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I-CReST 2025:149-126 – Participation in the Boycott of Israel-Based Products: Evidence from the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) Community

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the participation behaviour of the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) community to engage in boycotts of Israel-based products. While public discourse often emphasizes pro-Palestinian sentiment and collective solidarity, actual consumer behavior reflects a complex array of influences. Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), this research explores how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control can also explain non-participation in boycotts. A total of 380 responses were collected via online surveys from UUM community. The findings reveal that although there is general awareness and moral support for Palestine amongst the university community, practical constraints, social ambiguity, and lack of perceived efficacy significantly hinder boycott participation. Attitude showed a negative correlation with boycott behaviour, while subjective norms and perceived behavioural control had significant but nuanced effects.

Keywords: Boycott; attitude; subjective norms; perceived behavioural control; Israel-based products

1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has spurred widespread international condemnation and mobilized global support for the Palestinian cause, particularly through initiatives such as the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which calls for non-violent economic and cultural pressure on Israel to uphold international law [1]. In Malaysia, public sentiment strongly favors Palestine, with support peaking during periods of heightened conflict, such as the 2014 Israel-Gaza war. These periods often witness waves of consumer boycotts targeting companies believed to support or benefit from Israeli policies [1]. In response to such sentiments, Malaysia established BDS Malaysia in 2015, reinforcing its commitment to global boycott efforts. Consumer boycotts are widely regarded as tools of political protest and ethical consumerism. In Malaysia, support for Palestine is strong, particularly in times of visible conflict. The government, NGOs, and religious institutions frequently encourage boycotts of Israel-linked corporations. Despite this, many Malaysians—including members of academia—do not consistently act on these calls to boycott. Understanding why these individuals do not participate is essential to bridging the gap between belief and action.

However, despite widespread moral and religious solidarity with Palestine, actual consumer participation in boycott campaigns remains relatively low—particularly among educated segments of society such as university communities. This contradiction is especially evident within the Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) community, where students and lecturers

may be aware of and even vocal about the Palestinian plight, yet fail to translate that awareness into consistent consumer action.

Existing literature suggests that factors such as lack of product knowledge, perceived ineffectiveness of individual actions, brand loyalty, and social ambiguity significantly contribute to low engagement in boycott behaviour [2], [3], [4]. Moreover, there is a scarcity of localized empirical research that explores these inhibitors within Malaysian higher education institutions.

Therefore, this study seeks to address a critical gap by investigating the factors contributing to non-participation in the boycott of Israel-based products among the UUM community. It aims to examine the roles of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control—as outlined in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)—in shaping consumer inaction. In this study, non-participation behaviour is defined as the tendency of consumers to make purchases or buying behaviour without considering whether the products are Israel-based or otherwise.

Understanding these factors is essential for designing more effective advocacy strategies and fostering meaningful consumer solidarity with global human rights movements. This approach enables the study to examine underlying cognitive and social factors that obstruct activism through consumer choices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Attitude and Boycott Inaction

Attitudes towards a boycott may be shaped by both moral beliefs and pragmatic concerns. [5] noted that individuals may perceive boycotts as ineffective or symbolic, especially when large corporations are involved. Consumers may also doubt their personal impact, believing that their individual actions will not create significant change [1]. Sentiments regarding the boycott of US companies act as a mediator between the impact of intrinsic religious motivation and the desire to boycott [6].

2.2 Subjective Norms and Social Ambiguity

Subjective norms can reinforce or weaken the likelihood of participating in a boycott. In collectivist cultures like Malaysia, alignment with group values is important. However, when a peer group or workplace does not strongly promote boycott actions, individuals may not feel socially obligated to participate—even if they support the cause in principle [2].

2.3 Perceived Behavioural Control and Practical Constraints

Perceived behavioural control plays a key role in determining whether an individual acts on their intentions. Barriers such as the lack of product alternatives, higher prices of boycott-friendly products, and uncertainty about which brands are linked to Israel may deter participation [5]. In Malaysia, the convenience and affordability of major brands may outweigh ethical considerations for many.

2.4 Participation Behaviour

Participation behaviour, in the context of this study, refers to the deliberate decision by consumers to actively avoid purchasing Israel-based products based on moral, political, or religious reasoning. This selective consumption pattern involves evaluating product origins before purchase—signifying a higher level of socio-political awareness and commitment to

boycott efforts. It aligns with prior research demonstrating that consumers' willingness to participate in boycotts can be influenced by perceived efficacy, reputational impact, and social norms [3], [4].

2.5 Hypothesis and Framework

From past research, the following hypothesis was developed and are being tested. The hypotheses is depicted in research framework as shown in Fig. 1.

H1: Attitude positively influence the intention to participate in boycott of Israel-based products.

H2: Subjective norms positively influence the intention to participate in boycott of Israel-based products.

H3: Perceived behavioural control influence the intention to participate in boycott of Israel-based products.

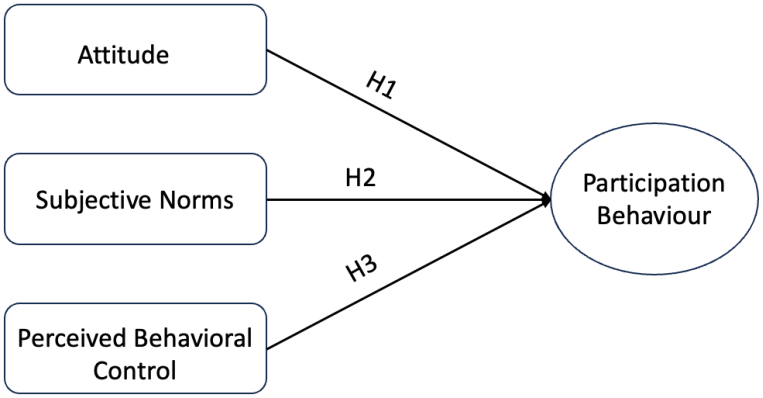

Fig. 1. Research framework

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative survey method distributed via Google Forms among UUM undergraduate students and lecturers. The sample consisted of 380 respondents selected through convenience sampling from a total population of 25,917. Convenience sampling was employed due to ease of accessing the population. Data collection was facilitated through online surveys distributed via messaging apps like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and Email. The questionnaire included sections on demographic data, attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and self-reported behaviour regarding boycotts.

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS 27 for descriptive statistics, reliability testing (Cronbach's Alpha), correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The pilot test was conducted by giving out the questionnaires to several candidates to test the validity of the questionnaires.

The survey instrument employed in this study is adapted from well-established sources in the literature. Specifically, the questionnaire items for the three independent variables—attitude (six items), subjective norms (five items), and perceived behavioural control (five items)—were adopted from [1]. In addition, the measurement of the dependent variable, participation behaviour, was constructed using six items derived from the works of [1] and [7].

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

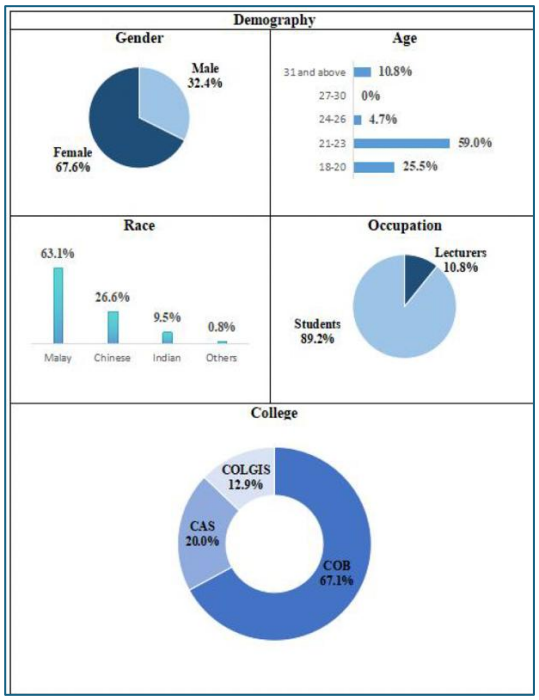

Fig. 2. Demographic profile

For demographic analysis, most respondents who completed the questionnaire were female (67.6%), followed by male respondents (32.4%). The age group with the highest percentage of respondents was 21-23 years old (59.0%), followed by 18-20 years old (25.5%), 31 years old and above (10.8%), 24-26 years old (4.7%), and no respondent from age 27-30 years old. Furthermore, the respondents were of various races, including Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Others. The highest percentage was Malay (63.1%), followed by Chinese (26.6), Indian (9.5%), and other race (0.8%).

Regarding the occupation, the most respondents were students which is 89.2%, while lecturers occupied 10.8%. In term of college at Universiti Utara Malaysia, the most respondents were from College of Business (COB) (67.1%), followed by the College of Arts and science (CAS) (20.0%) and the College of Law, Government, and International Studies (COLGIS) (12.9%).

Table 1. Reliability analysis

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Attitude	0.935	6
Subjective Norms	0.968	5
Perceived Behavioural Control	0.939	5
Participation Behaviour	0.993	6

Table 1 shows the individual values for attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and participation behaviour among UUM community are all considered acceptable reliability and consistency during the pilot test. All four constructs—Attitude (α = 0.935), Subjective Norms (α = 0.968), Perceived Behavioural Control (α = 0.939), and Buying Behaviour (α = 0.993)—show excellent internal consistency, far exceeding the acceptable 0.70

threshold [8]. This indicates that the measurement items are highly reliable. However, the extremely high values for Subjective Norms and Buying Behaviour may suggest item redundancy, which could be refined in future research.

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis

Model	Unstandardised B	Significant
Constant	-0.589	<0.001
Attitude	-0.022	0.662
Subjective Norms	0.523	<0.001
Perceived Behavioural Control	0.629	<0.001

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effects of Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioural Control on buying behaviour toward Israel-based products among the UUM community. As shown in Table 2, Subjective Norms ($B = 0.523$, $p < .001$) and Perceived Behavioural Control ($B = 0.629$, $p < .001$) were significant positive predictors. Attitude ($B = –0.022$, $p = .662$) was not statistically significant. Perceived Behavioural Control contributed the most to the model, followed by Subjective Norms.

Table 3. Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Findings
H1	Attitude positively influence the intention to participate in boycott of Israel-based products	Not Significant
H2	Subjective norms positively influence the intention to participate in boycott of Israel-based products	Significant
H3	Perceived behavioural control influence the intention to participate in boycott of Israel-based products	Significant

Table 3 summarises the hypothesis testing results. Hypotheses H2 and H3 were supported, while H1 was not. In this study, hypothesis testing was conducted to examine the influence of the three core constructs of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)—attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control—on the intention to participate in the boycott of Israel-based products. The testing process involved evaluating each hypothesis through regression analysis to determine both the significance and the direction of the relationships.

4.2 Discussion

The findings provide important insights into the determinants of the UUM community's intention to participate in the boycott of Israel-based products, as framed by the Theory of Planned Behaviour [9].

The strong effect of subjective norms (H2 supported) indicates that perceived social pressure from significant referents—such as family members, friends, religious leaders, and the broader Muslim community—plays a critical role in boycott participation. This is consistent with prior research showing that collective identity and community expectations significantly influence ethical and political consumption behaviours [1], [10]. Perceived behavioural control (H3 supported) emerged as the most influential predictor, highlighting the importance of individuals' confidence in their ability to participate.

Accessibility of alternative products, ease of identifying boycott targets, and clear boycott guidelines likely strengthen this perception. This finding aligns with past studies that emphasise perceived feasibility as a key driver of pro-social consumer actions [11].

In contrast, attitude (H1 not supported) was not a significant predictor. This diverges from much of the TPB literature, where attitudes are often a strong predictor of intention. In politically and religiously driven boycotts, attitudes may be overshadowed by powerful collective norms and social obligations. Individuals may agree with the boycott in principle but fail to act without social reinforcement or perceived ease of participation.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study concludes that in the UUM context, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control are the most critical drivers of boycott participation, while attitude plays a limited role. The study recommends strengthening community messaging by leveraging religious authorities, community leaders, and peer networks to reinforce social expectations. It also suggests enhancing perceived control by providing accessible boycott product lists, mobile applications, and clear substitution options. Furthermore, promoting collective identity by framing boycott participation as a shared moral and religious duty can help increase engagement. Finally, reducing barriers by addressing product identification challenges and ensuring that alternatives are widely available is essential.

This research extends TPB applications in ethical and political consumer behaviour by showing that in collectivist contexts, subjective norms and perceived control may outweigh personal attitudes. Future studies should explore additional variables such as moral obligation, religious commitment, and political awareness to provide deeper explanatory power.

6. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the study provides meaningful contributions to understanding boycott intention within the UUM community, it is not without limitations. Firstly, the research was conducted within a single university context, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other populations or cultural settings. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data raises the possibility of social desirability bias, especially given the sensitive political and religious nature of the boycott topic. Thirdly, the cross-sectional design captures responses at one point in time, preventing causal inferences about the relationships among variables.

Future research could address these limitations by adopting a longitudinal approach to capture changes in boycott intention over time, particularly in response to geopolitical events or advocacy campaigns. Expanding the sample to include participants from multiple universities or community groups could improve generalisability. Additionally, future studies could explore the role of moral obligation, religious commitment, political engagement, or media exposure as mediating or moderating variables within the TPB framework. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, may also provide richer insights into the motivations and barriers influencing boycott participation.

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