

Research.

## Purchase Unwillingness of Indonesian Consumer on Unilever Products with Focus on Pro-Israel Sentiment

Nurrifa Delfianti<sup>1)</sup>, Wenny Pebrianti<sup>2)</sup>, Ramadania<sup>3)</sup>, Heriyadi<sup>3)</sup>

Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Tanjungpura  
[nurrifa.delfianti@gmail.com](mailto:nurrifa.delfianti@gmail.com), [wenny.pebrianti@ekonomi.untan.ac.id](mailto:wenny.pebrianti@ekonomi.untan.ac.id),  
[ramadania@ekonomi.untan.ac.id](mailto:ramadania@ekonomi.untan.ac.id), [heriyadi@ekonomi.untan.ac.id](mailto:heriyadi@ekonomi.untan.ac.id)

corresponding author<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** *This study aims to test and analyze the effect of consumer animosity on boycott participation and boycott motivation, which ultimately influence unwillingness to buy. Also the effect of consumer animosity on unwillingness to buy, which is mediated by boycott participation and boycott motivation. Data were collected through an online survey with 320 respondents. This study uses a quantitative research method with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) techniques. The results show that consumer animosity has a positive and significant effect on boycott motivation and boycott participation. Boycott participation and boycott motivation have a positive and significant impact on unwillingness to buy. Boycott participation and boycott motivation, as mediators, are proven to have a positive and significant effect on the relationship between consumer animosity and unwillingness to buy.*

**Keywords:** *Boycott Motivation, Boycott Participation, Consumer Animosity, Unwillingness to Buy.*

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

On October 7, 2023, hostilities between Palestine and Israel intensified, marking one of the largest confrontations between the two sides in recent history. The Ministry of Health in Gaza announced that the number of fatalities resulting from Israeli aggression has risen to 4,651, with about 1,756 of them being children (Zuraya, 2023). This escalating conflict also heightened tensions in the Middle East and worsened the humanitarian crisis in a long-conflicted area, with limited access to medical assistance, food, and other basic necessities (2023a). As the conflict escalated, public attention turned to international companies, including Unilever, that have business ties with Israel (Widyastuti, 2023). These companies are seen as providing indirect economic support that strengthens Israel's capacity in the conflict, through taxes, investments, or operational support (Hendarto, 2023). This has triggered growing animosity towards these companies and their products.

Consumer animosity toward Unilever refers to the negative attitudes or antipathy shown by consumers toward the company, often in response to actions or policies perceived as inconsistent with their moral or ethical values (Alfi, 2022). In the context of the conflict between Palestine and Israel, Unilever's involvement in business related to Israel has triggered emotional reactions from consumers who believe that the economic support provided by the company may contribute to human rights violations in Palestinian territories. This sense of animosity is not just individual but also become part of a broader

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social movement in which communities collectively take a stance against companies seen as supporting actions they consider wrong (Daudigeos et al., 2020). One of the social movements gaining momentum is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Founded in 2005 by Palestinian activists, this international initiative calls for economic, academic, and cultural boycotts against Israel to pressure the country to end its occupation and illegal settlement activities in Palestinian territories (Tobing, 2023). This movement has garnered widespread support from the global community concerned about human rights violations (Baumgart-Ochse, 2017). The BDS movement has also been influenced by digitalization, which has facilitated its expansion into Indonesia through social media (Indahsari et al., 2023; Pramesti et al., 2023). This movement prompted the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) to release Fatwa Number 83 of 2023 concerning the Law on Supporting the Palestinian Struggle, which proclaims that supporting Israeli aggression against Palestine is not permitted (Medistiara, 2023). The fatwa urges Muslims to avoid transactions and the use of products linked to Israel if possible (2023).

The MUI fatwa encouraged consumers not to buy Unilever products as a form of protest against policies or actions perceived to support Israel reflects customer dissatisfaction. This is reflected in the decline of Unilever Indonesia's net profit in 2023, which fell by 10.4%, to IDR 4.8 trillion, compared to IDR 5.3 trillion in 2022 (Safitri & Djumena, 2024). This dissatisfaction demonstrates how negative feedback and reviews can impact a business's reputation and credibility (Nazhifa et al., 2024). It also reflects the phenomenon of unwillingness to buy, where consumers consciously avoid products from companies because they disagree with the political or social affiliations that are seen as contrary to their values (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). Unwillingness to buy arises when consumers feel that continuing to purchase products would violate their moral or ethical principles, such as supporting actions deemed harmful to a particular group. In this context, consumers' unwillingness to buy Unilever products is a manifestation of dissatisfaction and rejection towards the company, perceived to support Israel's policies.

Boycott participation and boycott motivation describe consumer behavior in choosing to support or oppose a specific company, as in the case of the boycott against Unilever for its affiliation with Israel. Boycott participation refers to consumer involvement in boycotting products or services from companies seen as connected to a country or policy that does not align with their social values (Tariki & Shukor, 2019). According to a Populix survey, 65% of participants agreed with the fatwa encouraging a boycott, meaning many consumers expressed a willingness to join a boycott if they knew a company was involved in activities or affiliations with Israel, particularly regarding its controversial policies towards Palestine (Hitchcock, 2020). Meanwhile, boycott motivation explains the reasons behind consumers' decisions to join the boycott (Keser & Söğütü, 2023). Based on Populix data, boycott motivation is driven by solidarity with Palestine (75%) and humanitarian concern for the region (65%). Many respondents believe boycotting is an effective way to express their disagreement with policies they see as harmful or unjust. Additionally, social media influence and the spread of information within online communities have further strengthened the push for a boycott as a form of protest against companies affiliated with Israel. Thus, the boycott against Unilever is motivated not only by economic factors but also by broader political and social motivations.

This study is influenced by previous research showing that consumer animosity has a significant positive impact on participation in boycotts and the motivations behind such actions (Suhud, 2017, 2018). Furthermore, boycott participation and motivation have a positive and significant influence on unwillingness to buy (Suhud, 2017).

The aim of this study is to explore in-depth the influence of consumer animosity on boycott participation and boycott motivation, which ultimately affects Indonesian consumers' unwillingness to buy Unilever products. Additionally, this study also aims to analyze the influence of consumer animosity on the unwillingness to buy, mediated by boycott participation and boycott motivation, with a specific focus on the impact of pro-Israel sentiment.

## **Research Question**

The research questions formulated in this study are as follows:

1. Does consumer animosity influence boycott participation on Unilever products?
2. Does consumer animosity influence boycott motivation on Unilever products?
3. Does boycott participation influence unwillingness to buy Unilever products?
4. Does boycott motivation influence unwillingness to buy Unilever products?
5. Does boycott participation mediate the relationship between consumer animosity and unwillingness to buy Unilever products?
6. Does boycott motivation mediate the relationship between consumer animosity and unwillingness to buy Unilever products?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Consumer Animosity and Boycott Participation**

Feelings of animosity toward a country often stem from ideological differences, government policies, human rights violations, as well as perceptions of crime or terrorism (Alvarez & Campo, 2020; Fong et al., 2022). Consumer animosity, defined as individuals' negative feelings and attitudes toward a specific foreign country, is typically triggered by traumatic historical events, economic disputes, or differences in cultural norms and values, which ultimately influence their perceptions and behaviors toward foreign products (Kiriri, 2018; Nawaz et al., 2023). One form of this is boycott participation, where individuals actively choose not to buy or support certain companies or products because the companies' actions are deemed unethical or unacceptable (Gabrielle Klein et al., 2002). Friedman categorizes boycotts into two types: direct and indirect. A direct boycott occurs when consumers avoid products from companies perceived as irresponsible (Farah, 2014; Friese, 2000), while an indirect boycott involves consumers refraining from purchasing goods from companies associated with the primary target, thereby applying economic pressure on those companies.

H<sub>1</sub>= Consumer animosity influence boycott participation on Unilever products

### **Consumer Animosity and Boycott Motivation**

Boycott motivation refers to the reasons why individuals choose to participate in a boycott, which can include instrumental motivation aimed at changing company policies, expressive motivation aimed at venting anger, and "clean hands" motivation aimed at avoiding guilt or feeling good about oneself (Gabrielle Klein et al., 2002; Keser & Söğütllü, 2023; Klein et al., 2001). Consumer animosity significantly motivates boycott participation, as increased animosity correlates with a higher likelihood of consumers engaging in a boycott against brands they view negatively (Suhud, 2018, 2020).

H<sub>2</sub>= Consumer animosity influence boycott motivation on Unilever products

### **Boycott Participation and Unwillingness to Buy**

Unwillingness to buy refers to consumer hesitation in purchasing a product, often frequently shaped by multiple factors such as negative reviews and the overall quality of online feedback. Consumers tend to exhibit a negativity bias, where they prioritize negative reviews over positive ones, especially if the negative comments are prominently displayed (Liu & Zhou, 2012). Boycott participation significantly impacts unwillingness to buy, indicating that consumers who engage in a boycott are less likely to intend to purchase the boycotted products (Suhud, 2018).

H<sub>3</sub> = Boycott participation influence unwillingness to buy on Unilever products

### **Boycott Motivation and Unwillingness to Buy**

According to Ajzen (1991) in the Theory of Planned Behavior, negative attitudes toward a company or product that is perceived as not supporting personal values will strengthen the intention to avoid purchase. Research by Klein et al. (2004) also shows that the stronger the boycott motivation against a company, the higher the level of unwillingness to buy, which can ultimately affect the consumer's decision not to purchase and impact the company's reputation and sales. Boycott motivation has a positive and significant effect on unwillingness to buy, where the greater the motivation to boycott a product or company, the greater the consumer's unwillingness to make a purchase (Suhud, 2017).

H<sub>4</sub> = Boycott motivation influence unwillingness to buy on Unilever products

### **Boycott Participation Mediates the Relationship of Consumer Animosity and Unwillingness to Buy**

Consumers with negative feelings toward a brand or country tend to avoid products, especially when involved in a boycott. These findings support previous studies (Kiriri, 2018; Suhud, 2018), which indicate that consumer animosity, when combined with organized boycott participation, leads to stronger resistance to purchasing products from companies perceived as responsible for unethical practices. Boycott participation serves as a direct expression of consumer disapproval, amplifying the effect of animosity on purchasing behavior. This supports research by Gabrielle Klein et al. (2002), who argue that consumers are more likely to avoid buying products when motivated by the desire to express their ethical or political stance. Furthermore, boycott actions are not merely symbolic gestures; they channel negative feelings into real behavior, making consumers more resolute in their unwillingness to support the rejected brand (Farah, 2014).

H<sub>5</sub>= Boycott participation mediates the relationship between consumer animosity and unwillingness to buy on Unilever products

### **Boycott Motivation Mediates the Relationship of Consumer Animosity and Unwillingness to Buy**

According to Fong et al. (2022), consumers with strong motivations for social change or moral improvement are more likely to act on their animosity, making their resistance to purchase even stronger. Boycott motivation, which can stem from various factors such as ethical concerns, social justice, or the desire to support alternative brands, plays a crucial role in amplifying the effect of consumer animosity. As demonstrated by Gabrielle Gabrielle Klein et al. (2002), consumers motivated to take action not only express their negative feelings but also channel them toward meaningful change, reinforcing their unwillingness to buy products from targeted brands. This research also supports the idea that motivated consumers view their actions as a form of resistance, which strengthens their resolve to avoid supporting companies like Unilever that are perceived as unethical (Liu & Zhou, 2012).

H<sub>6</sub>= Boycott motivation mediates the relationship between consumer animosity and unwillingness to buy on Unilever products

Using the provided description, a research framework can be developed as in Figure 1

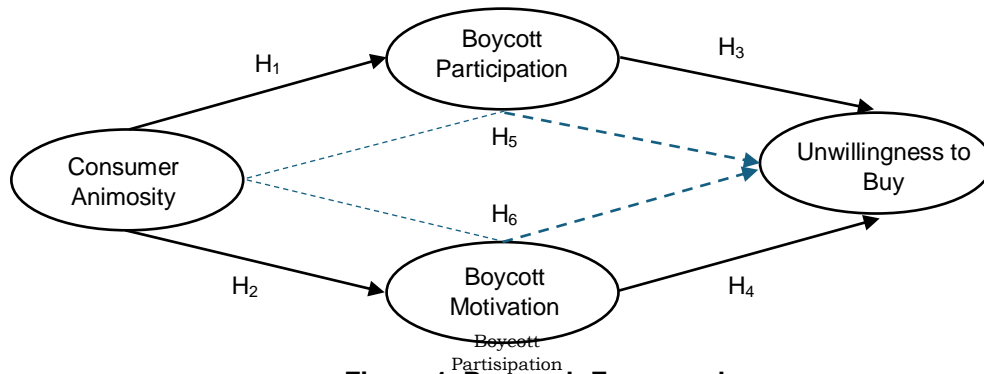


Figure 1. Research Framework

## RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, a quantitative approach was used through an experimental design to test the proposed hypotheses. The researchers gathered primary data by distributing questionnaires to collect necessary information from respondents. The questionnaire measured responses using a Likert scale, indicating levels of agreement (1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neutral, 4= agree; and 5= strongly agree) with the provided statements on a metric scale (Westland, 2022).

The data collection technique involved a questionnaire hosted on Google Forms, which was distributed by the researchers via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Discord, along with an announcement of the required respondent criteria. The sample for this research comprised 320 respondents from across Indonesia. Data processing was conducted using Smart PLS version 4 software with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) methods. The sample criteria included: (1) Respondents must be Indonesian citizens aged at least 17 years. (2) They must be aware of and have previously purchased Unilever products. (3) They should be informed about the conflict occurring between Israel and Palestine. (4) They must know that Unilever has affiliations with Israel. The data analysis process starts with testing convergent validity, followed by testing discriminant validity. Then, a reliability test is done using Cronbach's Alpha or Composite Reliability. After that, the R-Square test is performed, and the final step is hypothesis testing.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Characteristics of Respondents

The following table outlines the profiles of the 320 respondents who met the criteria for this study. It includes demographic details such as gender, age, location, education, occupation, and religion.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents

Categories	Items	f	%
Gender	Male	130	40.6
	Female	190	59.4
	Total	320	100
Age	17-25 years old	268	83.8
	26-35 years old	20	6.3
	36-45 years old	16	5
	46-55 years old	14	4.4
	over 55 years old	2	0.6
	Total	320	100
Domicile	Sumatera	5	2

Categories	Items	f	%
	Jawa	41	13
	Kalimantan	249	78
	Sulawesi	21	7
	Papua	4	1
	Total	320	100
Education	Junior High School	2	0.6
	Senior High School	161	50.3
	D1/D2/D3/D4	42	13.1
	Bachelor	99	30.9
	Master's degree	16	5
	Total	320	100
Job	Student	7	2.2
	University Student	173	54.1
	Private Employee	65	20.3
	Government Employee	18	5.6
	Entrepreneur	23	7.2
	Other	34	10.6
	Total	320	100
Religion	Islam	272	85
	Non-Islam	48	15
	Total	320	100

Source: Processed Data, 2024

### Evaluation of measurement model (outer loading)

The evaluation of the measurement model tested using SmartPLS 4 focuses on two forms of validity: convergent validity and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 2, each indicator has a factor loading greater than 0.7, indicating that these indicators meet the accepted standards. This finding aligns with Hair et al., who state that factor loadings should exceed 0.5, with an ideal value being above 0.7. Additionally, all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are greater than 0.5, suggesting that each indicator is suitable for measuring constructs in the research model (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, it can be concluded that all measurement items meet the criteria for convergent validity and can be relied upon to measure the variables in this study.

**Table 2. Convergent Validity Result**

Variable	Indicator	Measurement Item	Loading Factor	AVE
Boycott Motivation (BM)	BM1	I would feel guilty if I bought Unilever products	0.934	0.910
	BM2	I want to punish Israel. That is why I do not buy their products	0.967	
	BM3	I want to express my anger at Israel by avoiding purchasing Unilever products	0.961	
Boycott Participation (BP)	BP1	I would feel uncomfortable if others saw me purchasing Unilever products	0.785	0.713
	BP2	My friends/family encourage me to boycott Unilever products	0.837	
	BP3	Boycotts are effective to bring a change	0.919	
	BP4	By boycotting, I can change Unilever	0.908	
	BP5	Boycotting will put Unilever economy in danger	0.761	
Consumer Animosity (CA)	CA1	I felt angry with Unilever	0.858	0.732
	CA2	I will never forget what Unilever because of the pro-Israel issue toward Palestine	0.807	
	CA3	Unilever should pay for what they have done to Palestine	0.884	

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Variable	Indicator	Measurement Item	Loading Factor	AVE
Unwillingness to Buy (UTB)	CA4	I do not like Unilever	0.872	0.870
	UTB1	If there were two products with the same quality, but one made by Unilever and one made by another company, I would be willing to pay 10% more expensive for the products made by another company	0.927	
	UTB2	If it possible. I will avoid buying Unilever products	0.938	

Source: Processed Data, 2024

Figure 3 below presents the results from the data analysis carried out using SmartPLS 4, showcasing the outer loading values along with the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

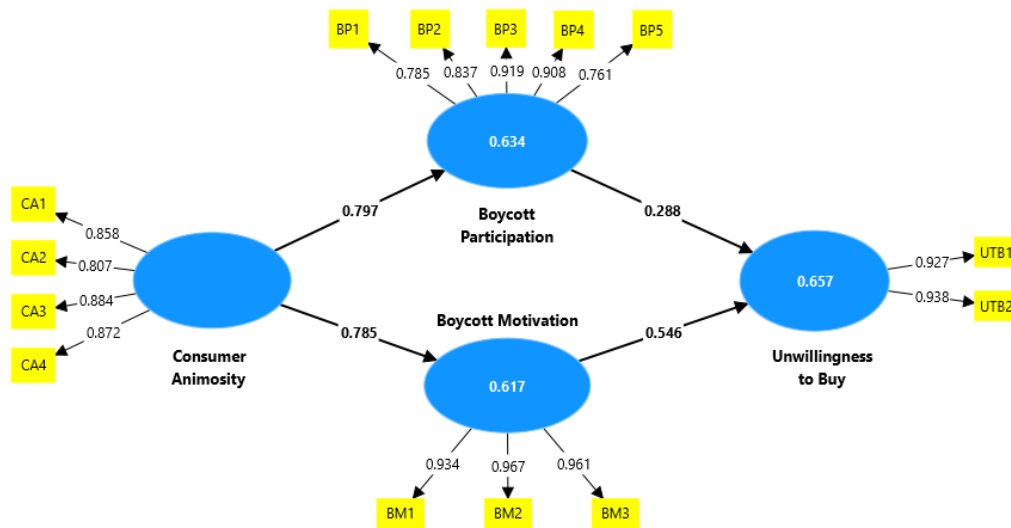


Figure 3. Algorithm Model Result

### Discriminant validity

The discriminant validity analysis shown in Table 3 demonstrates that each variable has a Fornell-Larcker criterion value that surpasses the correlation values of other latent variables. Additionally, each indicator displays a cross-loading value that surpasses those of the other latent variables. This indicates that all latent variables and their respective indicators are valid (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Fornell-Larcker Test Result

Variable	BM	BP	CA	UTB
Boycott Motivation (BM)	0.954			
Boycott Participation (BP)	0.878	0.845		
Consumer Animosity (CA)	0.785	0.797	0.856	
Unwillingness to Buy (UTB)	0.799	0.767	0.699	0.933

Source: Processed Data, 2024

### Reliability

Composite reliability assesses how consistently the indicators within a variable perform. A variable is deemed to have composite reliability if its value is greater than 0.7 (Purba et al., 2020). Furthermore, for a value to be deemed reliable, Cronbach's alpha should exceed 0.6, serving as an additional criterion for evaluating and confirming research

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results (Ayodele et al., 2018). The analysis reveals that the Cronbach's alpha values are 0.8 and 0.9, indicating that the results are reliable. Additionally, the composite reliability values for all variables reach 0.9, surpassing the required minimum of 0.7.

**Table 4. Reliability Test**

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)
Boycott Motivation (BM)	0.951	0.968
Boycott Participation (BP)	0.898	0.925
Consumer Animosity (CA)	0.878	0.916
Unwillingness to Buy (UTB)	0.851	0.930

Source: Processed Data, 2024

### Evaluation of structural model (inner model)

#### R Square

The evaluation of the structural model centers on assessing the R-Square values for each dependent variable through the PLS Algorithm to obtain reliable estimates. A low R-Square value indicates that the independent variables have a limited ability to account for changes in the dependent variable (Ghozali, 2016). Conversely, a variable with an R-Square value greater than 0.5 or nearing one is considered to possess significant explanatory power.

**Table 6. R Square Value**

Variable	R-square	R-square adjusted
Boycott Motivation	0.617	0.615
Boycott Participation	0.634	0.633
Unwillingness to Buy	0.657	0.655

Source: Processed Data, 2024

As shown in Table 6, the R-Square values for boycott motivation (61.7%), boycott participation (63.4%), and unwillingness to buy (65.7%) demonstrate stronger explanatory power regarding variations in the dependent variable.

#### Hypothesis testing

In SEM-PLS analysis, hypothesis testing is conducted through bootstrapping to assess the significance and direction (positive or negative) of the variables involved in a hypothesis. This process utilizes a one-tailed t-value of 1.645, which aligns with a significance level of 5%.

**Table 7. Path Coefficient Results**

Hypothesis	Relationship between Variables	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Description
H <sub>1</sub>	Consumer Animosity Boycott Participation ->	0.797	0.797	0.024	33.512	0.000	Accepted
H <sub>2</sub>	Consumer Animosity Boycott Motivation ->	0.785	0.786	0.025	31.035	0.000	Accepted
H <sub>3</sub>	Boycott Participation ->	0.288	0.290	0.082	3.499	0.000	Accepted

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Hypothesis	Relationship between Variables	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Description
	Unwillingness to Buy						
H <sub>4</sub>	Boycott Motivation -> Unwillingness to Buy	0.546	0.543	0.084	6.492	0.000	Accepted
	Consumer Animosity -> Boycott Participation -> Unwillingness to Buy						
H <sub>5</sub>	Consumer Animosity -> Boycott Participation -> Unwillingness to Buy	0.229	0.232	0.066	3.461	0.000	Accepted
	Consumer Animosity -> Boycott Motivation -> Unwillingness to Buy						
H <sub>6</sub>	Consumer Animosity -> Boycott Motivation -> Unwillingness to Buy	0.429	0.427	0.067	6.391	0.000	Accepted

Source: Processed Data, 2024

Table 7 above shows the path coefficient results and has the following meanings:

The first hypothesis states that consumer animosity positively and significantly influences boycott participation. This finding aligns with previous studies (Ali, 2021; Atilgan & Köken, 2022; Suhud, 2018), underscoring the relationship between negative sentiments and consumer actions. Specifically, individuals harboring animosity toward Israel may perceive Unilever as complicit in the issues they oppose, prompting them to engage in a boycott as a means of expressing their discontent. By participating in such activities, these consumers channel their frustration into tangible action, highlighting the emotional and ethical dimensions of their decision-making process.

The second hypothesis states that consumer animosity positively and significantly affects boycott motivation, which is consistent with earlier research (Khoiruman & Wariati, 2023; Lestari & Jazil, 2024; Suhud, 2018, 2020). Consumers who associate certain products with entities they oppose, such as Israel are more likely to feel compelled to act on their dissatisfaction. In the case of Unilever, this animosity fuels the motivation to boycott its products, driven by anger and frustration over policies deemed harmful. This behavior reflects a desire to make a statement against perceived injustices, with the hope that their collective actions will influence corporate practices and policies.

The third hypothesis states that boycott participation positively and significantly impacts unwillingness to buy, in line with findings from prior studies (Chapa & Bravo, 2024; Suhud, 2017). Participation in boycotts represents more than a mere refusal to purchase products; it also serves as an expression of social identity and moral values. Consumers who join boycotts often see their actions as aligned with their ethical beliefs, using their purchasing decisions to reinforce their stance on broader social and political issues. This unwillingness to buy extends beyond individual actions, reflecting a collective effort to challenge corporate behavior and advocate for change.

The fourth hypothesis states that boycott motivation positively and significantly influences unwillingness to buy. This aligns with the findings of Suhud (2017) and Lasarov et al. (2023), who emphasize the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping consumer intentions. When individuals hold strong views about political or social matters such as those related to Israel they are more likely to be motivated to boycott, which, in turn, strengthens their reluctance to purchase the products in question. In this context, the decision to avoid Unilever products becomes a form of protest, rooted in deeply held convictions and a desire to effect change.

The fifth hypothesis prove that boycott participation mediates the relationship between consumer animosity and unwillingness to buy in a positive and significant manner. When a company like Unilever becomes entangled in a controversial issue, consumers who disagree with its perceived stance may choose to boycott as a form of protest. This action amplifies their animosity toward the brand, transforming their ethical concerns into a concrete unwillingness to buy its products. As a result, the boycott becomes both a symbolic and practical tool for expressing opposition, further distancing consumers from the company.

The final hypothesis reveals that boycott motivation effectively mediates the relationship between consumer animosity and unwillingness to buy in a positive and significant way. When consumer animosity generates a strong urge to boycott, it directly influences their reluctance to purchase the associated products. In the case of Unilever, heightened motivation to boycott due to animosity increases consumers' unwillingness to engage with the brand, reflecting the power of emotions and ethical considerations in shaping consumer behavior.

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study concludes that consumer animosity toward Unilever, related to the perception that the company has a pro-Israel stance, significantly influences their unwillingness to buy the company's products. This animosity positively contributes to boycott participation and boycott motivation, further reinforcing the reluctance to buy. These findings contribute to the literature on consumer boycotts and corporate social responsibility, highlighting the importance of considering consumer emotions and attitudes in understanding boycott behavior. Furthermore, the results provide valuable insights for marketers and companies in addressing consumer concerns related to social and political issues to maintain trust and a positive brand image.

However, the study does have certain limitations that should be considered. One major limitation is that the research was conducted exclusively in the five largest islands of Indonesia, which may not fully capture the diverse perspectives and behaviors of consumers in smaller, outer islands or remote regions. This geographic limitation may result in a skewed understanding of consumer animosity and boycott behavior, as attitudes in different regions might vary significantly due to cultural, economic, and political differences. Additionally, the focus on a single company restricts the generalizability of the findings across different industries and sectors. Future research should aim to include a broader geographic scope that encompasses not only the larger islands but also smaller islands and more rural or less accessible areas. It should also investigate consumer animosity and boycott participation across various industries and companies to better understand the broader implications of these behaviors.

Moreover, the study's reliance on an online approach to data collection, while beneficial for reaching a wide audience, may also introduce biases related to digital accessibility and the overrepresentation of certain demographic groups. Future studies could consider employing a combination of online and offline methods to provide a more comprehensive picture of consumer attitudes and behaviors. Lastly, future research should also explore the long-term implications of boycotts on corporate reputation and the role of social media in amplifying consumer activism and organizing collective actions.

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