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The rise of alternative brands during the boycott movement: evidence from Malaysia

Seryna Bambang¹, Shahrina Ismail^{1*}, Abdallah H. A. Abuajwa², Azira Khalil¹

¹*Faculty of Science and Technology, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Malaysia;*

²*Faculty of Applied Sciences, Al-Aqsa University, Palestine*

**correspondence: shahrinaismail@usim.edu.my*

Abstract

The ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict has driven significant boycott movements among Malaysian consumers, resulting in shifts toward alternative brands. However, there remains a knowledge gap regarding the factors influencing consumer preference for these brands during boycotts. This research investigates the relationship between consumers' willingness to boycott, consumers' attitudes, and consumers' personal values and their preference for alternative brands. A quantitative method using Pearson Correlation and Ordered Probit Regression was employed. Data were collected through a convenience sampling method involving 289 respondents from Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, aged 18 and above, who were aware of the boycott movement. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between consumers' willingness to boycott, personal values, and consumer preference for alternative brands, while consumers' attitudes showed a moderate positive correlation. Ordered Probit Regression further confirmed that consumers' willingness to boycott and consumers' personal values significantly influence consumer preference for alternative brands. However, consumers' attitudes had a weaker yet positive relationship. The findings conclude that consumers with strong personal and ethical values and who are more willing to boycott are more likely to shift preferences towards alternative brands. This highlights the importance of ethical branding strategies in addressing consumer expectations during boycott movements.

Keywords:

Alternative brands;
Boycott;
Consumers' attitude;
Personal values;
Willingness to boycott;
Religious concerns

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1. Introduction

Boycotts have caused notable shifts in consumer preferences. Since Malaysians are now more aware of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, they tend to look for products that match their opinions towards this conflict. Malaysian consumers mostly avoid brands or products that are linked to Israel and shift to alternative brands. This boycott movement affects how businesses operate in the Malaysian market. Some brands have been positively affected, while others have been negatively affected, depending on how the brands reacted towards the conflict. According to MalaysiaNow (2024), over 100 Starbucks outlets in Malaysia have either permanently or temporarily ceased operations due to an international boycott movement opposing the United States support for Israel's actions, thus reporting a net loss of RM91.5 million in 2024 alongside

a 35% decline in revenue for Starbucks Malaysia under the Berjaya Group. This shows how consumer behaviour changes in response to boycott movements. However, there is a critical void in our knowledge of the motivations behind Malaysian consumers' participation in these boycotts and how these shape their choices of alternative brand preferences.

This void of knowledge limits our ability to understand and predict the consumer's preference for alternative brands and, more precisely, how brand preferences might shift in response to these underlying motivations. Undoubtedly, the ongoing conflict plays a role in consumers' motivations to boycott. Other factors, such as consumers' willingness to boycott, consumers' attitudes, whether they are on the supporting, neutral, or opposing sides, and consumers' personal values, such as their religious beliefs and social justice, could also be the main contributors to consumers' motivation to participate in this boycott movement which would influence the consumer's decision-making on alternative brand preference (Hamzah & Mustafa, 2019). Addressing these solutions can provide valuable insights into how businesses operate in Malaysia and contribute to a broader understanding of Malaysian consumer behaviour.

In this study, we focused on three independent variables (IVs): consumers' willingness to boycott, consumers' attitude, and consumers' personal values. We analyse the correlation among these IVs during the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and their relationship with consumer preference for alternative brands. This study presents a distinct perspective on consumer behaviour in Malaysia by examining how boycotting Israeli products influences consumers' alternative brand preferences. However, this topic has not yet been extensively explored in the Malaysian market. Unlike the study by Kutaula et al. (2024), which primarily focused on ethical consumerism or the impact of political boycotts on global brands, this research shifts the focus towards localised economic effects, specifically within the halal industry and local brand growth.

The findings of this study have significant implications for key market segments in Malaysia, particularly the halal industry, local brand growth, and multinational brand adaptation. With an increasing emphasis on ethical consumption and religious obligations, halal-certified local brands may experience long-term market advantages post-boycott as consumers shift their preferences towards products that align with their values (Alias et al., 2024). Similarly, alternative brands, particularly homegrown Malaysian companies, may gain brand loyalty and consumer trust, leading to a more competitive domestic market where local businesses can thrive and expand their market presence. Additionally, understanding how multinational corporations adjust their marketing strategies to regain consumer confidence post-boycott provides valuable insights into corporate resilience and adaptation in politically sensitive markets. By addressing these aspects, this study provides a unique contribution to existing literature. This study offers practical insights for businesses, policymakers, and marketing strategists navigating the complexities of boycotts and consumer behaviour in Malaysia.

2. Boycotts and consumers' preference for alternative brands

A boycott is a way of expressing dissatisfaction by refusing to interact with another party, and people boycott to pressure the other party to address the problem with which they are unsatisfied with (Abdul-Talib & Adnan, 2017). It can be seen from past studies by Lasarov et al. (2023) that boycotting a company or brand would make it necessary for the consumer to switch to an alternative provider. Two studies have examined product boycotts during the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The first study was by Hamzah and Mustafa (2019), who explored consumer boycotting intelligence regarding Malaysia's Israel-linked companies. The results of the study show that consumers chose to boycott many Israeli-owned brands such as McDonald's, Nestle, and Garnier. Consumers also shifted to alternative brands, mostly local ones, such as Ramly Burgers, Marry Brown, and Simply Siti. International alternative brands have also become consumers' choice, such as The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf and Libresse. The second study is that of Utama et al. (2023),

who analyse the influence of boycotting Israeli-related products on Muslim consumers' brand perception. The findings show that the boycott disrupted consumer purchasing behaviour, motivating them to seek alternative options for Israeli-related goods. It also reveals an increase in consumer support and search for brands that show commitment to social and ethical issues.

Tariki and Abdul Shukor (2019) found a strong correlation between the Social Influence Index (SII) and consumer purchasing trends. Moreover, Abdul-Talib and Adnan (2017) found that three factors are essential in determining consumers' willingness to boycott: product judgment, subjective norms, and animosity. Pandey et al. (2021) found that consumers are motivated to make a difference in boycott movements. In Hamzah and Mustafa (2019), attitude towards the boycott movement, either supportive, opposing, or neutral, significantly affects consumers' decision to participate in the movement, and attitude towards Israel is not significant.

While consumers' motivation to participate in boycotts varies, their personal values ultimately play a significant role in this participation. Consumers might develop several values in conjunction with participating in the boycott movement, one of which is religious belief. Religion is a structured set of rituals, beliefs, symbols, and practices that guide individuals closer to something divine. Religion can be related to the boycott movement because it plays an essential role in shaping a person's values, morals, and habits. Religious beliefs play an important role in consumers' purchase decisions, especially during boycott movements (Utama et al., 2023). Mirza et al. (2020) determined that religious animosity significantly impacts the boycott movement. The authors argue that religious animosity affects consumers' product evaluation, loyalty, and perceptions of brand image.

Prior research has largely examined boycotts from a global standpoint, with studies emphasising the effectiveness of political consumerism in Western markets (Neilson, 2010). However, there remains a literature gap in understanding how such consumer actions impact market dynamics in Muslim-majority countries, where religious and ethical considerations play a crucial role in purchasing decisions (Rafiki et al., 2024). This study fills this gap by providing empirical evidence from Malaysia, a nation where both religious values and geopolitical awareness increasingly influence consumer sentiment. Furthermore, most existing research focuses on short-term boycott impacts, such as temporary declines in multinational company revenue (Friedman, 1999). This study extends the analysis by exploring long-term shifts in consumer preferences, particularly examining whether consumers who switch to alternative brands due to a boycott remain loyal to those brands post-boycott.

This study adopts the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) as its theoretical foundation. The TPB posits that an individual's behavioural intentions are influenced by three key constructs: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In this study, consumers' attitudes, willingness to boycott (as a proxy for intention), and personal values (aligned with subjective norms and belief systems) reflect these core components. The application of TPB allows this study to systematically examine how these psychological factors drive consumer preference for alternative brands during the boycott movement. The theory has been widely used in studies related to ethical consumerism and pro-social behaviour, making it relevant to the current context. Figure 1 shows the research framework.

3. Methods

This study focuses explicitly on consumers residing in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, who are at least 18 years old and are aware of the current boycott movement in Malaysia. This study intentionally focused on respondents residing in Negeri Sembilan to maintain the contextual consistency with the research objectives. A screening question on place of residence was included at the beginning

of the survey, and only respondents who indicated Negeri Sembilan as their state of residence were allowed to proceed. This state-level focus helped reduce regional heterogeneity and enhance the internal validity of the findings.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), in 2023, approximately 831,300 Negeri Sembilan residents were above 18 years old. From the 831,300 population, with a 5% margin of error and a 90% confidence interval, the optimal sample size was 271. A convenience sampling method, focusing on potential respondents who were the easiest to reach (Golzar et al., 2022), was implemented to gather participants for this study's survey.

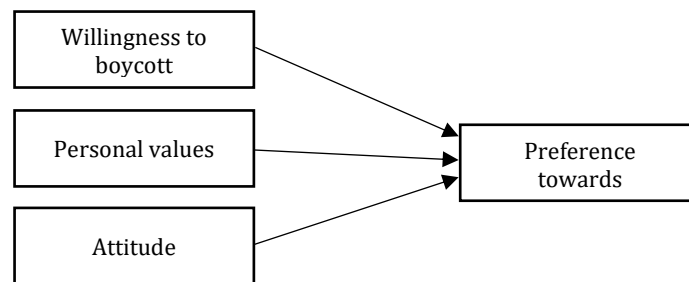


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

3.1 Samples

Although practical for timely data collection, convenience sampling has limitations, such as selection bias and generalisability issues due to non-random participant selection. Respondents may also have self-selection bias, as those with strong opinions on boycotts are more likely to participate. However, this method was chosen because of practical constraints, cost efficiency, and accessibility, allowing effective engagement with relevant consumers in Negeri Sembilan. Despite its limitations, this study mitigated bias by ensuring an adequate sample size and conducting reliability and validity tests to enhance data robustness.

To ensure that only respondents with awareness of the boycott movement participated in the study, a screening question was included at the beginning of the survey: “Are you aware of the ongoing boycott movement against Israeli-linked brands?” Respondents who answered “Yes” were allowed to proceed with the rest of the questionnaire. This screening criterion was added to improve the data quality and ensure alignment with the target population of the study.

A total of 289 valid responses were obtained through online questionnaire distribution via social media and messaging platforms. Because the survey link was distributed openly through these platforms, the exact number of individuals who received or viewed the invitation could not be accurately determined. Therefore, the response rate was not calculated. Data collection was conducted over a period of four weeks, from 2 November 2024 to 5 December 2024. The final sample size of 289 exceeded the minimum required sample size of 271, which was considered to be adequate for the analysis. This online distribution method allowed the study to reach relevant respondents efficiently, particularly consumers in Negeri Sembilan who were aware of the boycott movement.

3.2 Research instrument

This study employed a structured questionnaire to measure the key constructs related to consumers' boycott behaviour and their preference for alternative brands. The research questionnaire was developed as an online form and distributed through social media platforms. A pilot study was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of survey items. According to

Tavakol and Dennick (2011), reliability focuses on the consistency of the measurement instrument to produce stable and repeatable findings and to minimise measurement error.

All variables were measured using multi-item scales adapted from established studies in the literature to ensure content validity and theoretical consistency. The measurement items were refined to suit the context of the boycott movement in Malaysia. A five-point Likert-like scale was used to evaluate respondents' level of satisfaction, agreement, disagreement or frequency (Joshi et al., 2015). Table 1 summarises the variables, the number of items used to measure each construct, and the sources from which the items were adapted.

Table 1: Adapted items for each variable

Variable	Number of Items	Source (Adapted from)
Willingness to boycott	5	Abdul-Talib and Adnan (2017); Pandey et al. (2021)
Attitude towards the boycott	4	Hamzah and Mustafa (2019); Ajzen (1991)
Personal values	5	Mirza et al. (2020); Utama et al. (2023)
Preference for alternative brands	5	Hamzah and Mustafa (2019); Utama et al. (2023)

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument measures the construct it is intended to measure, whereas reliability refers to the consistency of the instrument in producing stable results (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Two approaches were used to test the validity: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test. The KMO test was used to check the sampling adequacy and determine whether the sample size was sufficient to capture the underlying factors. A high KMO value suggests strong suitability for factor analysis. Bartlett's test checks the interrelationships between variables in terms of correlation. If Bartlett's test gives a significant result, where the p -value is less than 0.05, it shows that the variables are not independent and share underlying factors with other variables.

A coefficient correlation was computed to accomplish the first objective of this research, which was to investigate the relationships among the study variables. Mekonnen (2020) stated in his past study that there are three methods of computing coefficient correlation: the scatter diagram, Pearson's correlation coefficient, and Spearman's rank order method. In this study, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to measure the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. To determine the strength of the correlation, the value of the coefficient r which ranges between -1.0 and 1.0, was assessed. A negative r value indicates a negative correlation between the two variables and vice versa.

To achieve the second objective, this study applies an Ordered Probit Regression model. This method is appropriate because the dependent variable, preference for alternative brands, is measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Although Likert-scale responses are sometimes treated as interval data, this study treats the dependent variable as ordinal because the response categories have a clear ranking, but the distance between each category cannot be assumed to be equal. Ordered Probit Regression is suitable for examining the relationship between an ordinal dependent variable and a set of independent variables because it estimates the probability that respondents fall into higher or lower ordered response categories (StataCorp, 2024). An ordinal variable is a categorical variable with a meaningful order, such as "poor", "good", and "excellent" (StataCorp, 2024). In this study, the ordinal response categories were coded as $y=1,2,3,4,5$, representing increasing levels of agreement. The model assumes that the observed ordinal response is generated from an underlying unobserved continuous latent variable, y^* , which reflects the respondent's level of willingness to boycott. Therefore, the Ordered Probit model for this study is specified as follows:

$$y^* = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Willingness} + \beta_2 \text{Attitude} + \beta_3 \text{Value} + \varepsilon, \quad (1)$$

where:

Willingness = Consumers' willingness to boycott
Attitude = Consumers Attitude
Value = Consumers' personal values
 y^* = Preference for alternative brands

$$y = z \quad \text{if} \quad \mu_{z-1} \leq y^* < \mu_z \quad \text{with } z = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, \quad (2)$$

where μ_z depends on the cut-off points or threshold parameters, which are estimated alongside the regression coefficients such that:

$y = 1$ (strongly disagree) if $\mu_0 \leq y^* < \mu_1$
 $y = 2$ (disagree) if $\mu_1 \leq y^* < \mu_2$
 $y = 3$ (neutral) if $\mu_2 \leq y^* < \mu_3$
 $y = 4$ (agree) if $\mu_3 \leq y^* < \mu_4$
 $y = 5$ (strongly agree) if $\mu_4 \leq y^* < \mu_5$

The probit link function and ordinal measure were applied to predict the relationship between the ordinal independent variables and ordinal dependent variables. The estimated coefficient values indicate whether the independent variables have a positive or negative effect on the dependent variable. The p -value was used to assess statistical significance at the 5% level, where values below 0.05 were considered statistically significant. The analysis was conducted using the IBM SPSS version 29 software.

4. Results

4.1 Pilot study

Table 2 presents the reliability results from the pilot study, which was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire items before the actual data collection. The Cronbach's alpha values for willingness to boycott, personal values, and preference for alternative brands were 0.833, 0.752, and 0.812, respectively, indicating acceptable reliability. However, the initial Cronbach's alpha value for the attitude construct was 0.415, which was below the acceptable threshold. Therefore, an item analysis was conducted, and Item 3 was removed because of its weak item-total correlation. After removing Item 3, the Cronbach's alpha value for the attitude construct increased to 0.610. Although this value remains below the ideal threshold of 0.70, it indicates an improvement in internal consistency in the pilot stage. Therefore, the revised attitude items were retained for the actual data collection, and reliability was reassessed using the final dataset.

Table 2: Pilot study reliability test of variables

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Willingness to boycott	5	0.833
Attitude	4	0.610
Personal values	5	0.752
Preference for alternative brands	5	0.812

The reliability of the final dataset was then reassessed using the actual responses collected from 289 respondents. To examine the structural validity of the measurement items, a factor analysis was conducted separately for each construct. This approach was used because each construct in this study, namely willingness to boycott, consumers' attitude, consumers' personal values, and consumers' preference for alternative brands, was measured using a separate set of

questionnaire items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used to assess whether the items within each construct were suitable for factor analysis. As shown in Table 3, the KMO values for willingness to boycott, consumers' personal values, and consumers' preference for alternative brands were 0.802, 0.804, and 0.691, respectively, indicating acceptable sampling adequacy. However, the KMO value for consumer attitudes was 0.569, which is slightly below the commonly recommended threshold of 0.60. Despite this lower value, the construct was retained because Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant for all constructs, indicating that the items were sufficiently correlated for factor analysis. In addition, consumers' attitudes were theoretically important to the study and were supported by previous research. Therefore, the variable was retained for further analysis; however, the relatively low KMO value should be acknowledged as a limitation. Similarly, a study by Safeer et al. (2022) found that consumers' attitude, such as consumers' liking or disliking of a brand, significantly affects their evaluation of the brand, which influences their brand preferences.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's test results for each construct

Variables	KMO test	Bartlett's test (p-value)
Willingness to boycott	0.802	<0.001
Attitude	0.569	0.034
Personal values	0.804	<0.001
Preference for alternative brands	0.691	<0.001

4.2 Sociodemographic

The demographic profiles of the respondents (N=289) are summarised in Table 4. Most of the respondents were aged 18-24 years, accounting for 52.9%, while the second-highest percentage fell within the 25-34 age group (17.3%). Regarding marital status, most respondents were single (61.9%), followed by married (28.7%). Regarding education level, a bachelor's degree holds a large proportion at 67.5%, while a master's degree holds the second-highest proportion at 13.8%. Geographically, the respondents were mainly from urban areas, comprising 49.1%, while 34.3% were from suburban areas. Additionally, nearly all respondents (99.7%) were aware of the boycott movement against Israeli-related goods in Malaysia, and a significant 96.5% of them participated in the boycott by refusing to purchase Israeli products.

Table 4: Respondents' demographic profile

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18-24	153	52.9
	25-34	50	17.3
	35-44	38	13.1
	45-44	34	11.8
	55 or older	14	4.8
Marital Status	Single	179	61.9
	Married	83	28.7
	Divorced	27	9.3
Level of Education	Diploma	32	11.1
	Bachelor's Degree	195	67.5
	Master's Degree	40	13.8
	PhD or higher	22	7.6
Residence Location	Urban Area	142	49.1
	Suburban Area	99	34.3
	Rural Area	48	16.6
Have you heard about the boycott movement against Israeli-related products in Malaysia?	Yes	288	99.7
	No	0	0
	Maybe	1	0.3
Have you participated in the boycott movement by avoiding or refusing to purchase Israeli products and brands?	Yes	279	96.5
	No	2	0.7
	Maybe	8	2.8

4.3 Pearson correlation

For the first objective, Pearson's correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships among consumers' attitudes, willingness to boycott, personal values, and preference for alternative brands. The results are shown in Table 5. The results show a moderate positive correlation between consumers' attitudes and willingness to boycott, with a correlation value of $r = 0.554$. A moderate positive correlation was also found between consumers' attitude and personal values ($r = 0.547$), and between consumers' attitude and preference for alternative brands ($r = 0.502$).

In addition, the results indicate a strong positive correlation between the willingness to boycott and personal values ($r = 0.819$). A strong positive correlation was also observed between the willingness to boycott and the preference for alternative brands ($r = 0.765$). Finally, personal values and preferences for alternative brands were strongly and positively correlated ($r = 0.761$). Overall, the Pearson correlation results indicated that all variables were positively correlated. This suggests that higher levels of attitude, personal values, and preference for alternative brands are associated with a higher willingness to boycott.

Table 5: Pearson correlation table

	Attitude	Willingness to boycott	Personal values	Preference for alternative brands
Attitude	1			
Willingness to boycott	0.554	1		
Personal values	0.547	0.819	1	
Preference for alternative brands	0.502	0.765	0.761	1

4.4 Ordered probit regression

For the second objective, Ordered Probit Regression was used as the main regression analysis to examine the effect of consumers' willingness to boycott, consumers' attitude, and consumers' personal values on consumers' preference for alternative brands. Unlike Pearson correlation analysis, which was used only as a preliminary bivariate analysis to examine the direction and strength of relationships between variables, Ordered Probit Regression was applied because the dependent variable, consumers' preference for alternative brands, was measured using ordered Likert-scale response categories. Although composite Likert scores are sometimes treated as interval data for preliminary analysis, the dependent variable in this model is treated as ordinal because the response categories have a meaningful ranking, but the distance between categories cannot be assumed to be equal. Therefore, Ordered Probit Regression is appropriate because it estimates the probability that respondents fall into higher or lower ordered categories of preference for alternative brands (StataCorp, 2024). Based on the findings in Table 6, the Ordered Probit model can be represented as follows:

$$y^* = 0.657Willingness + 0.175Attitude + 0.635Value \quad (3)$$

The results are shown in Table 6. The results show that consumers' willingness to boycott has a positive coefficient of 0.657, which is statistically significant at the 5% level ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that consumers' willingness to boycott has a significant positive relationship with their preference for alternative brands. Consumers' attitude had a positive coefficient of 0.175, with a significance value of $p = 0.095$. This shows that consumers' attitudes are not statistically significant at the 5% level but are significant at the 10% level. Therefore, the relationship between consumers' attitudes and preferences for alternative brands is weakly supported. Consumers'

personal values had a positive coefficient of 0.635 and were statistically significant at the 5% level ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that consumers' personal values have a significant positive relationship with their preference for alternative brands. Overall, the Ordered Probit Regression results show that consumers' willingness to boycott and consumers' personal values are significant predictors of preference for alternative brands. Consumers' attitudes showed a positive but weaker effect.

Table 6: Ordered probit regression

Variable	Coefficient	Sig	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
Consumers' willingness to boycott	0.657	<0.01	0.433	0.881
Consumers' attitude	0.175	0.095	-0.031	0.380
Consumers' personal values	0.635	<0.01	0.408	0.861

5. Discussion

The moderate positive relationship between consumers' attitude and willingness to boycott suggests that consumers who develop favourable attitudes towards boycotting are more likely to show willingness to participate in boycott activities. This is consistent with the idea that attitudes can shape behavioural intentions, where individuals are more likely to act in ways that align with their attitudes. This finding is supported by Tariki and Abdul Shukor (2019), who reported that consumer animosity, which reflects a negative attitude towards a targeted country or brand, positively influences consumers' willingness to boycott. The moderate positive correlation between consumers' attitude and personal values indicates that individuals with stronger personal values, including religious and ethical beliefs, are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards boycotting. This suggests that boycott attitudes may be shaped by moral principles, ethical concerns and religious teachings. Abdullah et al. (2021) also found that religiosity influences boycott participation through attitude, indicating that attitude can serve as an important intermediary factor.

The moderate positive relationship between consumers' attitudes and preference for alternative brands shows that consumers with positive attitudes towards boycotting are more likely to prefer alternative brands. This may be because consumers who support boycotts tend to choose substitute brands that are consistent with their ethical, religious or social principles. Similarly, Shanbhogue and Ranjith (2024) emphasised that consumers' attitudes towards brands affect purchase intentions and brand preferences. The strong positive relationship between willingness to boycott and personal values suggests that consumers with stronger religious and ethical values are more willing to participate in boycotts. This indicates that personal values may play an important role in motivating ethical consumer behaviours. Utama et al. (2023) stated that religious beliefs influence consumers' decision-making processes, supporting the view that religious and ethical principles can guide boycott participation.

The strong positive correlation between willingness to boycott and preference for alternative brands indicates that consumers who are more willing to boycott are also more likely to seek alternative brands. This is expected because consumers who avoid specific brands due to ethical or moral concerns need to replace them with other acceptable products. Lasarov et al. (2023) noted that boycotting a company or brand requires consumers to switch to an alternative provider. Finally, the strong positive relationship between personal values and preference for alternative brands suggests that individuals with stronger religious and ethical values are more likely to prefer alternative brands that align with their beliefs. This supports the view that ethical and religious values influence consumer decision-making. Elsayed et al. (2023) explained that religious teachings affect ethical and moral decision-making, which may guide consumers in choosing brands consistent with their values.

The positive and significant coefficient for consumers' willingness to boycott suggests that respondents who are more willing to participate in boycotts are more likely to prefer alternative brands. This finding is reasonable because consumers who avoid certain brands for ethical, political, or religious concerns may need to replace those brands with acceptable alternatives. This is consistent with Utama et al. (2023), who stated that boycotts can foster consumer loyalty when they successfully disrupt purchasing habits and encourage consumers to seek alternative brands that align with their values. The coefficient for consumers' attitude is positive but not significant at the 5% level. This suggests that although consumers' attitudes may influence their preference for alternative brands, the effect is weaker compared to willingness to boycott and personal values. This may indicate that attitude alone is insufficient to strongly influence brand-switching behaviour unless it is supported by stronger personal values or an actual willingness to boycott. This finding is partly supported by Safeer et al. (2022), who found that consumers' attitudes toward brands can affect brand evaluation and brand preference.

The positive and significant coefficient for consumers' personal values indicates that respondents with stronger personal values are more likely to prefer alternative brands. This suggests that religious, ethical, and moral values may influence consumers' decisions to avoid certain brands and choose alternatives that better reflect their beliefs. This finding is consistent with Elsayed et al. (2023), who explained that religious teachings can influence ethical and moral decision-making processes, thereby shaping consumers' values and choices.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the factors influencing Malaysian consumers' preference for alternative brands in the context of boycotting Israeli-related products. Specifically, this study focused on consumers' willingness to boycott, consumers' attitude, and consumers' personal values. The findings show that consumers' willingness to boycott and their personal values are the most important factors influencing their preference for alternative brands. Consumers who are more willing to boycott and those with stronger personal values are more likely to prefer alternative brands.

In contrast, consumers' attitudes showed a positive but weaker effect, suggesting that attitude alone may not be sufficient to strongly influence alternative brand preference. Overall, this study concludes that boycott-related consumer behaviour is strongly shaped by value-based and ethical considerations. This study contributes to the understanding of how socio-political issues influence consumer decision-making and brand-switching behaviour among Malaysian consumers.

6.1 Implications of the study

This study provides critical insights for businesses and marketers operating in Malaysia, especially those navigating the socio-political sensitivities of consumer sentiments. The strong influence of personal values and willingness to boycott brand preferences suggests that companies must actively align their branding and corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies with the ethical and religious values of their target consumers. Brands perceived as neutral or supportive of consumer-led causes may experience increased loyalty and market share, particularly during heightened political or humanitarian crises. The findings highlight the need for businesses to maintain transparency, practice value-based branding, and adopt proactive communication to avoid alienation during public boycott movements.

From a policy and socio-economic development perspective, this study underscores the power of ethical consumerism in shaping local market dynamics. Government agencies and halal certification bodies may use these findings to further support local brands and initiatives that

reflect consumer values, fostering self-reliance and reducing dependence on international brands that conflict with public sentiment. Moreover, this research opens a pathway for further academic enquiry into long-term shifts in brand loyalty triggered by boycott movements and the role of digital media in influencing collective consumer behaviour. This encourages future research into demographic-based motivations and regional variations that could aid in developing more targeted and culturally informed marketing strategies.

6.2 Limitations and recommendations

Despite these insightful findings, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the use of a convenience sampling method and the restriction to a single state (Negeri Sembilan) limit the generalisability of the results to the broader Malaysian population. Respondents were more likely to participate if they already had strong opinions on the boycott, introducing a potential self-selection bias (Golzar et al., 2022). Additionally, the low reliability score for the “consumer attitude” variable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.610$ after item removal) raises concerns about measurement consistency, even though its inclusion was justified based on its theoretical relevance (Safeer et al., 2022). Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study, which captures consumer behaviour at one point in time, potentially missing out on evolving attitudes and preferences, especially in a fluid sociopolitical context such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Hamzah & Mustafa, 2019; Abdullah et al., 2021).

Future research should address these limitations by adopting probability sampling techniques and expanding the geographical scope to include diverse states in Malaysia. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial for tracking changes in consumer attitudes and preferences over time, especially post-boycott, as highlighted by Utama et al. (2023). Furthermore, future studies can integrate qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to gain deeper insights into the emotional and moral dimensions of consumer decision-making, especially regarding religious values and ethical stances (Elsayed et al., 2023; Mirza et al., 2020). Scholars could also explore how global trends in ethical consumerism and digital activism influence local buying behaviour, thereby enriching the discourse on consumer-brand relationships in politically charged environments.

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Ethical compliance: All participants involved in this study were fully informed of the nature, purpose, and procedures of the research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to their involvement in the study. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, without any consequences.

Data access statement: Research data supporting this publication are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Conflict of interest declaration: The authors declare that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organisation or entity with any financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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and manuscript review. AK contributed to the literature review, data interpretation, and editing of the final manuscript. All the authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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