytynski (2023) **Method:** Qualitative / grounded theory analysis **Sample:** 800 tweets **Country:** United States	N/A	With the polarized political landscape in the US, there is often an "us vs them" view. If brands take a political stance, they will either by "in" or "out" for different consumer groups.	Individual	The study offers new insight into the anti-boycotters. Prior literature has focused on the actions of the boycotters.	Political identity and engaging in political consumerism.	N/A	N/A
Author(s): Bhatia, Gupta, Vimalkumar & Sharma (2023) **Method:** Qualitative **Sample:** 231 288 Tweets **Country:** India	Consumer Brand Sabotage (CBS)	This study examines factors related to Consumer Brand Sabotage (CBS) what factors contribute to virality on social networks platforms.	Individual	Number of hashtags in a tweet, emotion communicated and the inclusion of an URL link or not are factors that affect how likely it is a tweet will go viral in the context of CBS.	N/A	Consumers engage in brand switching and brand retaliations	Escalation strategy

2.3 Evolution of brand boycott

While brand boycott is a newer concept, boycotts itself have been around for a long time. The first boycotts date back to the 14th century. It was used as a tool for achieving societal or economic change (Zeng et al., 2021). Throughout history there have been many successful boycotts. Ghandi´s boycott of British salt in the fight for Indian independence and the international boycott of the Apartheid government in South Africa are two very prominent examples. (Klein et al., 2004).

Figure 3 below showcases an overview of the most prominent events within boycotts and brand boycotts in history. The timeline is parted in before and after 1st World War, 2nd World War, 2000 and after the corona virus. The timeline starts with the "*Boston Tea party*" 1773, as mentioned earlier is one of the first major boycott.

Boycott and brand boycott is not a new phenomenon. The first reagitated boycott happens in Boston all the way back to 1773 with the "*Boston Tea Party*" (Cooley, 2014, p.75). The conflict was a response to the taxes the Parliament of Britain introduced in 1765 called "*The Stamp Act.*" "*No taxation without representation*" became a saying which argued the British should not tax the Americans, without American representation at the parliament (Conser, 2013, p. 306). Around 150 colonists participated, and around 342 chests of tea were destroyed (Cooley, 2014, p.75). The act was an outcome of the British passing act that put taxes against the Americans (Cooley, 2014, p.75). Historically this event has been looked at as the first American display of defiance towards the British (Cooley, 2014, p.74). The major response to the boycott, and the fact that it was successful, have paved the way for several other boycotts later in history.

Figure 3. Overview of brand boycotts
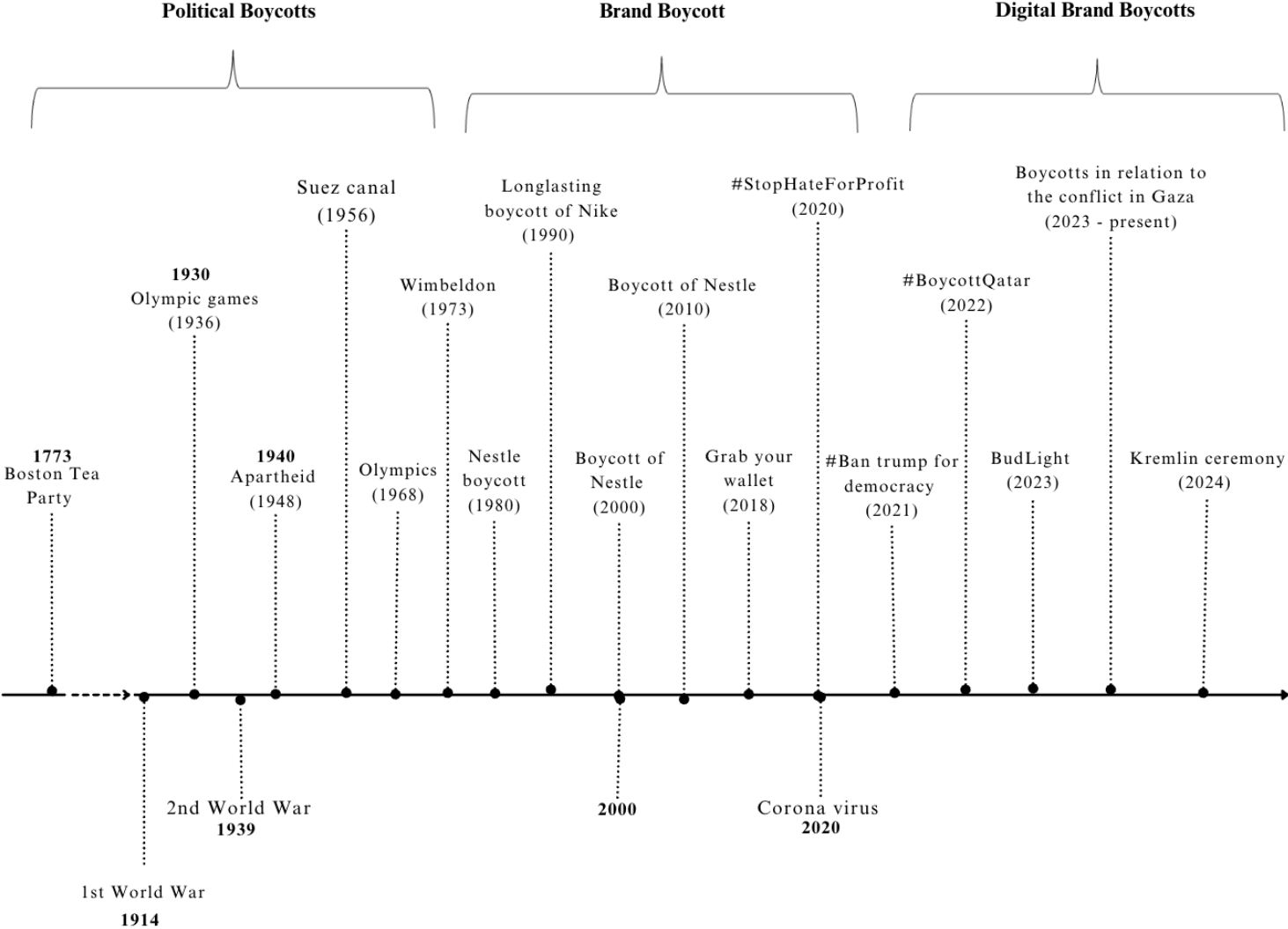
The National Socialist German workers party, led by Adolf Hitler, seized power in Germany in 1933. The Olympic Games in Berlin 1936 became very controversial due to the Nazi government hosting the games (Large, 2007, p. 5). Having the Nazi-led government host the games, was perceived as a mockery of the Olympic ideas. The foundations of the Olympics are internationalism and peaceful competition among different nations, independent of religious, racial and ethnic considerations (Large, 2007, p. 5). Despite protests from several athletes and calls for boycott from powerful nations such as the US, the Olympic games were held in Berlin as planned.

After the 2nd World War in 1939, one of the most successful boycotts in history occurred as a response to the Apartheid system. The Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, was a civil right protest towards racial segregation. The movement started when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man while the segregated bus system where still ongoing (Robinson, 1989, p. 8). She was eventually kicked off the bus and arrested. On December 5th in 1955, fifty thousand people, mainly the black population, walked off city buses in response to the incident with Rosa Parks (Robinson, 1989, p. 8). This lasted for fourteen months before the federal courts ordered the busses to operate without the segregation system (Robinson, 1989, p. 8).

After the 1970s there was a significant shift in boycott behavior. The main reason behind boycotting was no longer to make a major political change in society, but rather change the way organizations operated. Until now, the boycotts were motivated by inequality and segregation. When such major societal changes were resolved, there where room for to ask questions about large multinational brands and their businesses.

Historically, Nestlé is a firm worth highlighting. Nestle has been boycotted on several occasions. In 1980 the brand was criticized after their aggressive marketing campaign of infant formulas in the "*underdeveloped*" third world countries (Sasson, 2016, p.1 197). This initiated the debate about ethical responsibility firms have toward their customers (Sasson, 2016).

Nestle was boycotted again in March 2010, when the environmental group Greenpeace revealed that the Indonesian palm oil producer Sinar Mas was a major supplier of Nestlé (Ionescu-Somers & Enders, 2012). The environmental group launched a social media attack as a response to the unsustainable practices and the ripple effects of palm oil. Their video, which mocking Nestles advertisement of the chocolate KitKat went viral. Nestles response was to force

the video´s withdrawal from YouTube, citing copyrights, which caused criticism by consumers (Ionescu-Somers & Enders, 2012). The digital Brand Boycott of Nestle in 2010, steers into the last era of the timeline called "*Digital Brand Boycott"*. This is brand boycotts as the concept one knows today. Consumers are paying more attention to how companies act, with an increasing focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Zeng et al., 2021). Raising awareness of company behavior and social media has enhanced the boycott threat for brands. Social media allows consumers to organize and participate in boycotts via social networking platforms such as Twitter/X, TikTok and Facebook (Ginder et al., 2020).

2.4 Theoretical background

Complexity theory and disidentification theory can be applied to understand reasons, outcomes, and response strategies of brand boycotts.

2.4.1 Complexity theory

After conducting the literature review, the authors went back to the articles to find a suitable theoretical framework for the study. Reviewing the articles, 20 theories were uncovered, some more relevant than others. The authors went through the 20 theories together to remove those who deemed non-relevant. After removing the non-relevant theories, the authors were left with 5 theories. Out of the 5 theories, the authors agreed that the complexity theory and the disidentification theory were the most for applying to brand boycotts. The theories had to be able to contextualize the reasons for brand boycotts, the strategies to respond, and the outcomes of brand boycotts. Using two theories allowed for a better understanding of the three dimensions of brand boycotts.

As mentioned, Peng & Ren (2018, p. 819) explain complexity theory as "*how variables of complex systems interact and give rise to the system´s collective behavior and how such a system interacts with the environment at the same time*". The theory describes the components leading up to reasons, outcomes, and response strategy to brand boycott. Chapter 1.3 explained how each of these three aspects affects each other, the study will now explain how each of these are affected individually by several different objectives.

Starting with reasons, the results show that war, environmental, social and political reasons are the most common motives causing brand boycott. These are the coding sub-

categories, made up of the first order constructs which sums up the most common reasons for brand boycott. One can predict that in each of these coding subcategories, several different first order constructs have played an important role when consumers are debating whether to boycott a brand or not.

Next, there is responding to brand boycott. The complexity theory articulates clearly how different responses, both active and passive, operate as objectives which affect the outcome of brand boycott. Brands which are vulnerable to brand boycott can use both active and passive strategies as a variable. Strategy as a variable affects the outcome of the boycott. In the case of brands who already are boycotted, the complexity theory explains how the different strategies interact with the stakeholders. In both cases, the brand needs to use an emergent response strategy. By mapping all the different variables affecting each other when a brand is being boycotted, the complexity theory outlines the importance of these strategies to be flexible and responsive to changing dynamics.

Lastly, there is the outcome of brand boycott, either on an organizational level or consumer level. The organizational outcomes are financial, reputational and sales outcomes. Consumer level outcomes affect the consumer behavior both negatively and positively. The complexity theory clarifies the outcomes as a result of all the objects mentioned earlier, such as reasons and response strategy. In some cases, brands or consumers can experience more than one of the outcomes. As mentioned, brands need to be flexible considering their response strategy, and here one can see a correlation where the different outcomes operate as variables affecting the response strategy.

Brand boycott, in terms of the complexity theory, functions as a framework mapping all the variables affecting each other in the complex boycott landscape. To conceptualize brand boycott, there is a need to have a framework which explains the dynamic process of brand boycott. The complexity theory applies for all three components, reasons, outcome and response strategies in terms of brand boycott, as well as establishing an overview of all the components.

2.4.2 Disidentification Theory

While the complexity theory can be used to understand the reasons for brand boycotts, the strategies to respond, and the outcomes, the disidentification theory can provide a deeper understanding of the reasons for brand boycotts. An individual will disidentify from groups that

they do not want to be a part of anymore (Becker & Tausch, 2014). The relationship between consumers and brands can be complex and filled with different emotions. (Khatoon, S., & Rehman, 2021, p. 1). Emotions are either negative or positive.

A consumer boycott caused by disagreements with the brand's conduct, produces negative emotions on some level. Next, the consumer does not want to be a part of the group anymore or be associated with the brand. Considering boycotts are about driving societal change, the disidentification does not happen in isolation. Boycotts are an organized and collective campaign (Garret, 1987). When large amounts of consumers disidentify simultaneously from a brand in an organized way, it can be called a brand boycott.

3. Research Methodology

This chapter will present the research methodology used in this study. Research methodology is used to unravel the research problem (Kothari, 2004).

3.1 Media Discourse Analysis

In this study, the authors have utilized the research method media discourse analysis. Media discourse is written or oral interaction that takes place through a broadcast and then is presented to a recipient that is not present (O'Keeffe, 2013, p. 441). The broadcast can be any form of media or video, for example online newspaper, physical newspapers or YouTube videos. Media discourse analysis is the study of these interactions. Discourse analysis in itself is a very broad term, Gill (2009) states that there are at least 57 different types of discourse analysis.

No standard way of performing discourse analysis have been utilized, and there are several ways scholars can approach the method (Carvalho, 2000). Discourse analysis broadly consists of three steps: identifying relevant material, identifying key stakeholders and critically analyzing the material (Ngwenyama et. Al, 2023). Mjaorety of the framework of media discourse analysis originates from the work of Habermas, which developed the theory of communicative action (TCA) (Cukier et al., 2009, p.176).

Habermas introduced the notion of the public sphere, which consists of political parties, mass media, and politicians. He argued that the actors in the public sphere had a considerably amount of power, that there is a democratic problem if they are not critiqued (Cukier et al., 2009, p.176). Discourse analysis is helpful in examining social contexts (Alvarez, 2002, p. 87).

Written and spoken media have been studied by scholars for decades, using some form of media discourse. Bieber et al., (1999) studied the language of newspapers, Toolan (1988) studied the language of press advertising and Wallace (1977) studied sports reporting in newspapers (O'Keeffe, 2013, p. 442). For spoken media, Conversation analysis (CA) has traditionally been the most popular way of studying the popular media. Numerous studies going back decades have been done on the topic, including Schegloff (1968) which studied telephone calls openings between people who know each other to some extent (O'Keeffe, 2013, p. 443). Ngwenyama et al., (2023) used critical discourse to investigate the public debate regarding implementation of NemID in Denmark. NemID is a personal identifier of Danish citizens.

Scholars must find the approach that is most suitable for their study. In this study, the authors have analyzed three different categories of data: news articles, YouTube videos, and everything else that appeared during the search that was not academic articles or news articles, such as company reports or blogs.

As illustrated in figure 4, media discourse analysis consists of four phases which the authors conducted. The data set that is to be analyzed is defined in phase 1 (Cukier, et al., 2009, p. 178). The authors defined the data set to be news articles, blogs, and YouTube videos. The data was to be collected from Google News search, regular Google search, and a search on YouTube. Phase 2 is content analysis and coding. Further it was placed into subcategories and aggregate dimensions. Phase 3 is reading and interpreting the observations. Phase 2 and 3 are iterative, the authors went back and forth multiple times. Subcategories and aggregate dimensions were changed. Phase 4 explains the findings (Cukier, et al., 2009, p. 182-184).

Figure 4. Phases of media discourse analysis

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│     Media Discourse Analysis     │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
         │
┌─────────────────────────┐
│       Phase 1:          │
│     Define data set     │
└─────────────────────────┘
         │
┌─────────────────────────┐
│       Phase 2:          │
│  Content analysis and   │
│        coding           │
└─────────────────────────┘
         │
┌─────────────────────────┐
│       Phase 3:          │
│     Interpreting        │
│     observations        │
└─────────────────────────┘
         │
┌─────────────────────────┐
│       Phase 4:          │
│    Explain findings     │
└─────────────────────────┘
```
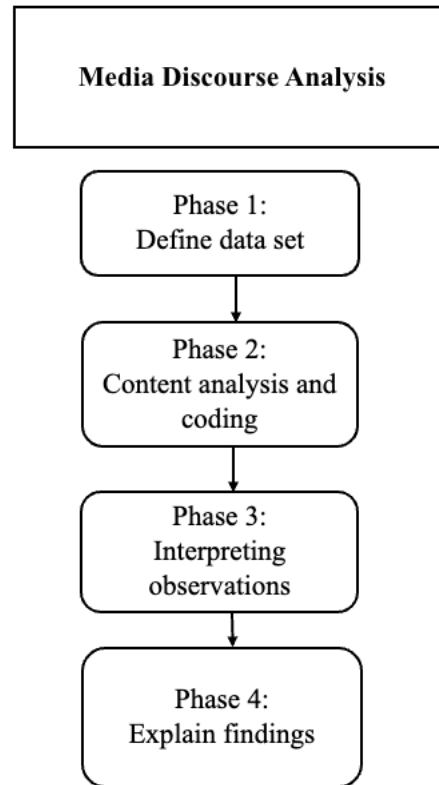
As with any research method, media discourse analysis has its advantages and disadvantages that the research must consider and account for. One of the biggest advantages of critical discourse analysis is that it is applicable in most settings, while it is context-specific (Mogashoa, 2014). The substantial number of settings applied underlines that the method is highly applicable. The method can be applied in several settings and always be context-specific of the medium it is applied to. Critical media discourse enables studying social structures such as identity, power, and dominations directly through the language (Hur et al., 2019, p. 527). This is highly applicable to the topic brand boycott. Social structures such as inequalities between people or power differences are common reasons for brand boycott.

The disadvantage is the subjective nature of the method, everything regarding the analysis is up to the subjective interpretation of the researcher (Mogashoa, 2014). Subjective methods with lack of rigor are common criticism of media discourse analysis. Using both a qualitative and quantitative approach can solve this issue (Cukier et al., 2009, p.181). The many ways of performing discourse analysis can also be viewed as a disadvantage. When there is a

lack of standard of how you should perform the method, there can be inconsistencies between different studies and researchers. This in turn, can confuse both readers and researchers (Mogashoa, 2014).

In this study, the focus is to study brand boycott and how it is portrayed in the media. It is a very relevant topic, with changes and new boycotts emerging seemingly every week. Based on the data, brand boycotts are influenced by geopolitical events like the Hamas-Israel war, political relationships between countries and the war between political ideologies in the United States. All these factors share circulation of misinformation and fake news. Actors in the public sphere may have their agenda by spreading information that fits their agenda. Like Habermas stated, this can be a democratic problem due to the power gathered in the public sphere (Cukier et al., 2009, p.176).

After the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, a transition occurred in brand boycotts. The number of boycotts and the media attention increased. This is one of the reasons why a critical media discourse study of the contemporary topic brand boycott is vital. By using media discourse, the authors were able to conduct "up to date" data on the topic. News articles and YouTube videos regarding brand boycott are posted frequently. If the study were to use academic articles as the source of secondary data, the data would not have been as current. Getting up to date data was crucial, as the factors that affect brand boycotts change rapidly. A company being boycotted today might not be boycotted next week, and vice versa.

Secondary data covers a broad sample (Vartanian, 2010, p.9). Analyzing this broad sample allowed the authors to gain a broad perspective on brand boycott. A broad perspective is an advantage when the topic is complex and dynamic, such as brand boycott. Figure 5 below demonstrates the elements of the data collection process.

Figure 5. Data Collection process
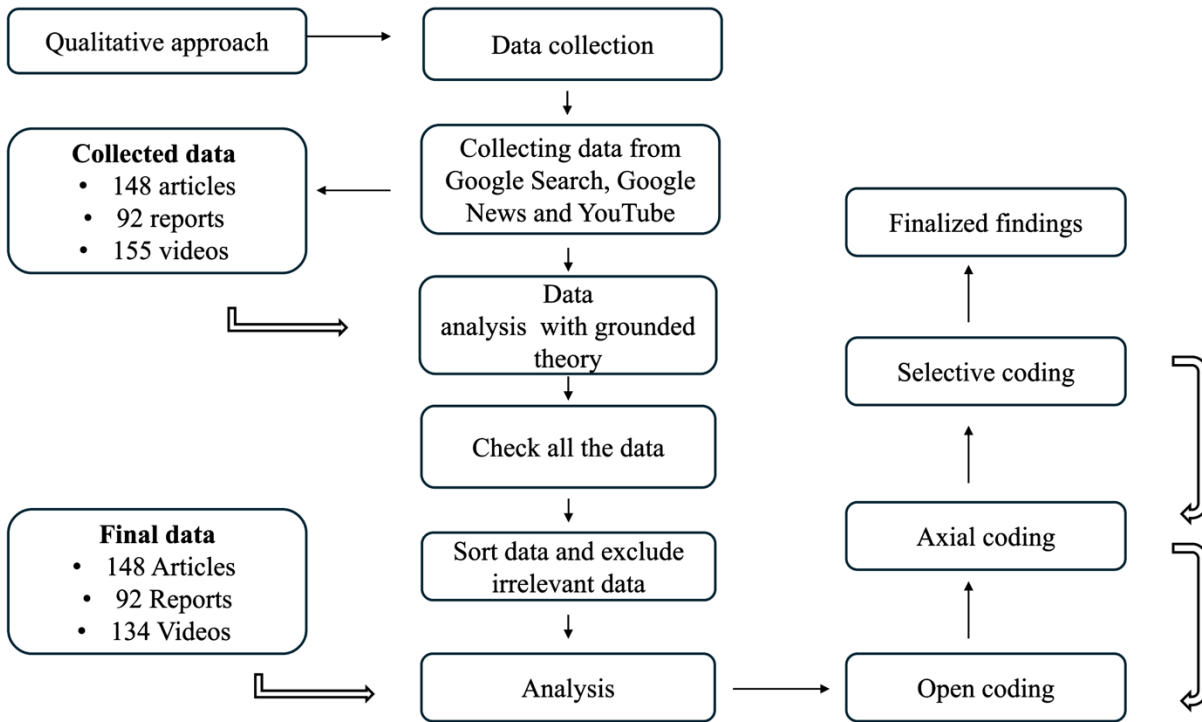
The model above illustrates the media discourse as a process. The data was collected from three different mediums, Google Search, Google News and YouTube, with a qualitative approach. Collectively, there were 148 news articles, 92 reports and 155 videos remaining after the collection process. The data was analyzed and sorted by using grounded theory. Final data contained 142 articles, 77 reports and 134 videos. The data was read through before using open coding's to capture the most important aspects of each article, report and video. Further, the data was sorted into axial and selective coding's before finalizing the findings.

On 16th of May, the authors did another search on Google and Google News, using the key word "brand boycott." This was done to ensure that the data was as up to date as possible. 7 new news articles from Google and Google News were added. The added articles were coded and added to the relevant categories in the excel sheet.

3.2 Data collection

Secondary data is the data used in this study. The data collected were news articles, YouTube videos, and blogs and reports that appeared during the Google and Google News search.

Using these types of secondary data gives the research a global view. Despite the fact that this is a great advantage, there are some limitations. One common limitation is, that the data was collected for another purpose, and not to answer the specific research question of interest (Johnston, 2014). Secondly, the researchers who collect secondary data have not participated in the collection process of the primary data and do not know exactly how it was conducted (Johnston, 2014). Therefore, the secondary researcher is not aware whether the data collection has had any limitation such as low response rate or other relevant problems affecting the outcome (Johnston, 2014).

As mentioned, the data collection is based on articles, videos and news from the internet related to brand boycott. The keyword used when collecting the data was "*brand boycott*" which aligns with the theme of this study. By using this keyword, the authors were able to gather various data that relates to brand boycott, that were useful when investigating the research question.

The data was divided into three sections A, B and C, depending on which medium. Section A consists of news articles obtained from the platforms Google Search and Google News. Section B contains all other kinds of information at Google Search related to the keyword "*brand boycott*". This is everything from blogs, company websites and related published material. Lastly, section C which is all videos related to brand boycotts obtained from the platform YouTube.

When sorting the data some of the articles were not relevant to brand boycott and were therefore not used when conducting the analysis. The news collected in section A was conducted from newspapers all over the world, giving the study a global view. Simultaneously, one must be critical to news due to today's spread of fake news. Fake news can be defined as either completely false or containing some misleading information, and usually circulates online (Bakir & McStay, 2017).

As mentioned, media discourse takes place in either written or oral form through a broadcast platform. (O'keeffe, 2013). The data collected were articles, news, blogs and videos. All the articles and videos collected was in English, making it easy to discard articles and videos in other languages. The only obstacle when basing all the information in English language, is the lack of geographical diversity. Most of the data collected was from either Europe or the US.

The program Trint was used to transcribe the YouTube videos from section B. Trint turns audios and videos into text by using AI and has up to 99% accuracy (Trint, n.d.). First, the videos were exported from links to MP4 files by using SnapDownloader and sorted by number. Next, the MP4 files were transcribed in Trint. The text made it easier to conduct the coding in section B.

3.3 Data analysis

Grounded theory is a methodology developed from social sciences. It was initially developed in the 1960´s with the idea of challenging established truths in social science. Researchers tended to use only a few numbers of well-known theories; students were trained to use this small number of theories as well (Hodkinson , 2015). Grounded theory is about developing new theories from real-world settings (Oktay, 2012, p.5). In grounded theory, the researcher is not concerned with testing hypotheses developed from existing theoretical frameworks. This as is common in quantitative research (Dunne, 2011). Few conceptual studies are done on brand boycotts. That is why grounded theory is a suitable approach, allowing the authors to induct new theories from real-world settings. The real-world setting was the media articles and YouTube videos. Analyzing data through grounded theory is not a linear process. Data collection and analysis will happen simultaneously. The researchers will go back and forth numerous times between data collection and analysis. These factors can make grounded theory a challenging method to use for researchers (Dunne, 2011).

Gioia's method is a version of grounded theory. It is a qualitative method of analyzing data, where the researchers develop codes and themes when analyzing (Gioia & Magnani, 2023). The data analysis in Gioia's method consists of three stages: creation of first-order codes, second-order codes and overall themes. Compared to other forms of qualitative research such as case studies, Gioia's method has great academic rigor, because of its structured and standardized way of conducting the analysis (Gioia & Magnani, 2023). In academic research, Gioia's method is

often used to develop new theories or concepts. When developing new concepts or theories it is difficult to find the right balance between the two, while simultaneously meeting the high expectations for rigor (Gioia & Magnani, 2023).

The data analysis consisted of three steps. First, open codes were generated from articles, videos and reports. All the articles, videos and reports were put in order in a shared excel file. The authors read all the articles and generated the open codes individually. Afterwards they got together and combined the open codes and agreeing on what the most relevant open codes were. From the combined open-codes, 8 subcategories were constructed. Three aggregate categories were constructed from the subcategories: Reasons for brand boycott, outcomes of brand boycott, and strategies to respond to brand boycott.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are viewed as two of the most important factors when assessing data quality in qualitative research. Validity and reliability originate from quantitative research and has not always been clear how to apply the concepts when doing qualitative research (Vu, 2021, p. 1). Reliability and validity are clarifying the trustworthiness of the data (Coleman, 2023). There are several definitions of reliability in the literature, (Vu, 2021, p. 1) defines it as "*the degree of* consistency *with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions."* Reliability in qualitative research can also be described as "*dependability," "confirmability" or "consistency."* (Coleman, 2023). Ensuring reliability in qualitative studies has traditionally been more challenging than in quantitative studies, due to the lack of statistical measures that can be utilized (Coleman, 2023).

Validity can be defined as "*the truth"* (Vu, 2021, p.6 & 7). Another definition is "*the degree to which an instrument is measuring what it is intending to measure"* (Long & Johnson, 2000, p. 31). In qualitative research, different concepts of validity are utilized, like trustworthiness, worthwhileness, and credibility (Vu, 2021, p.1). Researchers have addressed issues related to validity in qualitative research for an extended period of time (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 319)

Regarding validity, there are two main approaches researchers may follow, transactional validity and transformational validity (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 320). Transactional validity is about using certain techniques and processes during the data collection period to ensure that the

qualitative research is credible. Member checking is a common technique, where the collected data is sent back to the interviewer so he can look through it and ensure credibility. Achieving credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is part of the process of seeking the truth. (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 322). Techniques are used to ensure:" *an accurate reflection of reality*" (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 322).

Transformational validity explains the challenge of ensuring validity in qualitative research. Using certain techniques to achieve validity might not be sufficient or the correct approach. Transformational validity revolves around the self-inquiry and the self-reflections of the researchers in the data collection process. Researchers are encouraged to challenge established truths in society (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 324). Challenging established truths include making "*analytical practices"* where the truth is deconstructed and reconstructed (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 324). As there is no clear definition of transformational validity and no clear process of conducting it, researchers must be careful.

Transactional validity was used in this study to achieve trustworthiness and the truth. Since the data collected was secondary data, there was no way to perform a member check, by feeding the data back to the participant or the interviewer. Instead, the authors went back and forth with the data to ensure credibility. The goal of test-retest reliability is to make sure that the data measured what it was intended to measure (Polit, 2014, p. 1716). It calculates reliability by determining how similar the results of repeated measures are (Thyer, 2009, p. 63). To ensure test-retest reliability, the authors went over the data several times to ensure consistency in the findings.

Parallel form reliability is a form of reliability achieved by using several versions of an assessment tool and testing them on the same group of individuals (Mohajan, 2017, p. 69). The result from the two versions can then be compared with it each other. (Mohajan, 2017, p. 69). To achieve parallel-form reliability, the results must be highly correlated (Devillis, 2006). In this study, there are three different categories, reasons, outcomes and response strategy. YouTube, Google News and Google Scholar, was the assessment tools used and all the data was coded individually by the researchers. The open codes which were measured by reasons, outcome, and response strategy, were consistent when conducting the codes. Results from the coding categories are therefore highly correlated. As shown in **Appendix VIII**, there are few

highlighted codes in the first order construct. Showing that the codes from the three different media platforms do not vary and gives somewhat the same results. In other words, the result of the data is highly correlated meaning that the consistency is high.

Internal consistency reliability results from several different data are enhanced by all the items consistently measuring the same construct (Wriesley et al., 2004, p. 908). According to Wriesley et al., (2004, p. 908), *"internal consistency is a form of reliability and is most relevant to performance measures that consist of multiple items that are summarized into an overall score"*. In this case, the internal reliability is the coding of data from Google news, YouTube, and blogs. The same construct, brand boycott, was measured in each of the three platforms. This strengthens the results, due to the variety of platforms and the coding's all focusing on the same aspects, which is reasons, outcomes and response strategy of brand boycott. Each of the different platforms provided a wide range of data from different countries. The global approach combined with the variety of channels strengthens the trustworthiness of the results.

Split-half reliability aims to test the internal consistency of a test, and measures each item accounts for equally, with regards to what is supposed to be measured (Aden et al., 2019, p.4). The split-half test is conducted by dividing the data into two groups, and then compare the score or results from the two data sets (Wahatule, 2023, p. 6). In this study, the data was divided between the two researchers, and each coded all the data separately before it was merged in "Both Codes" section. The researchers had the same measures, reasons, outcomes and response strategy of brand boycott, when coding the data. After coding the data separately, the most relevant codlings were collected in the section called "both codes". By separating the data and individually coding it, before merging it together, strengthens the reliability of the data. Using a split-half test provides the opportunity to differentiate the coding's and increases the trustworthiness of the overall results. Below figure 6 shows an overview of reliability and validity in the study.

Figure 6. Overview of reliability and validity
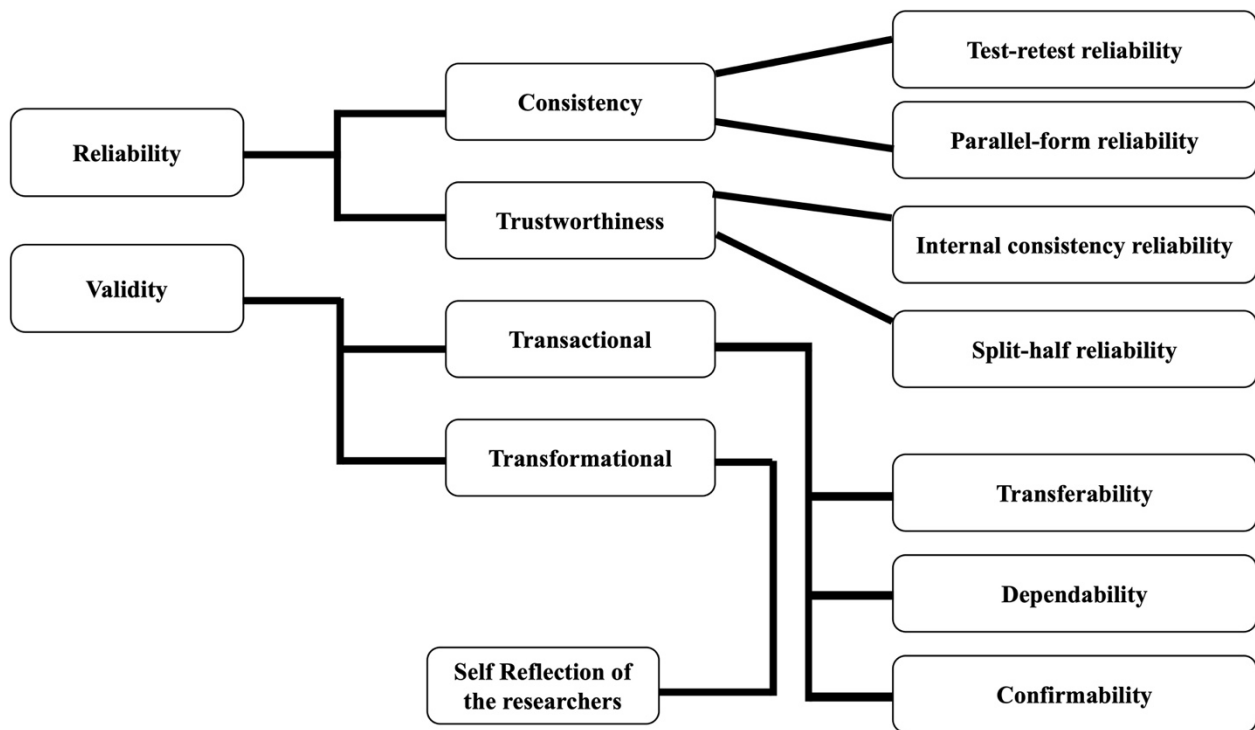
Transferability means that **f**indings from qualitative studies should be transferable. Meaning that the reader should be able to judge whether the findings are applicable to other settings or not (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). The term can also be referred to as external validity (Rolfe, 2006, p. 305). To achieve this, the study must include a great description of the participants, which allows the readers to make comparisons. With the aim of accomplishing this, the authors took a significant number of measures. Firstly, the authors collected data from several different sources. Next, they analyzed the data individually before unifying the findings together in aggregate dimensions. In the process the coding's where documented and analyzed thoroughly to make it easier for the reader to judge if the findings are transferable.

Dependability can be defined as consistency in qualitative research (Janis, 2022). If the study was repeated in another context, the results would be the same (Shenton, 2004). The details of the study was disclosed in great detail in order to achieve dependability. The research design

can be viewed as sort of a blueprint on how to replicate the study in another setting (Shenton, 2004). The researchers examined the data in detail, by first analyzing each data set individually before breaking it down and reviewing it together. By doing it in this order, the researchers made sure that the data and results was consistent through the qualitive research. In other words, the researchers achieved high dependability.

Confirmability is objectivity. A challenge with qualitative research is that it is hard to avoid subjectivity. Surveys and questionnaires are designed by humans, which makes it very challenging to avoid subjectivity (Shenton, 2004). It is essential that individual measures are established to make sure that the findings are "*the experiences and ideas of informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher*" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). The authors did not use any informants since the data was secondary, but the principle of objectivity remains the same.

The authors took several measures to ensure trustworthiness of the data. A shared excel file was used to generate the open codes. First, the authors coded the data individually before they combined the open codes. This was done to ensure that the authors were understanding the data set in the same way. Coding individually first, and then combining, ensured a higher level of consistency. The shared excel file found in the appendix shows step by step how the authors came up with the subcategories and aggregate dimensions. If this study were to be replicated in another setting, the researchers could use this to achieve the same results.

4. Results

In this section, the findings of the study are presented. Three aggregate categories were found: reasons for brand boycott, outcomes of brand boycott and company response.

4.1 Reasons for Brand Boycott

Every brand boycott starts with an event that triggers the boycott, in other words a reason for why the brand boycott is happening. Reasons for brand boycott is an aggregate dimension where the different reasons for brand boycotts are broken down into four sub-categories. To understand brand boycotts as a concept, one must understand the underlying reasons behind brand boycotts. The authors found that the reason behind brand boycotts can be explained by environmental reasons, war, social reasons, and political reasons. In the next subsection, all four of them will be discussed in detail. Figure 7 below shows the structure for reasons for brand boycott.

Figure 7. Reasons for brand boycott
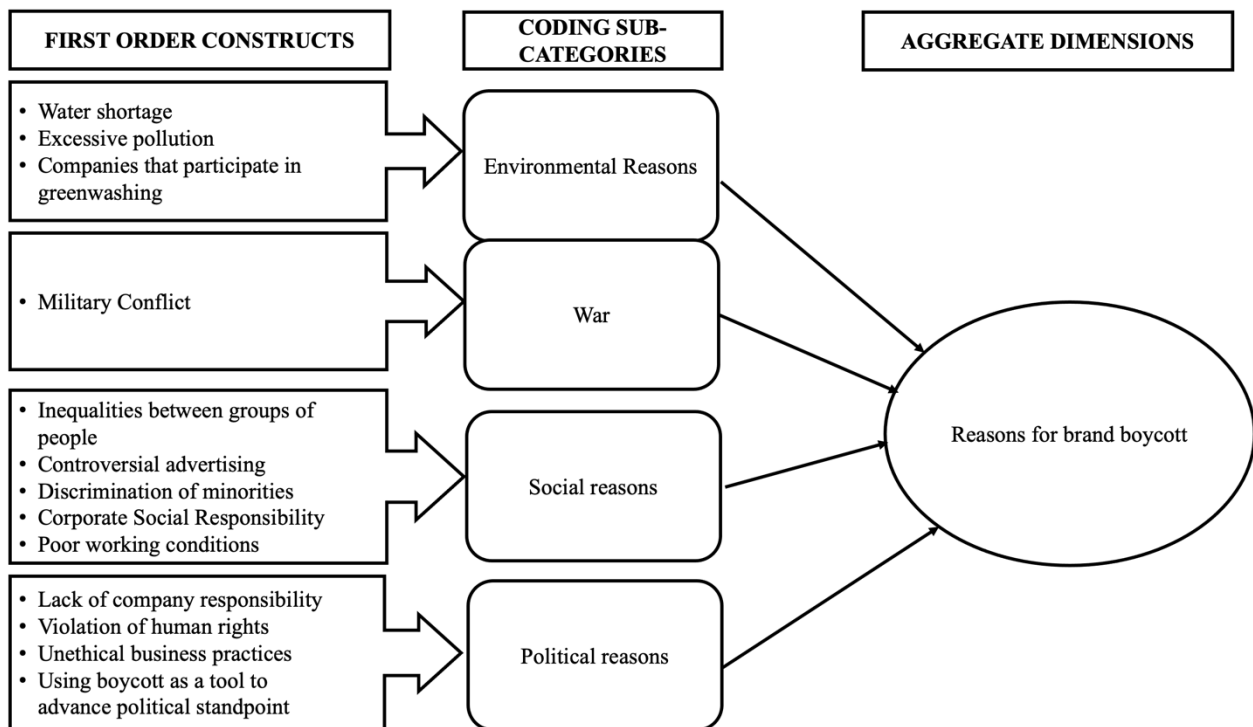
4.1.1 Environmental Reasons

An increased consumer focus on sustainability leads to an increased pressure on brands. Brands that are found to engage in environmental misconduct will be boycotted.

Companies that participate in greenwashing are one of the top reasons leading to brand boycott. A survey in the UK conducted by KPMG revealed that over half of the people surveyed were prepared to boycott a company that was greenwashing. The respondents were asked to define greenwashing, where two thirds answered: "*organization making false, exaggerated or unclear claims about the environmental sustainability of specific products or services*" (C63, para. 1). Dentsu International and Microsoft Advertisements did a study about sustainable consumption where they surveyed consumers. 59% of the consumers stated that they would boycott companies that did not prioritize the environment. 87% said climate change was their number one concern (C42, para. 1).

Excessive pollution is an issue in many industries. Fast fashion is an industry that is receiving a lot of criticism for its environmental impact and excessive pollution. To boycott fast fashion brand Boohoo or not is the topic of the video (B37). It highlights the environmental impact of producing clothes and selling them at a very low price (B37). In the long run, this high-paced production will not be sustainable.

A lack of regard for environmental consequences of the company´s operations is a common reason for brand boycotts. Unilever is a company that has been boycotted on numerous occasions. The reason behind the boycotts is usually the company´s involvement with palm oil and the environmental impact that stems from the production of palm oil (A139, para. 13). Production of palm oil has very negative environmental consequences and historically, Unilever has clearly prioritized profit over this.

4.1.2 War

Military conflict is a traditional boycott reason. Brands linked to a conflict run a very high risk of a brand boycott. Western brands that are linked to Israel are being boycotted in many Muslim countries. The link is often ambiguous, and many companies have tried to defend themselves against the accusations. Brands like McDonald´s, Starbucks, and KFC are boycotted in Muslim countries. The Israeli franchise of McDonald´s provided free food to the Israeli

Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers, which triggered the boycott (A121, para. 10). Starbucks was boycotted due to their lawsuit of the labor union Starbucks Workers United (SWU). SWU posted a tweet in solidarity with Palestine, Starbucks then sued SWU.

A boycott campaign that is receiving much attention now is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. BDS is a movement that protests the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the Westbank (A52, para. 5). The aim is to make companies divest from Israel and the West Bank. BDS aims for boycott of corporations and institutions which they believe are supporting Israel. Supporting Israel means "*contributing of financing, goods, and services, or cultural backing.*" (A52, para. 13). BDS specifically targets a small number of companies to maximize impact. Companies that have been targeted are HP, Chevron, and Carrefour (A107, para 8). BDS picks their targets carefully, with a set of criteria: level of complicity and the ability to generate media coverage. A company directly involved with the IDF is more complicit than a company selling goods in Israel. If a company can attract media attention, other boycott movements might buy into the BDS boycott (A107, para. 9). BDS has been around for two decades, but the media attention it has received has increased exponentially after the Israel-Hamas war broke out in October 2022. BDS is a decentralized organization, where activists in different countries can pick their boycott targets (A52, para. 5).

4.1.3 Social Reasons

Social reasons are ongoing issues in society. Social reasons are often very contested in the public sphere, with strong opinions on both sides. It can range from LGBTQ rights to how consumers view companies CSR practices. Brands often get involved in social issues by taking a political stance. Taking a stance will lead to a brand boycott from consumers disagreeing with your political stance.

Inequalities between groups of people are a common boycott reason. Marginalized minorities are often members of the LGBTQ community or transpersons. A common boycott reason is brand collaboration with transpersons. Brands often collaborate with transpersons to reach liberal consumers or to take a political stance. While this may go down well with liberal consumers, conservative consumers may often initiate a brand boycott.

Controversial advertising leads to boycotts. Australian surf company Rip Curl collaborated with a transperson, which led to boycott from consumers (A68, para. 2). Enraged consumers filmed themselves burning Rip Curl gear and posting it on social media. The collaboration turned into a nightmare for Rip Curl. Bud Light sent trans influencer Dylan Mulvaney a personalized can of beer, to celebrate her first year of womanhood (A2, para. 1). This led to one of the most well-known brand boycotts of the last two years. Racism is another social issue that the world is still struggling with. Racism or racist content is another reason why brands is being boycotted. Both Facebook and Twitter have been boycotted by advertisers due to their content being showed next to racist or hateful content. Apple, IBM, Disney, Warner Bros and Discovery are among companies that suspended advertising (A97, para. 1). If companies' advertisements are being displayed next to hateful content on the platforms, some consumers will link the company to the racist message. Racism is still a massive social issue in 2024. Even the slightest chance of being associated with racism may hurt the brand tremendously.

Corporate social responsibility has changed from the world of "*clean air and water, food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless and support of the arts into the more dangerous realm of social and political activism" (*A23, para. 2). Now, brands are expected to take political stances on contested social issues. This change in corporate social responsibility inevitably leads to brand boycotts when companies are taking a political stance. Consumers disagreeing with the stance will boycott.

Poor working conditions lead to boycotts. Companies are being boycotted due to poor working conditions. Frozen food company Army´s Kitchen employees have been calling for a boycott of the company. The reason is a long history of poor working conditions, lack of bathroom breaks, and punishment for taking sick days (A101, para. 1). Some employees have lost fingers and limbs due to accidents on the job (A101, para. 2). The Labor Union Teamster threatened Anheuser Buch with a boycott if they did not sign a new contract that improved the working conditions of their workers (C62, para. 1).

4.1.4 Political Reasons

Politics affect everything around us, including brands. Both geopolitical relationships and domestic politics are reasons for why consumers participate in brand boycotts. Domestically,

brands will get boycotted due to political disagreements. Globally, brands are often caught in the crossfire between tense geopolitical relationships between two or more countries.

Violation of human rights is an issue in many places in the world. The tense political relationship between the US and China has led to several boycotts. China have been accused of using forced labor to produce cotton in Xinjang. Western brands like Nike and Adidas have been threatened with boycotts in China due to their oppression to this forced labor (A21, para. 4).

Lack of company responsibility will upset consumers. Facebook owner Meta was boycotted by many large companies due to their inability or unwillingness to stop hate speech on their platform. Civil rights organizations Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) started the boycott campaign "stop hate for profit." (A124, Para 1). The motivation behind the campaign is Facebook´s "*repeated failure to meaningfully address the vast proliferation of hate on its platforms" (*A124, para. 2). Facebook did not want to take the responsibility many consumers expected. This debate is tied to the political situation in the United States, where some conservatives claim that the social media platforms are censoring conservative content in addition to hate speech.

Using boycotts as a tool to advance political standpoint. Brands that take a political stance to either the left or right politically tend to get boycotted by consumers from the different side of the political spectrum. Ivanka Trump, the daughter of former US president Donald Trump has a clothing line. The clothing line was boycotted by consumers to protest the divisive politics of her dad (A11, para 5). Retailers Nordstrom, Neiman Marcus and Burlington Coat Factory stopped selling Ivanka Trump products due to the movement (A18, Para 4). The boycott campaign is called "Grab your Wallet" which is a reference to one of Donald Trump´s infamous comments. Ivanka Trump claimed that sales were booming despite the boycott campaign. These claims were met with skepticism by some people, questioning if it was true (A11, para. 1).

4.2 Responding to Brand Boycott

Companies can employ different strategies to avoid getting boycotted. It is very much a choice between actively engaging in social issues or trying to stay as neutral as possible in order not to offend any customers. The aggregate category responding to brand boycott consists of two subcategories, boycotted brand and vulnerable to boycott. A boycotted brand is a brand that is experiencing a brand boycott. A brand that is vulnerable to boycotts is a brand that is operating

in similar industries as the boycotted brands but has not yet been boycotted. Both subcategories consist of active and passive response strategy. Active and passive strategies for boycotted and vulnerable brands will be discussed in the next subsection. Figure 8 illustrates the data structure for responding to brand boycott.

Figure 8. Responding to brand boycott
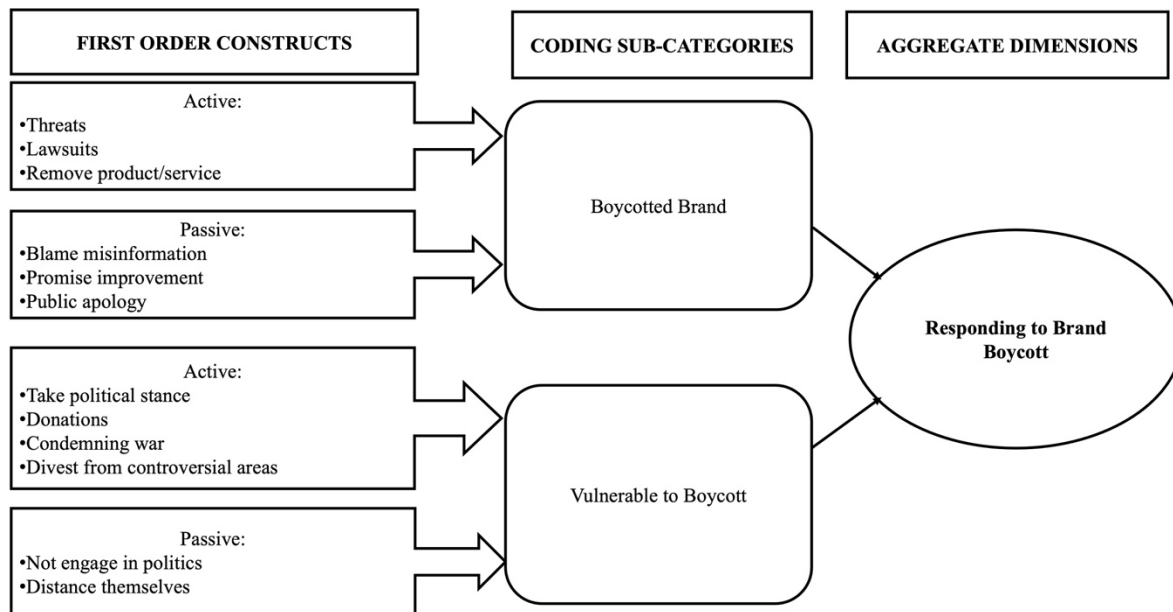
4.2.1 Boycotted Brand

As mentioned, a boycotted brand is a brand that is currently being boycotted. The brand is now looking for strategies to respond. A boycotted brand can either respond with an active or passive strategy.

Active response strategy

Threats is a very active response to a brand boycott. Elon Musk threatened to sue the US group Media Matters that investigates hate speech on platform X (A65, para. 1). Companies were suspending advertising on X at the time due to concerns over hate speech. Elon Musk stated that he would: "f*ile a thermonuclear lawsuit" against Media Matters "the split-second court opens on Monday" (*A65, para. 2).

Lawsuits are a common response to being boycotted. Some brands quickly file a lawsuit when experiencing a brand boycott. Western companies have been boycotted in many Muslim countries after the Israel-Hamas war erupted. McDonald´s sued the Malaysian branch of BDS for

alleged defamation during the boycott (A44, para. 10). Filing a lawsuit like McDonald´s did is a very strong response to the boycott. The company is stating that they disagree with the boycott and take no responsibility.

Remove product/service that is controversial. Disney was boycotted. Target stopped selling Disney products in their stores (A73, para. 1). Australian Surf Brand Rip Curl was boycotted after using a transperson in a promotion of women´s surfing. The promotion led to a massive backlash. Rip Curl withdrew the promotion to exercise damage control (A89, para. 2).

Passive response strategy

Blaming misinformation is a common response for brands experiencing a boycott. There have been several cases where the companies subjected to boycotts are blaming the boycotts on misinformation. Coca Cola Malaysia stated that the boycotts were based on misinformation and only would hurt local workers (B74). McDonald´s similarly stated that the boycott was based on misinformation. The firm is utilizing the franchise model, where different franchises run as independent organizations. They have publicly stated that all franchises are "*proudly run by local owners*" (A51, para. 1). Using this response strategy is an effort to mitigate the boycott damage, while also educating consumers. The US headquarters of McDonald´s have very little to say about whether McDonald´s Israel donates food to IDF or not. Many of the consumers participating in the boycott seemingly do not buy into this, and/or chose to ignore it as the boycott continues. This highlights the complexity of boycotts of multinational brands where small actions of local owners may have large consequences.

Promise improvement is a way of trying to mitigate the initial backlash from a brand boycott. Facebook publicly stated that they would improve their mechanism for detecting hate speech on the platform after being boycotted (C55, para. 4). In addition, Facebook stated that they would seek an external audit (B95).

Public apology and try to move on is the most passive response strategy a brand can respond with when facing a brand boycott. This is done in an effort to try to move on as quickly as possible. Zara apologized publicly and tried to move on after being boycotted after their controversial advertisement backfired (A46, para. 1).

4.2.2 Vulnerable to Boycott

A brand that is vulnerable to boycott is a brand that is operating in a similar industry as the boycotted the brand. The risk of a boycott is high, and the brand is now looking for strategies to deal with brand boycotts prior to it happening. A brand that is vulnerable to boycott may apply an active or passive response strategy prior to the boycott.

Active Response Strategy

Take political stance. Examples of this are donations to a political party and or cause. By donating to a political party, a brand reveals their values. A company in America donating to the Republican Party will upset a liberal consumer. A 24 urges companies to pursue an active strategy, the authors claiming it will benefit companies in the long run. After the Parkland school shooting in Florida companies like Dicks and Walmart's stopped selling assault rifles. Delta, United Airlines and Enterprise stopped giving discounts to National Rifle Association (NRA) members (A24, para. 3). By doing this, the companies clearly stated their values. The brands believed in stricter gun control in the United States. The Israeli McDonald´s branch donated free food to the IDF, which led to the international boycott of McDonald´s (A104, para. 3). While this portrays the values of McDonald's Israel, it does not portray the values of McDonald´s as an organization.

Donations. By donating to a cause, the brand takes a clear stand. This happens prior to being boycotted. The major boycott of McDonald´s started after the Israeli branch donated thousands of meals to IDF soldiers (A104, para. 3). Professor Joseph Sonnenfield from Yale tracks companies that have donated or pledged money to Israel (A59, para. 22). News outlet Al Jazeera took this list and narrowed it down to 30 companies that donated money to Israel or close associates of Israel. This list includes Disney, Johnson & Johnson and Blackstone (A59, para. 23).

Condemning war. By condemning war or military attacks, brands take a clear stand in active conflicts. Shortly after Hamas attacked Israel, Walt Disney Company, Amazon, and Pfizer released statements condemning the attacks (A55, para. 2). By releasing the statements, the brands stated what side they were on.

Divestment from controversial areas. A hot topic is companies operating in countries involved in war or contested geographical areas. Many western companies divested from Russia after their invasion of Ukraine, while some chose to continue operations. Ben & Jerry´s announced that they would not sell any products in illegal Israeli occupations. Effectively, they would divest from the controversial areas (B90). Divesting is a very strong statement from the company. A significant number of western companies have divested its operations in Russia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (B111). Not divesting from a controversial area puts a company at risk of being boycotted.

Passive response strategy

Not engage in politics. By staying out of social issues they will not alienate certain consumer groups, as you inevitably will do when taking a stance. By not taking a stance, the risk of being boycotted lowers. Not taking a stance does not mean ignoring potential boycotts, where brands can employ many strategies to be as neutral as possible. There have been examples of companies trying to take a stance, but it has backfired massively. Anheuser-Busch had a collaboration with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney, who they sent a Bud Light can (A9, para. 1). This immediately backfired, and a boycott emerged from the right side of the political spectrum. The boycott has had some real impact on the financials of Anheuser-Busch. US earnings before interest and taxes were expected to fall 26% in 2023 (A9, para. 1). Anheuser-Busch tried to reach out to new consumer groups with the collaboration, but they were not successful. Examples like this may encourage companies to engage in passive response strategy. Some companies may view not taking a stance as safer. In addition, some brands have lawyers review content before releasing it in order not to offend any consumers (A122, para. 1). Sensitive issues such as religion and politics are best to be avoided. Indian Fast Moving Consumer Goods company Dabur was boycotted after they showed a lesbian couple in a commercial (A122, para. 6). This is the type of content a strategist might advise against releasing.

Distance themselves. There are several cases where companies have publicly released statements where they have distanced themselves from any controversial events. The captain of the U19 South African cricket team came up with some controversial comments regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict. There was a rumor that apparel brand Diadora would not sponsor games where the captain was involved due to his comments (A1, para. 1). Diadora went out and

publicly stated that this was not true, that way distancing themselves from the boycott. By publicly stating that they had nothing to do with the boycott, they tried to stay away from any controversy. McDonald´s and Starbucks have been facing boycotts after Israel-Hamas war broke out. Both companies have distanced themselves from Israel publicly (A121, para. 4).

4.3 Outcomes of Brand Boycott

Brand boycotts are complex processes that presents outcomes for multiple stakeholders on several layers. Every boycott comes with consequences for the boycotted brand and consumers. Outcomes of brand boycott consist of four subcategories: financial outcomes, reputational outcomes, sales outcomes, and consumer behavior. All subcategories will be discussed in great detail in the next subsection. Figure 9 showcases the different outcomes of brand boycott, broken down into outcomes for the consumer and organizational outcomes.

Figure 9. Outcomes of brand boycott
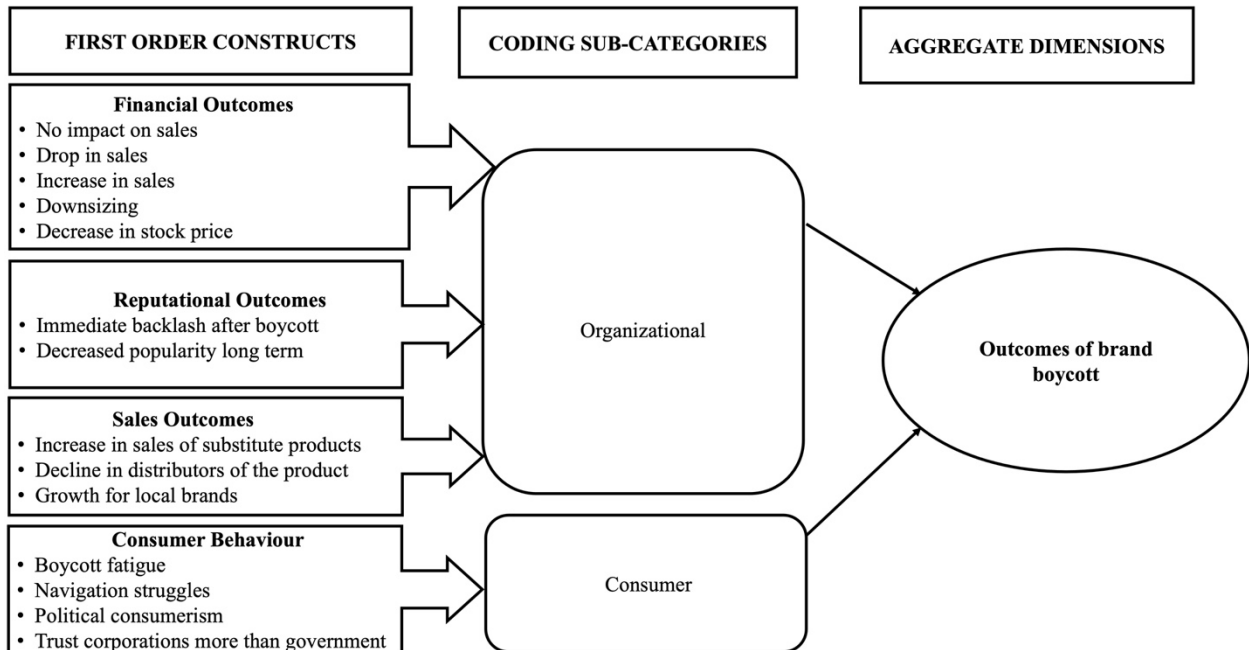
4.3.1 Financial outcomes

Every brand boycott has financial outcomes for the organization. Financial outcomes can be loss of sales, downsizing, or decreasing stock price. Layoffs and downsizing are common consequences for the organizations.

No impact on sales is observed after some brand boycotts. Seemingly it depends on boycott to boycott whether the financials of the brand are hurt. Boycotts tend to have little impact on sales (A6, para. 2). Numerous companies have experienced a drop in sales after being boycotted.

Drop in sales is a common financial outcome. Bud Light parent company Anheuser-Buch experienced a long-lasting boycott which impacted the bottom line of the parent company. 2023 earnings before interest and tax were expected to fall 26% in 2023 (A9, para. 1). Starbucks experienced a significant drop in foot traffic and sales in Malaysia after being boycotted (A30, Para 1). Starbucks slashed their global sales growth forecast from 6% to 4%, down from previous range of 5%-7% (A78, para 6). American retailer Target reported its first drop in sales in 6 years after being boycotted by conservative consumers in 2023 (A64, para. 1). McDonald´s reported their first quarterly sales miss in 4 years after the boycotts. This was due to slowing sales in their Asia and Middle East division (A80, para. 1).

Increase in sales after the boycott. That is due to consumers that disagree with the boycott try to fight the boycott by purchasing more. US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocazio-Cortex publicly stated that she would boycott food producer Goya after the Goya CEO supported Trump. Goya claimed that sales increased after the boycott (A26, para. 3). This is common in the United States where consumers often boycott due to their political view. Conservatives will boycott liberal companies, and liberal consumers will boycott conservative companies. When the boycott happens, the opposite group will buy more to support the company.

Downsizing is a consequence of lower sales. Thousands of local McDonalds´s workers are at risk of losing their jobs in Egypt due to the boycotts (A81, para. 1). Layoffs are linked to the negative financial outcomes of the boycotts. Less sales inevitably lead to layoffs. Which is an unintended consequence of brand boycotts, as the boycotters are trying to hurt the brand. In many cases it is the local workers that end up taking the impact. A Starbucks Egypt employee stated that they had kept their jobs for now, but their benefits had been impacted negatively (A81, para. 9).

Decrease in stock price. If the parent company of the boycotted brand is a public company, the stock price of the parent company is in some cases affected. Starbuck lost $11 billion in market value during one month in the fall of 2023 (A134, para. 7). Target stocks were

struggling after being boycotted by consumers from both political sides. The company lost $10 billions of market value during a ten-day period after being boycotted (B50, para. 1).

4.3.2 Reputational outcomes

Brand boycotts tend to generate significant media coverage. With the media spotlight, reputational outcomes for the brand often follows. The reputation of a company might be hurt more than the financials. Some experts claim that boycotts usually have little impact on sales, but the reputational damage can hurt the company long term (A6, para. 2).

Immediate backlash after boycott. Many companies have experienced backlash after releasing an advertisement. Dove partnered with Black Lives Matter (BLM) activist Zyhana Bryant, which immediately resulted in backlash from conservatives. In article A5, Fox News host Lisa Montgomery wrote a very negative article in Daily Mail as a response. Other times, the backlash comes on social media. Rapper Lil Nas X announced a partnership with jeans company Wrangler. Angry customers used social media as a platform to announce their dissatisfaction with the collaboration (A28, para. 3).

Decreased popularity long term. Australian surf brand Rip Curl received massive backlash from customers after collaborating with a transperson. Angry customers published videos and pictures of themselves burning and destroying Rip Curl gear (A68, para. 2). The collaboration turned into a PR-nightmare for Rip Curl, which is hurting the reputation of the company. Australian brand Bonds used a non-binary model for a bikini advertisement, which led to significant backlash from consumers (A84, para. 1). Outraged consumers took to social media platforms and stated that they would never buy from Bonds again (A84, para. 4). In some cases, a brand boycott will hurt the public´s view of the brand. Bud Light was the most popular beer in the United States until they were boycotted. In July of 2023 Bud Light lost its spot as United States most popular beer to Modelo (A7, para. 3). A disastrous boycott will often have spillover effects on the management of the brand. People from the Bud Light marketing department were put on leave after the boycott (B32, para. 2). Some brands released statements after the attack on Israel from Hamas. Walt Disney, Amazon, and Pfizer all released statements condemning Hamas and supporting Israel (A55, para. 2). This led to backlash on social media from pro-Palestine supporters.

4.3.3 Sales outcomes

When a brand is being boycotted, there are sales-related outcomes. Consumers refuse to buy the boycotted brand and start looking for other options. This leads to a change in the marketplace and presents opportunities for competitors of the boycotted brand.

Increase in sales of substitute products. Chinese consumers boycott foreign brands, which has led to Chinese consumers wanting sneakers looking for other options (A15, para. 1). Chinese consumers have turned to buying and trading Chinese sneakers instead of foreign sneakers. Consumers have stopped buying Bud Light and replaced it with other American beer brands such as Miller Lite or Coors Lite. Beer is a product that is very easy to substitute (A2, para. 6).

Decline in buyers and distributors of the product. A brand boycott will in some cases lead to distributors or retailers dropping the controversial product. This will keep the retailer or distributor out of the controversy surrounding the boycott. Ivanka Trump has a clothing line that suffered a brand boycott in 2017. A long list of US retailers stopped selling Ivanka Trump products (A13, para 1-4). The list includes Nordstrom, Sears, Jet.com, Shopstyle, and HSN (A13, para 1-4). Target stopped selling Disney products when Disney was fighting a brand boycott (A73, para. 1).

Growth for local brands. Arab consumers have started to choose local brands after western brands are being boycotted (A25, para 4). Other beer brands like Coors Light, Miller Lite and Michelob Ultra have increased their sales after the boycott of Bud Light (B128). Local brands in Malaysia have increased their sales after the boycott of western brands (A113, para. 1). Boycotts present good opportunities for brands that offer substitute products. They can capture the market shares that are being lost by the boycotted brand.

4.4 Consumer behavior

In this study, consumer outcomes can be parted into four different subcategories, boycott fatigue, navigation struggles, political consumerism, consumers trust corporations more than government.

Boycott fatigue is where consumers face too many potential boycotts and don't know which to choose. Consumers suffer from 'boycott fatigue' as boycotts of companies such as

McDonald´s and Starbucks grow (A127, para. 1). For a brand boycott to be successful, the consumers must stay active and motivated. The increasing number of boycotts makes it harder for consumers to choose and prioritize what brand boycotts they want to participate in.

Navigations struggles are closely related to boycott fatigue, where consumers struggle to navigate in a complicated boycott landscape. There are so many brand boycotts going on at a all the time, that staying updated is a challenge. 84% of surveyed consumers stated that it is very challenging to decide if a brand is doing good or not (A124, para. 1). Consumers that want to boycott are receiving endless boycott calls.

Political consumerism, on the other hand, indicates that consumers avoid brands whose political values do not align. A Harvard political scientist, states that only about 3.5% of the population's participation is needed to form real political change in the world (A37, para. 8). Consumers are demonstrating beliefs through their wallets, and brands without purpose are venerable to boycott. (A38, para. 16). Brand purpose has changed, and companies need to drive societal change in order to gain and keep costumers. This means that consumers will buy, or boycott brands based on their political beliefs.

Trust corporations more than the government. Only 30% of Americans have trust in their elected officials (B24). There is a void of trust among some consumers. Many consumers believe corporations are more effective in driving societal change than governments. By engaging in political consumerism or dollar voting, consumers can effectively support their cause. The view is that this is more effective than expecting governments to drive societal change through traditional voting.

5. Discussion

The study has looked at the reasons behind brand boycott, outcomes of brand boycotts, and strategies brands can use to respond to boycotts. Prior literature has explored reasons behind the mentioned subjects. The findings provided a deeper insight into the contemporary phenomenon of brand boycott. After the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas, there has been a significant increase in brand boycotts. This study used media discourse analysis, allowing the author to collect new and rich data. The research shows that there are many different reasons for brand boycott. Many of them can be avoided by brands by pursuing either a passive or an active response strategy. These strategies can be pursued both before and after the boycott.

RQ 1 examined what the different reasons behind brand boycotts are. After analyzing the data, the authors found that there are four subcategories which explain the reasons behind brand boycott. There are many different reasons behind brand boycotts, they can be broken down into: social reasons, political reasons, war, and environmental reasons.

War can be explained by military conflict, mostly the Israel-Hamas war. There is a religious element here, many Muslim countries are pro-Palestine, and consumers have boycotted brands they perceive as pro-Israel. This has received much attention after the outbreak of the war, but pro-Israel companies have been boycotted in Muslim countries for years. Muhamad (2019) findings "*show that religion (i.e. religious motivation) does not directly influence sample's motivation to boycott, yet it is the epicenter or the root of consumers' motivation to participate in a religion-based boycott.*" The current boycotts of western brands in Muslim countries are closely related to religion, which is in line with the findings of Muhamad (2019). Kinoshita & Kim (2023) investigated companies CSR contributions relative to consumers intention to boycott.

Applying the disidentification theory to the findings helps to understand and contextualize the reasons behind brand boycott. The disidentification theory states that individuals will try to distance themselves from a group that they do not want to be a part of anymore (Becker & Tausch, 2014). Every boycott starts for a reason. The findings show that there are four reasons for brand boycotts. In the eyes of the consumer, the boycott reason ruined the consumer-brand relationship. For the consumer, next step is to disidentify from the brand and

find a substitute brand. Consumers are leaving the group because of something the brand did. Conservative American consumers that boycotted Bud Light after the collaboration with Dylan Mulaney are leaving the group because they do not want to be associated with transgender people. One can assume that they found a substitute beer. By changing the beer, they now found a group that they are more comfortable being in.

RQ 2 investigated the different positive and negative outcomes of brand boycott. Organizations and consumers are affected in different ways by brand boycotts. Organizational outcomes consist of financial outcomes, reputational outcomes, and sales outcomes. Consumer outcomes consisted of the subcategory consumer behavior. The study found that there are different financial outcomes for the organization. It was challenging to find clear outcomes, as the financial impact on the organization varied from brand boycott to brand boycott. In some cases, the firm's sales dropped significantly. In other cases, the sales were not impacted. Peña et., al (2021) found that the sales of gourmet coffee in Mexico was hurt during a boycott after some offensive comments from Donald Trump. Sales decreased in the first four weeks. By week 7, there was little effect on sales Peña et., al (2021). Bronnerberg & Dubé (2022) found that the boycott of Goya had little effect on sales, but that the negative media coverage generated as much as $47 million worth of negative publicity. These previous findings are consistent with the findings of mixed financial outcomes for the boycotted brand of this study.

Reputational outcomes for the organization presented much clearer outcomes. All reputational outcomes for the organization were negative. Brand boycotts hurt the brand's reputation and brand equity. The data shows that once the brand is boycotted, it is very challenging to do something that will influence the reputation in a positive way. Brands tend to receive backlash from consumers and will experience decreased popularity for a long time after.

Consumer outcomes are political consumerism, navigation struggles, and boycott fatigue. The findings suggest that consumers are struggling to navigate in the complex boycott landscape, and that political consumerism is on the rise. Dalakas et., al (2023) studied political consumerism on social media, how consumers react to boycott events on social media. Dalakas et., al (2023) points out that political consumerism is on the rise. Political consumerism on the rise is consistent with the findings from this study.

RQ 3 tried to understand what different strategies there are for brands to respond to brand boycotts. To answer RQ 3, the authors found that it made sense to split this overall aggregate dimension into two different subcategories: boycotted brand and a brand that is vulnerable to boycott. Brand boycott is an ever-present threat for all brands, but it is a difference between already being boycotted, and being vulnerable to a boycott.

The study found that a boycotted brand and a brand that is vulnerable to being boycotted may use similar strategies, but there are some differences. No previous study has split the brands into two categories, boycotted and vulnerable to boycott. No previous study has divided response strategy into active and passive strategies. A brand that is boycotted may respond with either a passive or an active response strategy. A brand that is vulnerable to boycotts may also use passive or active strategies, but rather in order to avoid boycotts. Responding to brand boycotts with an active response strategy entails a direct response to the boycott. Examples from the data are response with threats or lawsuits, and the brand is attempting to fight the boycott. Responding with a passive response strategy entails a much calmer response. Examples are to apologize publicly, promise improvement, or remove the controversial product or service. Instead of trying to fight the boycott, the brand is accepting the situation and trying to move on.

Kim et., al (2022) uses Nike´s advertisement with Colin Kaepernick as a case study and found out that consumers will appreciate companies engaging in CSA when they agree with the cause. They suggest that companies can survey their core customers before engaging in CSA. The findings of this study build on that suggestion, by defining this as a brand that is vulnerable to boycott and pursuing an active response strategy.

The complexity theory explains the result of the three **RQs** and how they interact. As stated earlier in chapter 1.3, the complexity theory considers the whole system of brand boycott, rather than its individual parts and charts all the individual parts and how they interact (Johnson, 2011, section 1.1). Figure 10 explains well how each of the three elements reasons, outcome and response strategy interact with each other and how they are affected by external factors in the boycott landscape such as ongoing wars, environmental, political, or social issues. The complexity theory combined with the results conducted, can be used as a framework by brands to easily navigate between strategies and predict the outcome. It may also apply for consumers when they are navigating in the ever-changing boycott landscape heavily influenced by social

media. The theory strengthens the conceptualization of brand boycott and its reasons, outcome and response strategy.

5.1 Process Model

The process model in chapter 5 illustrates the different events when a brand is experiencing brand boycotts. In the root of the process model is reasons. There are countless reasons for why consumers start a brand boycott, and they can all be broken down into either a social, political or an environmental reason. Responding to brand boycott is the mediating factor and affects the outcome and can contribute to the brand boycott and its outcomes. A good response will lessen the negative consequences, while a poor response from the brand will anger customers and strengthen the negative relationship.

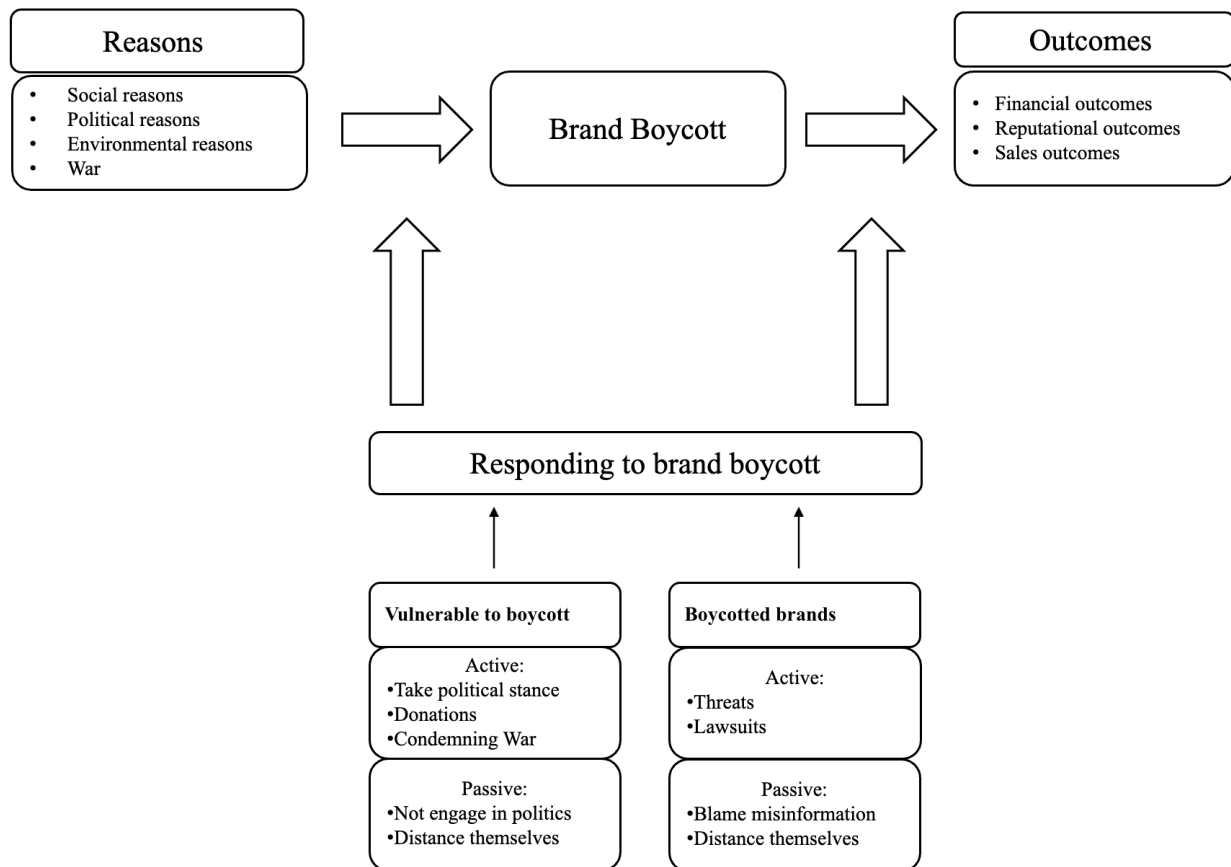**Figure 10**. Process model of brand boycott

Figure 10 above illustrates brand boycott as a process. Starting with a reason which is the main factor leading up to brand boycott. Active or passive response strategy works as a

moderating variable and affects the outcome either positively or negatively. The model ends with outcomes, which are the result of brand boycott. In the process model, outcome illustrates in which way the brand is affected by the boycott.

Brand boycotts have developed into a widespread phenomenon, and many consumers are very active. Active consumers are participating in many boycotts. An interesting factor both from the consumer and brand side is that there might be too many boycotts. Consumers are facing boycott fatigue and are struggling to keep up with the increasing number of boycotts (A127, para. 5). It is also worth discussing whether all boycott reasons are legitimate reasons to boycott a company. McDonald´s is being boycotted in many Muslim countries. The reason is that the Israeli branch of the firm donated free food to the IDF (A121, para. 9). McDonald´s have clearly stated that this is the actions of the Israeli Branch, and McDonald´s headquarters had nothing to do with this. Consumers may view this as an excuse and continue the boycott. However, this is the truth. It is well known and well documented that many of the large western corporations use the franchise model, where the franchises operate individually. Any rational consumer can educate themselves about this. Seemingly, most do not care to do this and continue to boycott. Which tells that the reasons behind some boycotts may not be rational, but rather driven by something else.

This is something to consider for brands. Brand boycotts are bound to happen. If consumers want to boycott, they can boycott regardless of having a legitimate reason or not. This should influence how brands respond to boycotts. When experiencing a brand boycott, brands must understand the reason behind the brand boycott. If it is a legitimate reason, change should be made. If the boycott reason is not legitimate, brands should consider using a very passive response. It is impossible to satisfy all consumers. In some cases, it can be worth considering not responding at all. This response strategy may be beneficial for the brand, but also comes with inherent risks.

The data collected are mostly from either the United States or the Middle East/Asia related to boycotts after the Israel-Hamas conflict erupted. The authors found little data regarding boycotts in developing countries outside of Asia. One article is about boycotts in Kenya. Young people in Kenya have tried to organize a boycott of western brands that support Israel, but it has been challenging to organize (A60, para 6). Many people view the conflict as something that is

happening far away from them and prefer to focus on local issues (A60, para 9). This is a point worth highlighting in the discussion regarding brand boycotts, boycotts are not a priority in the underdeveloped parts of the world. If you are living in poverty it is challenging to focus on brand boycotts. You will have other, more urgent priorities.

Findings show that there are both negative and positive outcomes of brand boycotts. Positive outcomes are the increased amount of focus on social issues. With the increased media attention comes increased pressure on the boycotted entity. Boycotts can be a powerful tool to highlight societal issues. The boycott campaign related to the Israel-Hamas have highlighted the terrible humanitarian situation on the Gaza strip, and how some brands have ties to Israel. Boycotts of these western brands contribute to increased media attention. It is still too early to determine the success of the Israel boycotts. They have been going on for seven months now, the war in Gaza is still going on. Increased attention and pressure have been key factors of successful historical boycotts such as the boycott of the apartheid government in South Africa. Boycott Divestment and Sanctions which are organizing many of the boycott campaigns against Israel have stated that the campaign is inspired by the apartheid boycott (A52, para 9). The aim of BDS is that the boycotts will apply enough pressure on Israel for them end the Gaza-occupation.

Brands that respond to brand boycotts with an active response strategy will apologize or promise improvement. While it is easy to promise improvement, the increased media attention and scrutiny from stakeholders increases the chance of the company changing its behavior. This is a positive outcome of brand boycotts. Unethical business practices and societal issues are brought to light.

When large international brands are boycotted, local brands are experiencing increased sales (A63, para. 1). This is an unexpected opportunity that local brands globally should recognize and take advantage of. Brand boycotts occurs quickly. It can be hard to predict where the next boycott will take place. Local brands should be aware of this potential opportunity and be ready to move quickly if the opportunity presents itself. When a brand is boycotted, there will be a certain void in the marketplace. A substantial market share may be up for grabs. A good example of this is the boycott of McDonald´s and Burger King in Malaysia (A44, para. 4). Given the historical Malaysian sympathy towards Palestine, and the size of the Muslim population, one

can imagine that this boycott will not fade away short-term. This is a tremendous opportunity for local Malaysian fast-food brands. They should race to capture the lost market shares by McDonald´s and Burger King. Once they boycott ends, they may have captured the market shares permanently.

When a consumer reads about a boycott on a social media platform and decides to join the movement, it may seem like a simple process. The reality is that brand boycott is a very complex phenomenon, which influences consumers and organizations on several layers. The aim is to hurt the brand, but there will be unintended consequences. When consumers around the world are boycotting McDonald´s or Starbucks, the impact will be felt locally due to the franchise model. Local workers will lose their jobs (A81, para. 1). It is local companies and local business owners that also will feel the impact. This is a negative and unintended consequence of some boycotts. One can imagine that few consumers that boycott want local workers to feel the impact, but that is the reality. Consumers should be aware of this before participating in brand boycotts. It is not a straight line from consumers withholding consumption to the brand being hurt. Data shows that the financial impact of brand boycott is questionable. Often boycotts have no or little impact on sales (A6, para. 2). In some cases, sales are hurt. Retail chain Target reported a drop in revenue after being boycotted (A64, para. 1). A consumer should consider and weigh up the potential impact towards the potential consequences.

Boycotts have been used very successfully throughout history and remain a useful tool to force societal change in 2024. Having the opportunity to boycott is an essential part of a democracy. It is a powerful way for consumers to exercise their freedom of speech where brand boycotts tend to be very controversial with a lot of strong opinions. It is important to remember that everyone is entitled to boycott whatever brand they want however people living in authoritarian countries such as Russia and North Korea may not have the same opportunity to boycott anything.

Brand boycotts are definitely here to stay. Long-term, all brands must develop strategies to respond to brand boycotts. Political consumerism is on the rise. A number of companies in various segments have positioned themselves as right-wing alternatives for conservative consumers. Examples is the social media platform Truth Social, and the anti-ESG investment platform Strive (A33, para. 6). While this sounds extreme, it may be the norm one day. Brands

must anticipate a competitive environment where a significant amount of consumers will only buy from brands that have values that align with their own. This will raise several strategic challenges. Will you try to stay neutral, or position yourself left or right?

6. Study Implications

This section will present the implications of the study. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on brand boycott and offers several important practical and theoretical implications.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The result from the research presented has four theoretical implications. First, this study contributes to filling this gap in the literature with this conceptual study of brand boycott. Prior literature on brand boycotts were limited, and there are certain gaps which this study helps address. Few studies addressed either the reasons behind brand boycotts, the outcomes of brand boycotts or the strategies to respond. None addressed all the above holistically. When searching "brand boycott" in Google Scholar, 15 articles appeared word the word brand boycott in the headline. Further, when searching for the term "brand boycott" in the text in general, there were 210 results. Out of all these results, only 30 articles were relevant in terms of reasons, outcomes, and response to Brand Boycott. This underlines the missing research on Brand Boycott, and especially how to handle it in the digital world. As far as the author's know, this is the first study that has used the method media discourse on brand boycott.

Secondly there is a lack of qualitative studies on brand boycott. Reviewing the literature on brand boycott revealed that the prior studies were mostly quantitative. Most of the studies are quantitative and focuses on the consumer motive to boycott. By using a qualitative method, the researcher could get a deeper understanding of brand boycott from different views, both stakeholders and brands. This study builds on the missing qualitative literature and provides a good foundation for future research on reasons, strategies, and outcomes of brand boycott. This is the first study that has used media discourse as a research method. Using media discourse on brand boycotts is crucial due to the increase in brand boycotts after the Israel-Hamas war. The number of brand boycotts have increased substantially and have received considerable media attention.

Thirds, it contributes with a conceptualization of brand boycott. It provides a deeper and better understanding of the reasons behind brand boycott, the outcomes of brand boycott, and the strategies brands can use to respond. As mentioned, there was a gap in the literature, and qualitative studies on brand boycott and this study filles this gap, and simultaneously contributes

with a strategy. In the rapidly changing society where brands are boycotted more frequently than ever this conceptualization is therefore needed to shed light on the concept to inform consumers and brands.

Lastly, the study contributes by using a new methodology to conceptualize brand boycott. By using this method, the data and literature collected were "up to date". No studies of brand boycott have been done using media discourse analysis. This indicates that there is a gap in the literature and this study contributes by filling this gap.

6.2 Practical Implications

Our study provides four practical implications for managers and practitioners. Firstly, this process model helps brands understand the concept of brand boycott better. Brands may use the findings as a process model of how to navigate brand boycotts. The study offers a conceptual model that explains why brand boycotts are happening, the different strategies to respond, and the outcomes. This model can be very beneficial for brands when making strategic plans for how to deal with ongoing and potential brand boycotts. The process models take brands through the entire process of the brand boycott. It explains the different reasons why brand boycotts are happening, and it outlines the strategies that can be used to respond and highlights the outcomes. By using this model, brands can be one step ahead of the boycott. Many brands struggle when experiencing a boycott, they do not know how to act.

Secondly, the study works as a framework which consumers can use to navigate in the digital ocean of boycotts. As mentioned earlier, consumers experience navigation struggles when they are exposed to several boycotts at the same time. The results map the most common reasons for brand boycott and their outcomes, helping consumers to choose and prioritize brands and boycotts. If consumers knew that several boycotts ended with no or little effect on the company financially, they would most likely reconsider or not participate in a boycott at all. As highlighted in the discussion chapter, there are unintended consequences of brand boycotts. Most consumers probably do not give this much thought before joining a boycott, but it is an important factor to consider. This study helps consumers make more educated choices related to joining brand boycotts.

Third, the conceptualization of brand boycott can help shareholders remain composed when a brand experience calls for boycott. The results in chapter 4, underlines the fact that there

is usually no long-lasting effect on sales and that brand power plays an important role when brands are exposed to brand boycott. Investors in equity markets can use the findings to make more qualified decisions when contemplating investing in brands that are experiencing boycotts.

Lastly, the study can contribute as a regulatory framework of brand boycotts spreading online. As mentioned, social media plays a crucial role when talking about brand boycott. Most of the brand boycotts today take place online and are spreading rapidly. Unfortunately, the digitalization of brand boycott increases the spread of misinformation online. This study considers this dark side of brand boycott and contributes as a framework where consumers can dig deeper into brand boycott before participating in a boycott or spreading the words of a boycott online. Hopefully consumers will think twice before boycotting a brand online.

7. Conclusion

Boycotts have been a common way of driving change in society throughout history. Recently, there has been an increase in brand boycotts. The increase in brand boycotts is largely driven by an increased consumer focus on corporate social responsibility and the advancement of social media. Organizing a boycott is way easier in 2024 than it was decades ago. Few studies have looked into the aspects around brand boycott. This study wanted to investigate the reasons behind brand boycott, the outcomes of brand boycott, and the strategies brands can use to respond to brand boycotts. The authors analyzed 138 YouTube videos, 148 news articles, and 77 reports or blogs. Most prior studies on brand boycott have been quantitative.

Analyzing the collected data using grounded theory led to the findings of three aggregate dimensions: reasons for brand boycott, outcomes of brand boycott, and strategies to respond. Reasons for brand boycott may be broken down into four sub-categories. There are three organizational outcomes and one outcome for the consumer. Brands can use either passive or active strategies to respond to brand boycotts.

Using complexity theory and disidentification theory, the authors developed a process model of brand boycotts. The process model outlines brand boycotts as a sequential process, starting with a reason for brand boycotts. Responding to brand boycotts works as a mediating factor between reasons and outcomes. How the brand responds to the brand boycott will either strengthen or weaken the association between reasons and outcomes. This process model contextualizes brand boycotts in a way that has not been done previously. Complexity theory can explain reasons, responding strategies and outcomes while the disidentification theory on the other hand can explain the reasons behind brand boycotts. Consumers and brands may use the process model to understand brand boycotts on a deeper level.

This study is not without limitations. The subsequent section will review the limitations of this study and the suggested future areas of research.

7.1 Limitations and future directions

This study comes with three limitations which point out direction for future research on brand boycotts. Firstly, searching for brand boycott on YouTube gave almost unlimited search results. It was challenging to decide when to stop collecting data from YouTube, and the authors could have continued to collect data. After 134 YouTube videos were collected the authors

stopped, due to the feeling that the YouTube videos became less and less relevant the further down the search, meaning that there is much data beyond the 134 YouTube videos that was not collected. The authors recommend that future scholars expand on the number of YouTube videos. Increasing the number of videos collected and analyzed will provide a different and deeper perspective from what this study did.

Secondly, this study only reviewed English articles. Around 1,5 billion people speak English as either their first or second language (Dyvik, 2024). However, this means that the majority of the world population are neither speaking nor understanding English. Which in turn indicates that there are many articles on brand boycott that this study missed, due to being written in some other language. Several of the brand boycotts are occurring in countries where English is not the first language. Future research on brand boycott and related concepts should include articles written in other languages than English. Many of the brand boycotts in 2023 and 2024 took place in countries without English as the official language. Malaysia and Indonesia are examples of this. Doing a media discourse analysis on media articles from Indonesia and Malaysia could present a very different perspective on ongoing conflicts. This study mostly captured the perspective of the western world.

Thirdly, this study only used "brand boycott" as a key word for data collection. There are several related concepts to brand boycotts which potentially could have been included in the data collection process. Ethical consumerism, political consumerism and consumer boycotts are highly related to brand boycotts. Consumer boycotts and brand boycotts are used interchangeably in the literature. Only using "brand boycott" as a key word did limit the data collection process. Secondly, scholars may also expand the number of key words used for the search. New key words that could be utilized in future research is political consumerism, ethical consumerism, consumer boycott, or dollar voting. These are all concepts that are related to brand boycott and are receiving attention in the mainstream media. Including these key words in the data collection process will present a richer data set. A richer data set will help contextualize brand boycott further.

In addition to the three areas of research above, the authors recommend that more research is done on political consumerism. Political consumerism is on the rise in the western world, but there are few or no research about the possible impact. The results of previous studies

are mixed (Dubé and Bronnerberg, 2022). Political consumerism is essentially brand boycotts put into a system, where you will only buy from brands that have values that align with your own. With an increasingly polarized political landscape in the United States, it seems like political consumerism will continue growing. More research needs to be done on both the organization and consumer side. More research on the organization side will help brands understand the phenomenon and develop strategies to respond. More research on the consumer side will help reveal the motivations behind and factors that affect our intention to participate in political consumerism. A regular brand boycott tends to not last long, while political consumerism is a more permanent phenomenon. Brands would have to apply different strategies to navigate political consumerism, which further proves the need for more research.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Overview of Articles, videos, and reports

A (Articles)

Articles 1-20

Overview of all articles can be viewed through this link:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/0yiavvhiyjlrc6srvo5d5/AMxFIgRZpXgYZ57ilftyWcs?rlkey=1k8i451e4tk6a0ow6dbdmfrn7&st=i8xwnw32&dl=0

Article number	Article name	Media House	URL
A1	Diadora distances brand from boycott of David Teeger	The Citizen	https://www.citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/diadora-distances-brand-boycott-david-teeger/
A2	Tucker Carlson Confronted On Bud Light Boycott: 'Patriots' Drink it	News Week	https://www.newsweek.com/dana-white-defended-bud-light-tucker-carlson-1851747
A3	Not a Seasonal Cash Grab: Brand Lessons on Engaging With Diverse Creators	Ad Week	https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/pride-month-not-seasonal-cash-grab-brand-lessons-lgbtq-creators/
A4	The Dark Side Of Brand Boycotts	Forbes	https://www.forbes.com/sites/julianvillanueva/2020/07/21/the-dark-side-of-brand-boycotts/?sh=1efea9dc62ca
A5	KENNEDY: Hey, Dove. Your cynical boardroom witches hired a BLM bully to promote 'fat liberation' and 'freedom'. But what about the woman whose life she destroyed? You can take your soap… and shove it!	Dailymail	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12523657/dove-black-lives-matter-boycott-fat-liberation-kennedy.html
A6	Companies fear consumer boycott	The Economist	https://www.economist.com/business/2022/04/16/companies-fear-consumer-boycotts
A7	'TREASON': Conservatives Outraged As Kid Rock Seen Drinking Bud Light 3 Months After Shooting it to Protest Dylan Mulvaney Collaboration	Bottle Raiders	https://whiskeyraiders.com/american/treason-conservatives-outraged-as-kid-rock-seen-drinking-bud-light-3-months-after-shooting-it-to-protest-

			dylan-mulvaney-collaboration/
A8	COUNTRY BACKLASH Garth Brooks fans threaten to 'throw out records' after he said his bar 'will serve every beer' during Bud Light drama	The Sun	https://www.the-sun.com/entertainment/8343813/garth-brooks-bud-light-controversy/
A9	Bud Light Boycott Could Cost Anheuser-Busch 26 Percent of Earnings	Newsweek	https://www.newsweek.com/bud-light-boycott-anheuser-busch-earnings-1802134
A10	After more than 1,000 firms boycotted Facebook, what's next for ads on social media?	CNBC	https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/04/facebook-boycott-whats-next-for-advertising-on-social-media.html
A11	Ivanka Trump brand claims sales are booming despite boycott	CBC	https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/ivanka-trump-sales-boycott-1.4016372
A12	Broadcasters boosted by YouTube brand boycott	Campaign Live	https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/broadcasters-boosted-youtube-brand-boycott/1428902
A13	Every Retailer Who Has Dropped Ivanka's Brand	Town & Country	https://www.townandcountrymag.com/society/politics/news/a9603/ivanka-trump-brand-boycott/
A14	Storyboard18 | From creative brief to brand boycott: Is advertising being rewired for an era of intolerance?	Money Control	https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/trends/features/storyboard18-from-creative-brief-to-brand-boycott-is-advertising-being-rewired-for-an-era-of-intolerance-7666661.html
A15	China's foreign brands boycott has pushed up the resale price of Chinese sneakers	Quarts	https://qz.com/1993206/chinas-foreign-brand-boycott-ups-resale-price-of-chinese-sneakers
A16	Trump brand boycott gets louder with plans to protest Ivanka's line at the Bay	CBC	https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/baycott-ivanka-trump-boycott-grabyourwallet-1.3994422
A17	Adidas Boycott Calls Grow Over 'Biological Male' Modeling Women's Swimsuit	News Week	https://www.newsweek.com/adidas-boycott-womens-swimsuit-modeled-biological-male-1801262
A18	Is the Ivanka Trump brand boycott anti-feminist?	CBC	https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/ivanka-trump-grabyourwallet-boycott-feminism-1.3998601
A19	IBM suspends advertising on X after report says ads ran next to antisemitic content	CNBC	https://www.cnbc.com/2023/11/16/ibm-stops-advertising-on-x-after-

			report-says-ads-ran-by-nazi-content.html
A20	Indigestible Spaghetti gathering': Do boycotts against companies work?	Euro News	https://www.euronews.com/business/2024/01/26/a-spaghetti-gathering-that-turned-out-to-be-indigestible-do-boycotts-against-companies-wor

B (videos)

Videos 1-20

Overview of all videos can be viewed through this link:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/pau08tvepsfwaroj1sr2b/AP2fu3P3LvefoLFJ35Uw4Ro?rlkey=86565zwj0h0ms13d5rilb0qhb&st=vux1fvln&dl=0

Video Number	**Video Name**	**Youtube Channel**	**URL**
B1	Jordanians boycott American brands to support for Israel	France 24 English	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnGnmyZwmH4
B2	How are leading brands helping Israel?	TRT World	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3cngOVEjpQ
B3	Why are Turks boycotting western brands?	DW News	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsvHWu7w-fc&t=19s
B4	Boycotts against Israel in US can be punished by law	TRT World	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqEceFMO6t0&t=13s
B5	People in West Asia boycott companies supporting the US	WION	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HgjNDtE6K0
B6	Global boycott on Israel-made products and brands supporting israel	TRT World Now	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0O0cPHmiWYs
B7	Muslim shops in India are boycotting Israel products	Al Jazeera English	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjd1JQ-wl7w
B8	Fashion giant Zara sparks outrage once again	TRT World Now	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2RjPJKca1l

B9	Are the boycotts against Israel making an impact? | The Stream	Al Jazeera English	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uT87igaL8w
B10	War on Gaza: Global boycott movement against Israel gains traction	Al Jazeera English	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiBjWeZVWSE
B11	Starbucks Loses $11 Billion Due to Poor Sales & Boycotts over Israel War| Vantage with Palki Sharma	Firstpost	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VK5E-Pen0w
B12	How West Asian businesses are capitalising on boycott of American manufacturers | The West Asia Post	WION	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XA6G5BF6tJ0
B13	Cornel West speaks to Al Jazeera on war in Gaza	Al Jazeera English	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Db_7iiV5pSM
B14	Western fast-food chains & brands targeted in anti-Israel boycott | World Business Watch	WION	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOzvKkO0Ds4
B15	Boycotts over Gaza hit Western brands in some Arab countries	Reuters	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPulgeGQ9hw
B16	#ISRAEL - #GAZA LATEST: #WHY IS #BOYCOTTMCDONALDS TRENDING ON SOCIAL MEDIA?	Islam Channel	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pg6FgfKzmBs
B17	WATCH: The Ultimate Guide to Boycotting Israel 🇮🇱	i24NEWS English	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDqHWktku9Y
B18	Calls to boycott Zara over far-right Israeli links | Al Jazeera Newsfeed	Al Jazeera English	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9usArFhFxQ

	Israel-Hamas war: Western brands in Arab nations facing wave of boycott campaigns	CNA	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs0EUBQTohY
B19			
B20	Boycott Israel? No US state jobs or aid for you	TRT World	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRXuOeugOWU

C

(Reports)

Report 1-20

Overview of all reports can be viewed through this link:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/uo9vej6za0xs4193cjpyr/AJxQWgmIhgszUNcSl6usKvU?rlkey=bbs05xdtbyw1m7ijoise96sh5&st=1ghh672z&dl=0

Report Number	Report Name	Website	URL
C1	Boycotting Brands for a Cause: Impact, Effectiveness, and Responsible Social Media Activism	LinkedIn	https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/boycotting-brands-cause-impact-effectiveness-social-chikhani--fkpef/
C2	What is a boycott?	Ethical Consumer	https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/ethicalcampaigns/boycotts/what-is-boycott
C3	Act Now Against These Companies Profiting from the Genocide of the Palestinian People	BDS Freedom, Justice, Equality	https://bdsmovement.net/Act-Now-Against-These-Companies-Profiting-From-Genocide
C4	21% of consumers boycott brands and most don't come back	Truly Deeply	https://www.trulydeeply.com.au/2017/04/brand-boycott-report/
C5	How Much Impact Do Boycotts and Buycotts Actually Have on Brand Sales?	Informs	https://www.informs.org/News-Room/INFORMS-Releases/News-Releases/How-Much-Impact-Do-Boycotts-and-Buycotts-Actually-Have-on-Brand-Sales

C6	RUBIO CALLS OUT CORPORATIONS' HYPOCRISY: HOW CAN YOU BOYCOTT X AND NOT TIKTOK?	Marco Rubio US Senator for Florida	https://www.rubio.senate.gov/rubio-calls-out-corporations-hypocrisy-how-can-you-boycott-x-and-not-tiktok/
C7	Two-Thirds of Consumers Worldwide Now Buy on Beliefs	Edelman	https://www.edelman.com/news-awards/two-thirds-consumers-worldwide-now-buy-beliefs
C8	Over half of UK consumers prepared to boycott brands over misleading green claims	KPMG	https://kpmg.com/uk/en/home/media/press-releases/2023/09/over-half-of-uk-consumers-prepared-to-boycott-brands-over-misleading-green-claims.html
C9	Why was Nestlé boycott launched	Nestle	https://www.nestle.com/ask-nestle/our-company/answers/nestle-boycott
C10	Consumer boycotts: the 5 most contrversial brands in the media right now	Commetric	https://commetric.com/2020/09/30/consumer-boycotts-the-5-most-controversial-brands-in-the-media-right-now/
C11	Boycott, Ban, Brands, Marketing, and Whatnot...	Linkedin	https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/boycott-ban-brands-marketing-whatnot-ranjan-das/
C12	From the high street to high fashion, brand boycotts are here to stay	Hyphen	https://hyphenonline.com/2023/12/19/from-the-high-street-to-high-fashion-brand-boycotts-are-here-to-stay/
C13	Boycotting Brands: Brands Symbolize More than Features and Benefits	American Marketing Association	https://www.amanewyork.org/resources/boycotting-brands/
C14	A quarter of consumers have have boycotted a brand	YouGov	https://au.yougov.com/society/articles/19955-brand-boycott
C15	In an Era of Easy Outrage, When Should Brands Take a Stand?	Kellog Insight	https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/boycott-brands-era-easy-outrage
C16	More Than a Third of World's Consumers Boycott Brands	Provoke Media	https://www.provokemedia.com/latest/article/more-than-a-third-of-

			world%27s-consumers-boycott-brands
C17	What Does Brand Boycotting Mean for Loyalty?	Ingenuity Hub	https://ingenuitylondon.com/blog/what-does-brand-boycotting-mean-for-loyalty/
C18	Target boycott: what is going on with target	Collage Group	https://www.collagegroup.com/2023/10/20/unpacking-the-target-boycott/
C19	Main reasons for boycotting foreign brands or companies among consumers in China as of May 2023	Statista	https://www.statista.com/statistics/1393482/china-brand-boycott-reasons-among-consumers/
C20	How QSR brands can manage boycotts on social media	Brandbastion	https://blog.brandbastion.com/how-qsr-brands-can-manage-boycotts-on-social-media

Appendix II: Open Codes A

Can be viewed through:

https://shorturl.at/cUDIt

Appendix III: Open Codes B

Can be viewed through:

https://shorturl.at/ueAxG

Appendix IIII: Open Codes C

Can be viewed through:

https://shorturl.at/S0F4s

Appendix V: Coding – Responding to Brand Boycott

Can be viewed through:

https://shorturl.at/AhF1u

Appendix VI: Coding – Reasons for Brand Boycott

Can be viewed through:

https://shorturl.at/C81Ye

Appendix VII: Coding – Outcomes of Brand Boycott

Can be viewed through:

https://shorturl.at/NJya9

Appendix VIII : Example – Reasons for Brand Boycott

FIRST ORDER CONSTRUCTS	CODING SUB-CATEGORIES	AGGREGATE DIMENSIONS

- Water shortage
- Excessive pollution

→ Environmental Reasons

- Military Conflict

→ War

- Inequalities between groups of people
- Controversial advertising
- Discrimination of minorities
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Poor working conditions

→ Social reasons

- Lack of company responsibility
- Violation of human rights
- Unethical business practices
- Using boycott as a tool to advance political standpoint

→ Political reasons

Reasons for brand boycott (A)

Coding. Reasons for Brand Boycott (B)

FIRST ORDER CONSTRUCTS	CODING SUB-CATEGORIES	AGGREGATE DIMENSIONS

- Water shortage
- Excessive pollution
- Companies that participate in greenwashing

→ **Environmental Reasons**

- Military Conflict

→ **War**

- Inequalities between groups of people
- Controversial advertising
- Discrimination of minorities
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Poor working conditions
- High price level

→ **Social reasons**

- Lack of company responsibility
- Violation of human rights
- Unethical business practices
- Using boycott as a tool to advance political standpoint
- Use of unethical raw materials

→ **Political reasons**

→ **Reasons for brand boycott (B)**

Coding. Reason for Brand Boycott (C)

FIRST ORDER CONSTRUCTS	CODING SUB-CATEGORIES	AGGREGATE DIMENSIONS

- Lack of environmental action
- Companies that participate in greenwashing

→ **Environmental Reasons**

- Military Conflict

→ **War**

- Inequalities between groups of people
- Controversial advertising
- Discrimination of minorities
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Poor working conditions

→ **Social reasons**

- Lack of company responsibility
- Violation of human rights
- Unethical business practices
- Using boycott as a tool to advance political standpoint
- Use of unethical raw materials

→ **Political reasons**

→ **Reasons for brand boycott (C)**

Appendix X: Discussion Paper International

Håvard Sandland Kristensen

Summary of thesis

In our thesis, we investigated brand boycott. Boycotts is a very old phenomenon. Boycotts are group effort to make some target change its policies on some cause Garret (1987, p. 47) Examples of well-known historical boycotts are the Montgomery bus boycott, where Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white man Robinson, 1989, p 8). This was during the racially segregated area of the United States. Thousands of people opted to walk instead of taking the bus, after 15 months the federal courts ended the segregation system on the buses (Robinson, 1989, p 8). This was a successful boycott. Brand boycotts are a newer development of boycotts. The last few years we have seen more and more brand boycotts, which are characterized by the use of social media and the massive media attention it receives.

The method we used was media discourse, where we analyzed news articles, YouTube videos, and company reports and blogs. Brand boycott is a phenomenon that is becoming more common globally. Still, the literature on the subject is quite limited. Most of the prior studies were quantitative, looking into very specific aspects of brand boycotts. We took a broader view, investigating the reasons for why brand boycotts are happening, the strategies brand can use to respond, and the outcomes of brand boycotts.

Initially, me and my co-author wanted to study company´s response to brand boycotts. The idea was to interview companies and investigate if brand boycotts is something Norwegian companies are strategically preparing for. However, we found it challenging to find companies to interview. The attention was then switched to a media discourse analysis of brand boycott.

With brand boycotts being a concept on the rise, this is something all companies and brand must be prepared to handle. It is easy to think of the United States or the Israel-Hamas war, but it is also happening in Norway. The chocolate brand Freia was boycotted last year due to their parent company Mondelez still operating in Russia (Leinan & Fausko, 2023).

The problem statement of our thesis was as following:

Research Objective - How is brand boycott conceptualized in popular media?

RQ 1 looked into the reasons behind brand boycotts. The findings showed that reasons for brand boycott can be explained by four subcategories. One of the most common boycott reasons is war, particularly related to the Israel-Hamas conflict.

RQ 2 investigated the different positive and negative outcomes of brand boycotts. Outcomes of brand boycott can be explained by organizational outcomes and consumer outcomes. Organizational outcomes are financial, reputational, and sales related outcomes.

RQ 3 looked into the different strategies brands can use to respond to brand boycotts. Brands can use either passive or active strategies to respond to the boycott. There are active and passive strategies for both a brand that is boycotted, and a brand that is vulnerable to boycotts.

To answer the research questions we collected data from Youtube, news articles, and blogs/reports. All data was collected using the key word "brand boycott." The articles and reports were collected from search on Google News and regular Google.

Complexity theory and disidentify theory was used to contextualize and understand the findings. Complexity theory is "the behavior of a whole system, rather than its individual parts, and is the study of the whole phenomenia which emerge from a collection of interacting objects" Johnson (2011, section 1.1. Complexity theory was used to explain reasons for brand boycott, strategies to respond, and outcomes of brand boycott. The disidentification theory was used to explain the reasons behind brand boycott. The disidentification theory states that individuals will try to disidentify from a group once they are not comfortable with being in the group anymore (Becker & Tausch, 2014). When a consumer decides to boycott a brand, they are essentially disidentifying from the brand.

How thesis relate to International

In a very globalized world, the same brands are offered in numerous countries. Multinational enterprises are operating over the entire world. Brand boycott relates to the growing trend of corporate social responsibility and more ethical consumers. Consumers have higher expectations from brands. Corporate social responsibility is the idea that corporations should not only maximize profits, but also be responsible citizens (Tai,et al, 2014). The advancements of social media have made it easier for consumers to organize boycotts. Pre social-media, boycotts were more constrained to one location. It was substantially more challenging to spread the boycott message. In 2024, a brand boycott can easily be organized by social media. This makes the phenomenon very global and poses more of a threat to multinational enterprises.

Companies that are failing to be responsible citizens are more vulnerable to brand boycotts. This has been the trend for quite some time now. Our findings showed that brand boycotts are occurring all over the world. Most of the data collected was from the United States, Europe and Asia. We only collected data in English, expanding on different languages will show more boycotts that are not from the United States or Europe. Using the company asthe unit of analysis, one can highlight several points on how brand boycotts affect a multinational enterprise and how the concept is related to international trends.

Brand boycotts are a very relevant topic for a student within the international business major at UIA. The master's degree at University of Agder is very much centered around international and ethical conduct from corporations. Corporations that are not operating ethically, will be boycotted. There are many historical examples of this. Multinational enterprise Nike was boycotted in the 90´s due to the poor working conditions in their South East Asia factories (Klein et al., 2004). The British Bank Barclays was still operating in South Africa during the Apartheid regime, which led to an international boycott. (Klein et al., 2004).

Our findings shows that many of the boycotted brands are large, multinational enterprises such as McDonald´s and Starbucks. McDonald´s utilizes the franchise model, where each McDonald´s store in each country will operate as an independent profit center. McDonalds aim

to have 95% of their restaurants under the franchise model, and 5% privately owned (Pereira, 2023). What we found was that the actions of the local franchise owners significantly influenced the McDonalds brand globally. When having such a decentralized operating model, one would assume that there is a low reputational operating risk for the centralized headquarters. That is not the case. McDonald´s reported quarterly sales miss in four years after the boycotts. The sales miss can be blamed on weaker sales growth in Middle East, China, and India (Reuters, 2024). This is a very interesting finding. Large multinational enterprises must consider how the actions of their decentralized subsidiaries may hurt the organization. While the financial outcomes of a brand boycott are somewhat ambiguous, the reputational outcomes are usually negative. McDonald´s have been dealing with significant bad publicity after the brand boycotts, all due to the actions of the local Israeli franchise. Multinational enterprises should assess how they monitor operational risk in the subsidiaries or franchises. Are there ways to avoid what happened with McDonald´s?

An interesting point of discussion worth raising is that many multinational enterprises have a complex organizational structure that boycotting consumers does not understand. The brand Freia was boycotted in Norway because the parent company Mondelez still operated in Russia at the time. The brand Freia is sold by Mondelez Norge AS, which in turn is owned by Mondelez International (Freia, nd.). By boycotting Freia in Norway, it is the local workers that are facing the negative consequences. Mondelez Norge AS is extremely far away from Mondelez International in organizational distance. Consumers should be aware of these unintended consequences before considering boycotting brands and companies. This also highlights the complexity of the world of international business. Things are not always how they seem at first glance, they are often interconnected, and one must dive deeper to unveil what is correct.

The brand boycotts are not delimited to one specific geographical area, they are very global. Companies can internationalize in many ways, a common theory to contextualize the process is the Uppsala Model. The Uppsala Model consists of four different stages, each characterized by the increasing commitment to the foreign market (Andersen, 1993). Stage 4 is the establishment of an overseas production facility. Applying the risk of brand boycotts to the Uppsala model means that companies should assess the risk for boycotts in the early stages. If the risk of boycotts are at a critical level, one should be very careful in committing more

resources. To exemplify: an American multinational enterprise that has openly supported and donated cash to Israel should be very careful in expanding internationally into Muslim countries. Low-commitment activities such as exporting could be conducted, but increasing the commitment would be very risky. Moving from one stage to another should probably be avoided if the boycott threat is high. Companies should include a scan for boycott threats in the host country in their due diligence before internationalizing.

The world is becoming more and more unstable. There are many active conflicts going on, a presidential election in the United States and social unrest in many countries. Companies are facing an increasingly unstable and risky external environments. Brand boycotts elevate the risk level in the external environment and must be accounted for.

Companies' asses the risk before internationalizing. A common framework to use is the PESTEL-framework. PESTEL is an acronym for political, environmental, social, technological, economic, and legal. The risk level is broken down and assessed in all those domains (Issa & Issa, 2014. The risk of brand boycotts should be incorporated into this framework. It will make sense to incorporate it into the "social" parts, as brand boycotts are driven by socially conscious consumers. Once the risk level is assessed using the PESTEL-framework, the notion of brand boycotts must be further incorporated into the analysis of the fit between the company and the foreign market.

Brand boycotts can be the cause of divestment from a foreign market. Divestment is the withdrawing from foreign assets. It is a very common process for multinational enterprises (Xu et al., 2024). The findings from our study showed how brand boycotts could affect the operations to such a negative extent that the company chose to divest from the country. A divestment from a country will hurt the multinational enterprise, but also the local workers who will lose their jobs.

In addition, divestment is an active strategy a brand that has not yet been boycotted may apply. Over 1000 companies have pursued this strategy after the Russian invasion ofUkraine in February 2022 (Yale School of Management, 2024). This received notable media attention in mainstream media. Over 400 companies have not yet left Russia and has faced boycotts and massive international pressure to divest as well (Sonnenfeld & Tian, 2023). Companies will be caught in the crossfire with major geopolitical events like this. There is nowhere to hide. We called for future research on more strategies brands can use to handle brand boycotts.

In conclusion, our master thesis was a about brand boycotts. Brand boycotts is a phenomenon that is becoming more and more common. The outcomes can be quite serious for the brands. Multinational enterprises must start incorporating contingency plans for brand boycotts when entering new markets. When brands get caught in the crossfire of geopolitical events, there are nowhere to hide. Recent wars between Russia and Ukraine and Israel-Hamas have dragged many companies into the spotlight. They are being linked to the conflicts. The link is often not very clear, many of the brands have tried to defend themselves with varying luck. The risk of brand boycotts are present when entering a new market, during operations in the foreign market, and can also be the cause of divestment from the foreign market. The number of brand boycotts will most likely increase in the future, it is important that brands prepare and develop strategies on how to respond.

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Appendix XI: Discussion Paper International

Marit Garli Langedal

This paper will present the thesis and it´s topic, research question and findings. Further, it will explain how the topic relates to international trends and forces and how they affect each other. The paper ends with a summarize and a conclusion.

The thesis "The Why, What, and how of brand boycott" conceptualized the term Brand Boycott. The paper outlines the reasons, motivation, and responding strategies of Brand Boycott. The thesis contributes with a qualitative study of brand boycott, which the researcher found a lack of in previous literature. It contributes to the previous literature by filling these gaps and conceptualizing the term brand boycott. Further, this paper will explain brand boycott and present the research questions and the method used to conduct the data.

Brand Boycott can be defined as an act by consumers, where they boycott a brand, they don't want to support. With today's international and global society, brand boycott has spread fast all over the world and is a common phenomenon among consumers. Klein et al. 2004 states that "*boycotts are an intriguing form of consumer behavior, and firms targeted by a well-supported consumer boycott have apparently fail to sustain a sufficient customer focus*. Klein et al.(2004) also states that "*boycotts represent a source of consumer power and mechanism for social control*". It is important to note that boycott works as an "umbrella term", and that the term is a category within boycott. There are several related concepts to brand boycott, like political consumerism, consumer boycott or consumer activism. Brand Boycott is focusing on one or more brands, and how they operate in the international market.

The research objective discussed in the thesis was "How is brand boycott conceptualized in popular media" and the research question discussed was as following:

RQ 1 – What are the different reasons behind brand boycott?

RQ 2- What are the different positive and negative outcomes of brand boycotts?

RQ 3 – What are the different strategies brands can use to respond to brand boycotts?

Media discourse was the methos used when conducting the data. According to O'keeffe, (2013, p. 441) "th*is type of method refers to interactions that take place through a broadcast*

platform, either spoken or written".. The data was conducted form Google News, YouTube and blogs. Each of these were sorted into three excel documents and labeled A, B and C. News articles were labeled A, blogs B and videos C. Each article, newspaper, and blog where coded by the authors individually, before the coding's were merged in one section called "both open codes". Videos where also coded in the same way, but had to be transcribed first, before they could be coded. There were 142 articles, 77 reports and 134 videos in total. The media discourse data is parted in three levels, first order construct, subcategories, and aggregate dimension. Brand boycott is an up-to-date topic, and media discourse made it possible to conduct timely and up to date data. This method also makes it possible to conduct data globally from all over the world, giving the data and research an international aspect.

Further, this paper will present the findings which can be parted in three different categories, reasons, outcomes and responding strategy to brand boycott. Starting with reasons, the most common reasons for brand boycott are environmental, war, social and political. These are factors that triggers consumers to boycott a brand. In some cases there are two or more triggers affecting the boycotter at the same time. In other words, reasons for brand boycott work as a motive by the consumer and triggers them to boycott a brand.

Next, there is responding to brand boycott. There are two different approaches when responding to brand boycott, depending on if the brand is already boycotted or are vulnerable of being boycotted. There is either an active or a passive way of responding. Active ways of responding to brand boycott if a brand is already boycotted is threats, lawsuits or remove the product or the service. Passive ways are blaming misunderstanding, promise improvement or to apologize. Vulnerable brand, on the other hand, can take a political stance, donate, condemn war, or divest from controversial areas, as active strategies. Passive strategies can either be to not engage in politics or distance themselves.

Lastly, there is outcomes of brand boycott, which is either on organizational level or consumer level. Financial, reputational and sales outcomes the most common outcomes of brand boycott. Consumer behavior, such as boycott fatigue, navigation struggles, political consumerism or corotational trust are the most common outcomes on consumer level.

In today's global world, with connectivity trough internet decreasing the distance between the national borders, calls for brand boycotts spread faster than ever. As stated by Ignat

(2017, p.3) "*it is important to anticipate which technology trends are to influence in the products and services for the clients, in order to develop new solutions in right time*". This underlines the importance of being "up to date" in today's society affected by international trends and forces.

There are several trends today, but the biggest trends worth mention may be the digitalization, focus on sustainability as well as ethical business practices. These are both trends that have emerged over the past years and have great influence on business today. One can argue that these forces have become important due to a more connected international world where it is easier to shield light on businesses and their practices. This makes it easier as a consumer to navigate between brands and choose what to boycott or not. In terms of the brand, on the other hand, this can work as a negative force affecting them when doing business.

In relation to the research of the thesis and its result, companies or brands can risk boycott if they don't follow these trends. The international trends can work as forces in the business world, and if companies don't follow, they are being boycotted. Stated by Aydın (2021), we talk about "*the "digital age", which refers to a time where information in many forms is ready, available, accessible and instantly shareable*". Aydın (2021) also states that "*today, consumers can share their thoughts bout businesses and brand trough social media, and sometimes even cause serious business problems to businesses with their negative shares*".

Greenwashing is a phenomena which have caused boycotts of brands or firs, and is happening due to firms not following international forces and trends such as environmental trends and forces. Increasing environmental issues change consumers and stakeholders' behavior, and they are choosing brands and firms who produce eco-friendly products (Pimonenko et al., 2020). Pimonenko et al., (2020) states that "*firms pressure to quickly adapt their strategy corresponding to the new trends of transformation to green consumption, can lead to increased frequency of using greenwashing as a unfair marketing strategy*"

RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 all discuss different aspect of brand boycott, and the three research questions all correspond with international trends and forces. Starting with RQ1, which lights the different reasons for brand boycott. As mentioned, the most common reasons are either environmental, war, social and political reasons. These are the coding sub-categories, but the first order constructs show reasons like water shortage, inequality between people, discrimination, or unethical business practices as some of the drivers behind boycotts. This

aligns whit the assumption that environmental and ethical practices work as international drivers today.

Next, there is RQ2 which answers what the different positive and negative outcomes of brand boycotts can be. As mentioned, outcomes operates either on organizational or consumer level, and its either financial, reputational, or affecting sales of the brand. Focusing on the organizational outcomes, one can indicate that these outcomes will or can happen if a brand don't follow the international forces and trends mentioned, such as environmental and ethical business practices.

Lastly, there is RQ3 responding strategies to brand boycott, which are either active or passive and depending on the situation of the brand. Due to boycotts spreading fast trough social media and brands can be easily boycotted. It is therefore important that brand develop different response strategies to be preprepared. As mentioned firms who don't developed a green strategy today may risk being boycotted. If they don't follow the international forces the boycott can spread globally due the social media.

A theory which can apply to international trends and forces in relation to brand boycott is the stakeholder theory. The stakeholder theory contributes to clarify concepts around brand boycott such as its motives, outcomes, and responses theoretical implication brand boycott. Freeman defined the stakeholder theory as "*any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organizations objectives*" (Freeman, 1984, p. 46).   The theory represents the relationship between the brand and the stakeholders. These groups are customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers and lastly communities (Freeman et al., 2020).

Mahajan et al., (2023) sates that the theory "t*akes both external and internal stakeholders within a brand into account, and acknowledge stakeholders needs, wants and demands*". It can be viewed as a framework that not only focus on shareholders and leave room for considering international trends and forces in a brand decision-making process (Mahajan et al., 2023). It is important to note that, due to international trends and forces, the firms can't just focus on maximizing shareholder value, due to these trends and forces are broadening the shareholders interest beyond revenue.

The stakeholder theory applies for all the three research questions, simultaneously as it takes international trends and forces into account. As mentioned, stakeholders are the ones who

can affect the brand, and the theory underlines the power of the stakeholder. Brands risk boycott by stakeholders if they don't follow international trends and forces. It is therefore important that the brand takes international trends and forces in consideration as the stakeholder would want them to do.

Through the past two years at UiA, the term international have been a key word. Both the researchers did a semester of exchange before writing the thesis and this broadened their horizons as well as contributing with important knowledge about international trends and forces from other countries perspective. Most of the data collected were mainly focusing on international trends and forces within Europe or USA. From an international view, brand boycotts due to international trends and forces are more common in developed countries. Due to the researchers experience from their semester abroad, they quickly noticed this. In relation to this, one cans say that the international trends and forces mentioned, like digitalization, environmental and ethical practices are most prominent in developed countries compered to underdeveloped countries. The reasons for this may be that business and consumers in emerging countries are mainly focusing on develop and survive and don't have room to consider international forces and driver yet.

To summarize, brand boycott and international forces do align. Brand Boycott are being affected by international forces like digitalization, environmental and ethical business practices due to these being driver of brand boycott. The findings shows that reasons behind brand boycott aligns with the international trends and forces mentioned. Trough digitalization, these boycotts spread faster, and the outcomes mentioned in the findings are the consequences of this rapid digital spread. The thesis contributes with active and passive strategies and one can say that to follow international trends and forces today, is a strategy to prevent being boycotted.

One can conclude that brand boycott in itself is a form of international trend or force today. Due to social media connecting the world and spreading information faster than ever, firms should follow the international trends and forces that dominates the business world today. As mentioned earlier, Klein et al. (2004) states that "*boycotts represent a source of consumer power and mechanism for social control*". Boycott and brand boycott may therefore be the most common international force or trend happening today, due to consumers power trough social media and their high willingness to boycott brands. The power has shifted from companies to consumers, and consumers are deciding the international trends and forces today.

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