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## An Ethical Stance in Consumption: A Phenomenological Study of Boycotts

Ali Can Yenice

### Abstract

This study aims to explore the phenomenon of boycotts through the lived experiences of university students focusing on how they internalize and practice boycotting. When participants hear the word *boycott*, they primarily associate it with events in Palestine and Gaza, indicating that boycotting is perceived as a form of protest specifically against Israel and its supporters. The research examined the boycott experiences of theology and political science students using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The study group consisted of ninety theology students and ninety political science students. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that theology students tend to view boycotting as a religious and moral obligation, while political science students –alongside these motivations– also interpret it as a tool for political pressure. For both groups, the act of boycotting is closely associated with supporting the oppressed, pursuing justice, and fulfilling a sense of social responsibility. Moreover, the impact of boycotts is observed on micro, meso, and macro levels. This study seeks to contribute to the limited body of literature on boycotts and, to the best of our knowledge, provides an original contribution as the first study to examine university students' lived experiences of the boycott phenomenon using the IPA method. The findings demonstrate that boycotts serve not merely as economic tools but as multifaceted psychosocial phenomena, significantly influenced by digital engagement. Consequently, entities seeking to foster consumer activism should focus on robust social media strategies and leverage opinion leaders to enhance solidarity and awareness.

**Keywords:** Islamic finance, consumer activism, political consumerism, boycott, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Türkiye, Palestine

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KÜLLİYE

ULUSLARARASI SOSYAL BİLİMLER DERGİSİ  
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## Tüketimde Ahlaki Duruş: Boykota Dair Fenomenolojik Bir Analiz

Ali Can Yenice

### Özet

Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin boykotu nasıl içselleştirdiklerine ve hayata geçirdiklerine odaklanarak; boykot olgusunu öğrencilerin bizzat yaşadıkları deneyimler üzerinden araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Katılımcıların, boykot kavramını öncelikle Filistin ve Gazze'deki olaylarla ilişkilendirmesi, eylemin temel olarak İsrail ve destekçilerine yönelik bir protesto biçimi olarak algılandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırmada Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz (IPA) yöntemi kullanılarak ilahiyat ve siyasal bilgiler fakültelerinde öğrenim gören toplam 180 öğrencinin (her gruptan 90 kişi) deneyimleri incelenmiştir. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerle elde edilen veriler, tematik analiz yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular, ilahiyat öğrencilerinin boykotu dini ve ahlaki bir yükümlülük olarak görme eğiliminde olduklarını, siyasal bilgiler fakültesi öğrencilerinin ise bu motivasyonların yanı sıra boykotu siyasi baskı aracı olarak da yorumladıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Her iki grup için de boykot eylemi, ezilenleri desteklemek, adaleti sağlamak ve sosyal sorumluluk duygusunu yerine getirmekle yakından ilişkilidir. Ayrıca, boykotların etkisi mikro, mezo ve makro düzeylerde gözlemlenmektedir. Bu çalışma, boykotlar üzerine sınırlı sayıda bulunan literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır ve IPA yöntemini kullanarak üniversite öğrencilerinin boykot olgusuna ilişkin deneyimlerini inceleyen ilk çalışma olma özelliğiyle literatüre özgün bir katkı sağlamaktadır. Bulgular, boykotların yalnızca ekonomik araçlar olarak değil, dijital katılımın önemli ölçüde etkilediği çok yönlü psikososyal fenomenler olarak da işlev gördüğünü göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak, tüketici aktivizmini teşvik etmek isteyen kuruluşlar, dayanışmayı ve farkındalığı artırmak için sağlam sosyal medya stratejilerine odaklanmalı ve kanaat önderlerinden istifade etmelidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslami finans, tüketici aktivizmi, politik tüketicilik, boykot, Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz (IPA), Türkiye, Filistin

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## Introduction

A boycott is defined as a multidimensional form of social action that allows individuals or communities to express their ethical, political, religious, and ideological stances through their consumption practices (Britannica, 2025). Historically, boycotts have functioned not only as economic choices but also as tools of political resistance. Landmark examples such as Gandhi's Salt March during India's struggle for independence, the Boston Tea Party that sparked the American Revolution, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott against racial segregation all demonstrate the transformative power of collective action (Aydınbaş et al., 2025).

Today, consumer boycotts are considered a serious challenge to modern capitalism, with the majority of multinational corporations facing boycott campaigns. Research indicates that such actions can significantly damage brand reputation and directly impact business performance (Mulyono & Rolando, 2025). In this sense, boycotts represent a social movement that influences not only individual consumption patterns but also global economic relations. Islamic economics and finance, also known as Islamic political economy or moral economy, does not view consumption solely through the lens of utility maximization; instead, it is understood within a broader framework of religious and moral values (Asutay, 2012). Consequently, consumers fulfill their moral and religious responsibilities by engaging in ethical and responsible consumption. Boycotts can be seen as an extension of this understanding, as the religious and moral motivations behind boycotts align with these principles.

In Türkiye, the concept of boycott is strongly linked to Israel's occupation policies in Palestine. Participants primarily associate the term "boycott" with Palestine and Gaza, suggesting that the act is widely interpreted as a protest specifically targeting Israel and, by extension, the United States as its supporter. Indeed, existing literature shows that anti-Israel boycotts are seen not only as political acts but also as humanitarian and moral responses (Chaitin et al., 2017; Halimi et al., 2017; Hamzah & Mustafa, 2019). The motivations for participating in boycotts are diverse. Key drivers include religious and moral obligations, political ideals, the pursuit of justice and human rights, and broader universal human values (Avcı, 2024; Farah & Newman, 2010; John & Klein, 2003). A recent study conducted in Türkiye shows that over 30% of the population has participated in a boycott, with the rate rising to 40% among university graduates. This suggests that boycott participation increases with educational attainment, indicating that such actions are not confined to subcultures, but are instead embraced by individuals with higher levels of social awareness and political consciousness (Aydınbaş et al., 2025). Despite the proliferation of boycotts, unresolved theoretical and empirical debates persist in the academic literature. Theoretically, there remains a tension between rational choice models, which emphasize utility maximization without individuals incurring personal costs for collective goals, and moral agency theories that highlight ethical and religious commitments. How individuals resolve the conflict between economic interests and moral obligations in their daily lives remains unclear. Empirically, the debate focuses on the "attitude-behavior gap," as surveys often indicate a high intention to boycott, while actual market data frequently reveal inconsistent adherence, raising questions about the sustainability of such actions. Building on these debates, this study addresses three main questions: (1) How do university students manage the tension between moral and political ideals and their consumption habits? (2) Do motivations differ between students in religious education (Theology) and secular political education (Political Science)? (3) How is the impact of boycotts perceived beyond purely economic criteria?

While there are numerous studies in the current literature examining the economic, political, and social consequences of boycotting, phenomenological research aimed at understanding individuals' lived experiences of boycotting remains limited. Therefore, it is important to explore how young people—particularly university students—perceive and engage with boycotts. This focus is essential because younger generations play a pivotal role in the spread of boycotts and the development of social awareness, especially through their use of social media (Stolle et al., 2005).

Considering this gap, the present study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first in the literature to investigate the phenomenon of boycotting through the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of theology and political science students, using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method. The aim of this research is to reveal how boycotts are experienced not only as economic and political actions but also as expressions of personal beliefs, moral values, and a sense of social responsibility.

In summary, the main findings of this study reveal a clear difference in the lived experiences of the two groups. While theology students primarily frame the boycott as a religious duty (*fard*) grounded in the concept of the *umma* and not open to debate, political science students conceptualize the boycott as a strategic instrument for political pressure and rights-based resistance. Nevertheless, both groups agree on the psychosocial benefits of participation, such as inner peace and social solidarity, suggesting that for participants the fundamental benefits of boycotts may be psychological and social, in addition to economic. The following sections of the study begin with a review of the relevant literature on boycotts, followed by an explanation of the methodological framework employed. Next, the findings derived from participants' experiences are presented and discussed thematically. Finally, based on the results, the study offers both theoretical and practical contributions, outlines policy implications, and provides suggestions for future research.

## Literature review

A boycott is a collective and organized form of exclusion implemented in business, economic policy, and social relations as a means of protesting practices deemed unjust. In the modern era, boycotts gained prominence in the West with the 1880 protest against high rents and land evictions in Ireland (Britannica, 2025).

According to the Turkish Language Association, the term refers to a decision to abstain from an activity or sever ties with a person, group, or country in pursuit of a particular goal (TDK, 2025). Although the concept has become more prominent in recent years due to global reactions to Israel's occupation and actions in Palestine, the practice of boycotting is well-established in both Western and Islamic historical traditions. Numerous examples throughout modern history demonstrate the significant impact of boycotts. Among the most prominent are Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March during India's struggle for independence, the Boston Tea Party that sparked the United States' Revolutionary War, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott against racial segregation. Other notable examples include the school boycott by Asian students facing violence in the U.S., the "Buy Nothing Day" campaign against consumerism, and the oil embargo imposed in response to U.S. support for Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War (Aydinbaş et al., 2025).

Consumer boycotts have increasingly emerged as powerful tools of resistance and are now seen as a serious threat to global capitalism. Research shows that 42% of multinational corporations and 54% of leading brands are currently subject to boycotts or similar forms of consumer activism. The growing prevalence of consumer boycotts can be attributed to a range of

motivations, including ethical concerns, political convictions, religious beliefs, and more (Mulyono & Rolando, 2025).

A search for the term *boycott* in two of the most well-known academic databases reveals that scholarly interest in the topic has grown steadily over the years, indicating a rising prominence of boycotts in academic discourse (see Figure 1).

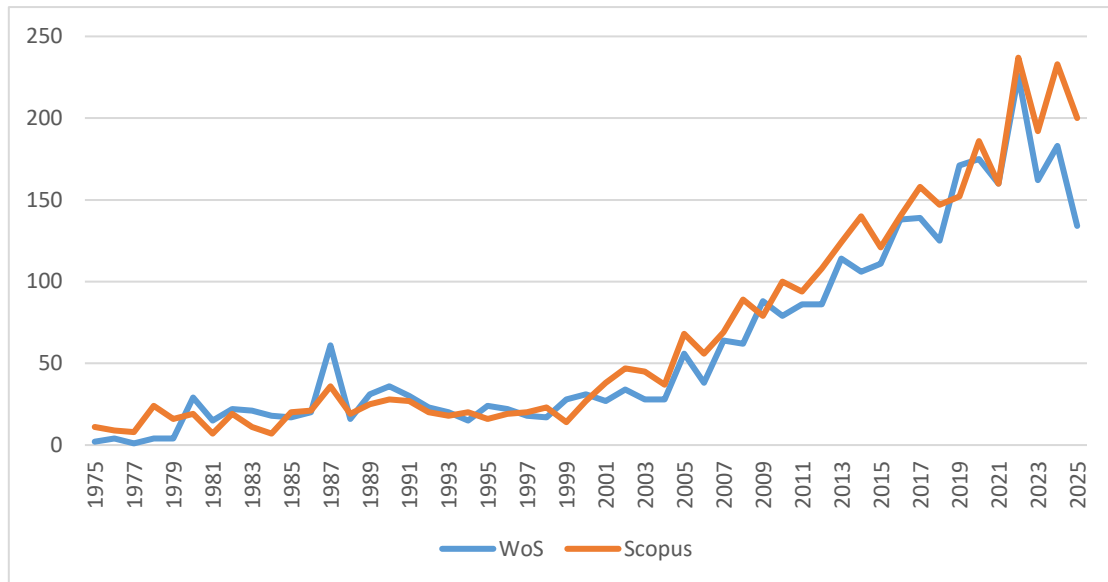


Figure 1. Publications related to the boycott (Note: It has been visualized by the author using data from the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus databases)

Currently, there are approximately 7,000 academic publications on the subject across these databases, with a notable increase in output since the 1970s. This growing academic attention is driven by a variety of factors -including an interest in understanding consumer preferences, examining the economic impacts of political issues, exploring the influence of religion on consumption, and more.

To provide a structured framework for this study, we have synthesized the existing literature on consumer boycotts into four main thematic areas:

- **Motivations for participating in the boycott:** This body of research focuses on the individual and collective motivations behind boycott actions, often in response to specific events. These studies aim to understand why people participate in boycotts, offering insights that help affected national or multinational companies develop strategies to manage their reputations and performance (Avci, 2024; Mulyono & Rolando, 2025). Other works explore the personal intentions behind such actions, seeking to uncover how consumers react to social or political events on an individual level (Farah & Newman, 2010; John & Klein, 2003; Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2011). From an Islamic perspective, consumer boycotts are understood not merely as political or economic instruments of protest, but also as a form of passive resistance grounded in religious principles, commonly referred to as “financial jihad” (*al-jihād bi’l-māl*) (Halevi, 2012; Shamshiyev, 2024). Although permissibility (*ibāḥa*) constitutes the general rule in commercial relations under Islamic law, boycotting actors who wage war against Muslims, forcibly displace them from their homelands, or insult their religious values in order to deny them economic support is regarded as both legitimate and, in certain contexts, necessary from a *fiqh* perspective. Within this framework, the legal justifications (*‘ilal*) for boycotts include

considerations such as harm to Muslim dignity, disrespect for religious values, and providing support to an enemy in a state of conflict, and are grounded in the principle of “not cooperating in sin and enmity.” Historically, as illustrated by the case of Şumāma ibn Uthāl during the time of the Prophet, this strategy of economically weakening an adversary has been described by contemporary scholars as one of the most effective non-military means available to civilians when armed struggle is not possible, and as a significant expression of Muslim identity (Dekhil et al., 2017; Demirbaş, 2025).

- **Boycotts as political and social movements:** This strand of research examines boycotts within the context of political or ideological movements. It includes discussions on union-related boycotts, employer/employee conflicts, and resistance against multinational corporations. Topics covered include media representations of protests, institutional strategies to prevent protest escalation, and activist methods to amplify their messages. Political consumerism is often interpreted as a tool for those who lack trust in formal political institutions. Various political events that have also been the subject of international relations have been the subject of boycotts. For example, following the 2005/2006 Cartoon Crisis, in which the Prophet Muhammad was depicted in a derogatory manner, Muslim countries boycotted Danish goods. China's boycott of Japanese goods in response to the 2012 Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute, the boycott of French products in the US due to the 2003 Iraq War, and Türkiye's ongoing boycott of Israel due to Israel's occupation and genocide of Palestine are among these (Baron, 2001; Friedman, 1985; Heilmann, 2016; King & Soule, 2007; Shamir, 2017; Stolle et al., 2005). Boycotts targeting Israel and companies that support its supporter companies are discussed specifically in the literature. A separate section below is devoted to this topic.
- **Perception of the boycott:** This research focuses on how individuals and communities perceive boycotts, particularly regarding their reasons for avoiding certain products or services. Key variables include attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and consumer animosity. In some cases, consumers express their views through *buycotts*—choosing to support companies whose values they align with—rather than through traditional boycotts. These studies highlight how consumers use their purchasing power to express either support or opposition (Abbas et al., 2025; Farah & Newman, 2010; Hawkins, 2010; Neilson, 2010; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007; Sen et al., 2001).
- **Boycott against Israel:** Israel's illegal occupation and genocide since 1947 have caused protests and reactions in many Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Many people organize protests against Israel's actions against their state and boycott Israel's products and the goods and services of companies that support Israel. This boycott appears to be a humanitarian response beyond its political and policy context. Since people cannot stop the occupation, they want to react against the crimes against humanity committed by Israel and boycott it. In the literature, this issue has been discussed in multiple contexts. From antisemitism in Europe to the effects of the boycott of Israeli goods on the shares of companies producing these goods in various countries, from the boycott of Arabs and different nations as a reaction against Israel to the boycott of different groups, such as academics, from boycott rhetoric to boycott participation, from the boycott of Israeli goods and companies to the impact of the boycott on Israel's economy and many other issues are discussed under this heading (Abbas et al., 2025; Avcı, 2024; Aydınbaş et al., 2025; Chaitin et al., 2017; Firdaus & Supriyono, 2022; Gerstenfeld, 2025; Halimi et al., 2017; Hamzah & Mustafa, 2019; Hino, 2024; Losman, 1972; Shamir, 2017; Sutrisno, 2024; Zanotti et al., 2017; Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2025).

The absence of any study in the existing literature that examines the phenomenon of boycotts using the IPA method constitutes the primary motivation for this research. While one study employing the IPA approach explores the psychosocial effects of Israel's attacks on Gaza on individuals in Türkiye—along with their religious coping strategies—it does not directly address the phenomenon of boycotting. Nonetheless, it illustrates the potential of the IPA method to yield meaningful insights into individuals' lived experiences (Kızılgeçit et al., 2025). Building on this foundation, the present study examines the boycott phenomenon within the context of consumer boycotts by focusing on the lived experiences of university students—specifically, students of political science and theology—through the lens of the interpretative phenomenological analysis method.

## **Method**

This study employed a phenomenological research design, a qualitative approach that enables the exploration of participants' lived experiences, emotions, and perceptions of a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). In this sense, phenomenology provides a means of investigating how individuals or groups experience and interpret phenomena within their own contexts.

Phenomenological research originated in the early twentieth century with the work of philosopher Edmund Husserl. Unlike the dominant view of objective reality—shaped by scientific progress and the positivist paradigm—it emphasized the subjective experiences of individuals and groups, which later became central concerns in the social sciences. (İlerisoy, 2023; Neubauer et al., 2019). In this context, the lived reality of individuals was reintroduced into the agenda of the social sciences. The central aim of phenomenological research is therefore to re-examine phenomena through lived experience. This is because the dimensions of a phenomenon—inseparable from the worldview, values, and subjectivity of the person experiencing it—may be too complex to be fully captured through empirical methods alone. Phenomenological description thus emphasizes staying close to experience, moving beyond purely empirical observation, and interpreting each experience from the ontological standpoint of the individual who undergoes it (Friesen et al., 2021). Thus, studies exploring both what a phenomenon is and how it is experienced—first in psychology and philosophy, and later in other social sciences—have gained a recognized place in literature. Phenomenology has since developed into three main strands: lifeworld research, post-intentional phenomenology, and IPA. For the purposes of this study, IPA was chosen because it emphasizes participants' personal experiences of the phenomenon while also incorporating the researcher's interpretation within their own subjectivity.

In phenomenological research, the phenomenon, the participant, and the researcher engage in dynamic interaction. The researcher first identifies the phenomenon of interest within the participants' world and then enters that world through interviews, observations, or shared experiences. The aim is to describe these experiences and uncover the meanings they hold for the participants. Finally, the researcher re-presents the phenomenon by synthesizing individual accounts into a holistic explanation, while preserving the unique dimensions of each participant's experience (Finlay, 2013).

## **Participants and sampling rationale**

This study examines how political science and theology students experience the phenomenon of boycott through an IPA approach. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how boycotts—particularly those related to consumption—are perceived and lived within the participants' world. Accordingly, interviews were carried out with 180 participants who had taken part in boycotts, focusing on how they interpret the phenomenon, the emotions and

motivations underlying their participation, and the ways in which social networks, social media, and broader socio-political and economic contexts shape their boycott experiences. This study employed a purposive sampling strategy, specifically selecting participants from theology and political science departments to capture the multidimensional nature of the boycott phenomenon. Theology students were included to represent the religious and moral obligations often associated with Ummah consciousness, while Political Science students were selected to reflect the strategic and rights-based dimensions of political consumerism. Although Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) typically utilizes smaller sample sizes, a total of 180 participants (90 per group) were recruited to ensure data saturation across these two distinct theoretical perspectives. This extensive sample size was deemed necessary to robustly capture the diversity of lived experiences and to conduct a sound comparative analysis of how the boycott is navigated at the intersection of belief and political agency.

Interviews lasted between 2 and 10 minutes, averaging approximately 6 minutes per participant. Although the duration was relatively short, the interview protocol was designed in line with IPA principles, allowing participants to articulate personal meanings and lived experiences in depth. In total, approximately 400 pages of transcripts and field notes were analyzed using the ATLAS.ti 8 software. The analysis produced 4 themes and 5 sub-themes. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, an independent expert reviewed the themes and sub-themes, which were then confirmed for consistency and credibility.

The field data for this research were collected between February 24 and June 1, 2025, in the context of Israel's increasing attacks and occupation of Palestine, particularly Gaza, after October 7, 2023. During this period, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 90 political science and 90 theology students. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants. Participants were selected through purposive sampling from the Theology and Political Science departments in order to capture the multidimensional nature of the boycott. Theology students were included to represent religious and moral obligations, often associated with *ummah* consciousness, while Political Science students were selected to reflect the strategic and rights-based dimensions of political consumerism. Although the number of participants ( $N = 180$ ) exceeded typical norms for IPA, this larger sample size was considered necessary to ensure data saturation across these two distinct theoretical perspectives and to enable a robust comparative analysis. Despite the larger sample, the analysis preserved the method's idiographic commitment by prioritizing depth of meaning in individual narratives before synthesizing cross-case patterns. The brevity of the interviews was compensated for by the interpretative depth of the thematic analysis, conducted through repeated readings and reflective coding. These interviews were audio recorded, transcribed into written text with the participants' consent, and coded as PT1, PT2, PT3 for theology participants and PP1, PP2, PP3, etc. for political science participants, to prevent the disclosure of identities. The brevity of the interviews was compensated for by the interpretative depth of the thematic analysis, conducted through repeated readings and reflective coding. These interviews were audio recorded, transcribed into written text with the participants' consent, and coded as PT1, PT2, PT3 for theology participants and PP1, PP2, PP3, etc. for political science participants, to prevent the disclosure of identities. The semi-structured interview form consisted of questions aimed at understanding the definition of the boycott, individual experiences, motivations for participation, emotional processes, the effects of social environment and social media, and the individual-social reflections of the boycott and its implications for the future of Muslims. The data obtained were analyzed using the IPA analysis method; the researcher first familiarized himself with the data by reading the interview texts repeatedly, then produced meaningful codes, and based on these codes, sub-themes and main themes were structured.

This research was conducted with the approval of the Sakarya University Ethics Committee (Date: 04.06.2025, Decision No: E-61923333-050.99-479885). All participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study and participated voluntarily. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved. Moreover, due to the multidimensional nature of the boycott phenomenon, a relatively large number of participants were included to capture both its religious and political dimensions in greater depth. Maintaining a high number of participants was also intended to ensure diversity and richness in the interpretative findings within the IPA framework.

### Findings and discussion

An examination of participants' perceptions of the concept of boycott reveals that the context of Palestine and Gaza is particularly prominent. The boycott is primarily understood as a form of protest against Israel and its ally, the United States, and is most often expressed through the refusal to purchase products from companies associated with these countries. Notably, theology students tend to frame the boycott in terms of religious and moral obligations. In contrast, political science students ground their motivations not only in religious and moral reasoning but also in political ideology, viewing the boycott as a strategic tool for exerting social and political pressure. Despite these differences, both groups converge on the belief that boycotting is closely tied to a sense of solidarity with the oppressed and a broader awareness of social justice. When asked to define the concept of boycott in a single word, political science students highlighted terms such as *difficulty*, *struggle*, *resistance*, and *protest*, often focusing on the challenges and sacrifices involved in the act of boycotting. In contrast, theology students placed greater emphasis on issues concerning the future of Muslims, reflecting a broader religious and moral perspective in their interpretations.

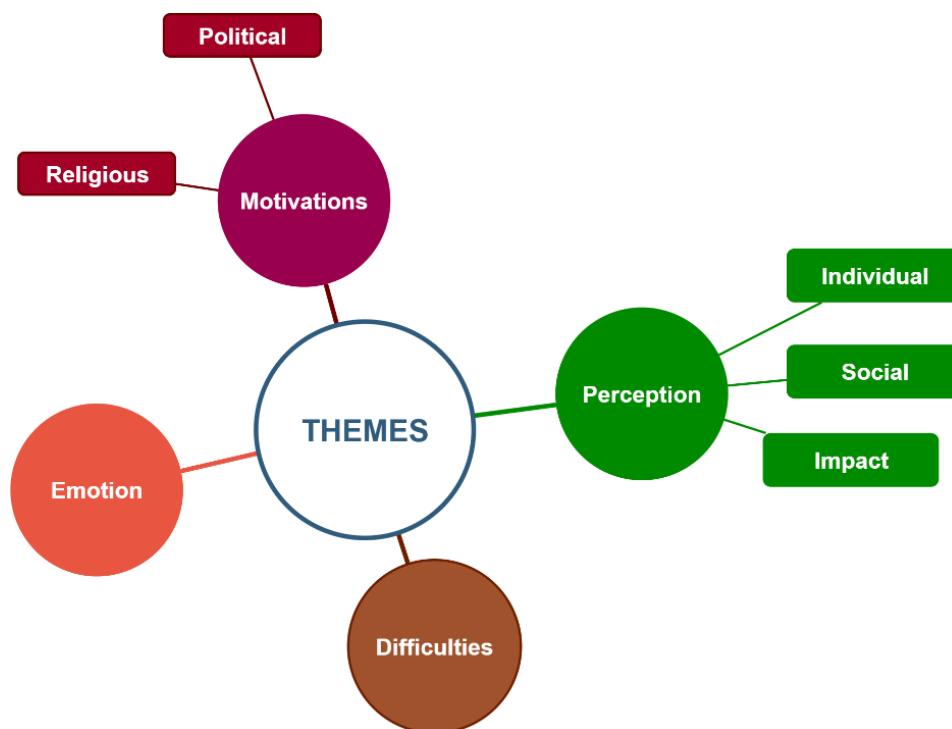


Figure 2. Themes and subthemes related to the boycott phenomenon

The data obtained from the research (see Figure 2) reveals that the phenomenon of boycott centers around four main themes: motivations, perceptions, emotions, and challenges. The theme

of motivation is further categorized into religious and political sub-dimensions, reflecting the participants' underlying reasons for engaging in boycott actions. The theme of perception is characterized by individual, social, and impact-related dimensions, illustrating how participants interpret and contextualize the act of boycotting. The emotions theme captures a wide range of affective responses during the boycott process, including empathy, anger, sadness, and a sense of inner peace. Lastly, the theme of challenges highlights the practical difficulties faced by participants, such as finding alternative products, adapting to their social environment, and altering established consumption habits. This thematic framework underscores that participants experience the boycott as a multidimensional and deeply personal process.

### **Motivations for boycotting**

This theme explores the motivations behind boycotting. Although motivations for boycotting vary among individuals, they are generally categorized in the literature into two main areas: basic psychological and socio-cognitive factors, and moral, political, and socio-cultural factors (Klein et al., 2004; Mulyono & Rolando, 2025). In this study, while participants' psycho-social and cognitive factors exhibit similarities, religious and political motivations differ significantly between the two student groups. Motivations for boycotting emerged under two main sub-themes: religious and moral motivations and political and ideological motivations. These sub-themes were common across students from both theology and political science faculties, although their emphasis varied.

### **Religious and Moral Motivations**

Religious and moral motivations play a significant role in boycotts, which are generally considered a form of ethical consumption aimed at penalizing a company or country for unethical policies or misconduct (Avci, 2024). Religious and moral beliefs help define right and wrong, while commitment to values and personal identity also influences consumption decisions. However, religious beliefs serve as a particularly powerful catalyst in shaping boycott intentions. The vast majority of participants in this study respond to Israel's attacks by boycotting, viewing them as egregious, as described in the literature (Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2011). For theology students, however, the boycott holds a multidimensional significance: it is seen as a moral obligation, a means of taking a stand against the oppressor, a symbol of religious identity, and a sign of unity. Additionally, the boycott reflects these individuals' desire for consistency with the values they hold, as well as their reflection on these values through their consumption choices. For theology students, boycotting is primarily viewed as a religious and moral obligation, deeply rooted in Islamic values and seen as a natural extension of their faith. Political science students also identified religious and moral reasons as important, but they tended to frame these within a broader pursuit of human rights and universal justice. In this regard, PT 59 emphasized that "*Boycotting is a moral responsibility imposed on me by my religious values as a Muslim,*" while PT 26 stated, "*In my opinion, the concept of boycott is about refusing to consent to oppression and taking a principled stance.*"

Participants PT80 and PT38 described boycotting as a moral stance, while participants PT1, PT2, PT8, PT65, and PT90 characterized it as a matter of faith. Others, such as PT2, PT22, and PT77, emphasized that boycotting was a religious duty and a requirement of being Muslim.

Theology students frequently justified their stance using well-known hadith of the Prophet Muhammad

*"Whoever sees an evil, let him change it with his hand. If he cannot do so, then with his tongue. If he cannot do that, then with his heart, and that is the weakest level of faith."* (Muslim, Iman 78; see also Tirmidhi, Fitn 11; Nasa'i, Iman 17).

This hadith was interpreted by participants as religious justification for opposing injustice—even if only symbolically—through boycotting, which they likened to “disliking something in one’s heart.”

Findings indicating that theology students primarily perceive the boycott as a religious obligation closely parallel the legal framework outlined by Demirbaş (2025). Participants’ framing of the boycott as a duty to “avoid supporting the oppressor” reflects the Islamic legal principle that economic disengagement becomes obligatory when commercial interaction contributes to aggression against Muslims. The perception of consumption as a form of spiritual struggle aligns with Halevi’s (2012) concept of “financial jihad” (*al-jihād bi’l-māl*) and suggests that everyday consumer spaces, such as supermarket shelves, have become legitimate arenas of non-violent resistance for these students. Moreover, the strong commitment observed among theology students corroborates the findings of Dekhil et al. (2017), which demonstrate that high levels of religiosity act as a powerful moderator against brand loyalty and encourage consumers to prioritize ethical-religious compatibility over product utility. By conceptualizing the boycott through the categories of *halal* and *haram*, participants navigate the complex process of identifying a legitimate legal justification (*‘illah*), a challenge that Shamshiyev (2024) identifies as central to contemporary debates in consumer activism law.

The religious and moral motivations discussed above, exemplified by boycotts, have historically been transformed into concrete actions or have triggered such actions in various global events. For instance, in 2005, Muslims viewed the offensive cartoons published by a Danish newspaper about the Prophet Muhammad as an attack on their religious sensitivities, leading to a global boycott (Kiyak & Dora, 2025). A more recent example is the massacre and genocide carried out by Israel in Gaza following the October 7 Al-Aqsa Flood, which resulted in boycotts targeting global brands such as Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, and Starbucks, accused of supporting Israel. This religious sensitivity is so profound that various scholars worldwide, including the Indonesian Ulema Council, have issued fatwas declaring it unlawful to purchase products from companies that support Israel (Aydınbaş et al., 2025; Kızılgeçit et al., 2025).

### **Political and Ideological Motivations**

Consumers express their personal beliefs, national sentiments, and political stances through economic actions, namely boycotts, which are driven by political and ideological motivations. These actions are often triggered by political events, wars, and international incidents (Hamzah & Mustafa, 2019; Heilmann, 2016). In this context, consumers can demonstrate their dissatisfaction by participating in boycotts, thereby pressuring target organizations to instigate political or social change (Abbas et al., 2025; Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2011). This behavior is fueled by a sentiment known as consumer animosity. Additionally, boycotts ideologically foster national solidarity and the expression of national sentiments, such as ethnocentrism. While participants in boycotts act individually, they exert political pressure by identifying as part of a larger group (Farah & Newman, 2010).

Political science students frequently used political and ideological discourse when defining the purpose and function of boycotts. While theology students also touched on concepts such as human rights and world peace, political science students were more likely to frame boycotting in terms of activism, protest, resistance, social pressure, and strategic change.

PP33 described the boycott as “*a response to anger at Israel’s policies toward Palestine*,” while PP70 stated, “*I think boycotts raise awareness and create economic pressure*.” Similarly,

PP78 viewed it as “*economic pressure on large companies and governments,*” and PP79 perceived it as “*a political uprising of a community.*”

Participants PP16, PP23, PP30, PP33, PP62, PP67, PP78, and PP83, among others, expressed that they actively sought to exert pressure on companies that support Israel, both directly and indirectly, through boycott actions, with the aim of compelling Israel to change its policies and behavior.

Although their primary lens was religious, theology students also adopted rights-based language. For instance, participant PT77 spoke about human rights and world peace, while others (PT61, PT74, PT76, PT77, PT80, PT87) condemned Israel's killing of children and women, describing it as a grave violation of human rights.

As clearly reflected in the quotations above, participants exhibit consumer animosity toward Israel and seek to influence its policies by creating political pressure through boycotts. Similar patterns were observed in boycott campaigns against Israel in Türkiye in 2014 and 2023. In political circles, boycotting has also been used as an indicator of strong political and cultural alignment (Aydınbaş et al., 2025; Heilmann, 2016; Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2025). Another significant example is the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) Movement, initiated by Palestinians as a nonviolent political pressure campaign against Israel in pursuit of freedom, justice, and equality. Through this movement, activists have achieved numerous political, economic, and social gains (BDS, 2025).

### **Perception of the Boycott - Experience**

The perception of boycotts is a complex and multidimensional theme that has received limited attention in existing literature. Recent studies, however, have highlighted that consumer boycotts are viewed as actions encompassing ethical, political, and sociocultural dimensions (Al Serhan & Boukrami, 2015; Utama et al., 2023). These elements significantly influence individual, social, and collective boycott behaviors. Boycotts are not only a tool for expressing personal dissatisfaction but also serve to exert political pressure, influence corporate behavior, and foster national solidarity. Consequently, this theme is divided into three sub-themes: the individual dimension, the social dimension, and the perceived impact of boycotts (Chiu, 2016; Herman & Salehudin, 2026).

#### **Individual dimension of the boycott**

The individual dimension of the boycott consists of codes that express how the boycott is perceived, who it is against, and who it is in favor of. The boycott is very clearly perceived by almost all participants as a stance in favor of Palestine and against Israel. When the boycott is mentioned, Israel and Palestine are directly referenced, and it is understood as a form of aid to Palestine, and more specifically, Gaza. However, for students from both faculties, the codes of providing aid to Palestine, not remaining silent in the face of oppression, and reacting to injustice are common. Theology students more frequently referred to their religious beliefs and the concept of the ummah at the individual level, while political science students also mentioned these ideas but focused more on concepts such as resistance, applying pressure, and activism.

PT8 views the boycott as *a requirement of faith*, while PT86 perceives it as an act of *restraining their desires*. PT42 states, “*A believer is a brother to another believer; he does not oppress him.*” PT78 explains, “*I am fulfilling my religious responsibility.*” PT57 describes it as “*a duty both as a human being and as a Muslim.*” PT59 emphasizes, “*As a conscientious person and Muslim, I believe it is a responsibility imposed on me by my religious values.*”

These statements align with the literature suggesting that boycotts are perceived as a religious obligation and that religious values play a guiding role in shaping behavior (Herman & Salehudin, 2026; Kiyak & Dora, 2025).

### **The Social Dimension of the Boycott**

There is also substantial reference to the social dimension of the boycott in both student groups. It is commonly believed that the boycott raises awareness of social issues, fosters social solidarity, and contributes to unity. Boycotts, as demonstrated by Kızılgeçit (2025), encourage individuals to act more sensitively and responsibly in their daily lives. Indeed, influenced by the events in Gaza, many begin to perceive their own problems as less significant and approach life with a renewed perspective. Participants emphasize that, consistent with findings in the literature (Avci, 2024; Farah & Newman, 2010), boycotts can foster social cohesion, unite people around common goals, and even help build shared identities and values. However, as mentioned in the section on challenges, some participants noted that the boycott can also create divisions between those who participate and those who do not. Despite this, the majority agreed that the boycott would generate solidarity against oppression and in support of the oppressed. While codes such as awareness, solidarity, social justice, and resistance appeared frequently in both groups, theology students emphasized faith-based justice, unity of the ummah, and religious solidarity more prominently.

According to PT 8, *“The boycott is not merely a Palestinian-Gaza issue, but a matter concerning the entire Muslim community.”* Similarly, PT 78 emphasizes that *“the boycott strengthens the collective consciousness of the Muslim community,”* while PT 70 notes that *“it reinforces the sense of unity and solidarity among Muslims.”*

Some political science students also referred to these concepts, but codes such as independence, freedom, human rights, and ethical values were more frequently mentioned (PP1, PP19, PP34, PP38, PP45, PP51, PP63, PP79).

According to PP38, boycotts *“both ensure national independence and reduce external dependency.”* PP18 states, *“Economically, shifting support to local and ethical products can be achieved through boycotting,”* while PP79 emphasizes, *“It contributes to justice, human rights, ethical values, and social awareness.”* These statements demonstrate that boycotts are a political tool (Stolle et al., 2005; Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2011) used to express dissatisfaction when human rights and freedoms are violated, and can even serve as an example of political consumption.

### **The impact of the boycott**

Almost all participants who reported engaging in boycott actions believe that boycotting has effects at the micro, meso, and macro levels (see figure 3). Theology students tended to frame these effects within a religious context, often referring to the afterlife, the unity of the ummah, and the development of ummah consciousness. PT83 describes the boycott as *“a global tool that strengthens the consciousness of the ummah.”* PT27 states that *“It teaches unity,”* while PT32 notes that *“It serves to raise awareness in society.”*

While political science students also referenced these elements, they more frequently emphasized concepts such as independence, freedom, and economic autonomy. According to PP76, *“It may negatively affect economically targeted individuals and support alternative economies, but it may also alter employment and investment balances. Its success depends on participation and a long-term strategy.”* PP56 states, *“By boycotting foreign products, we can support our own national products.”*

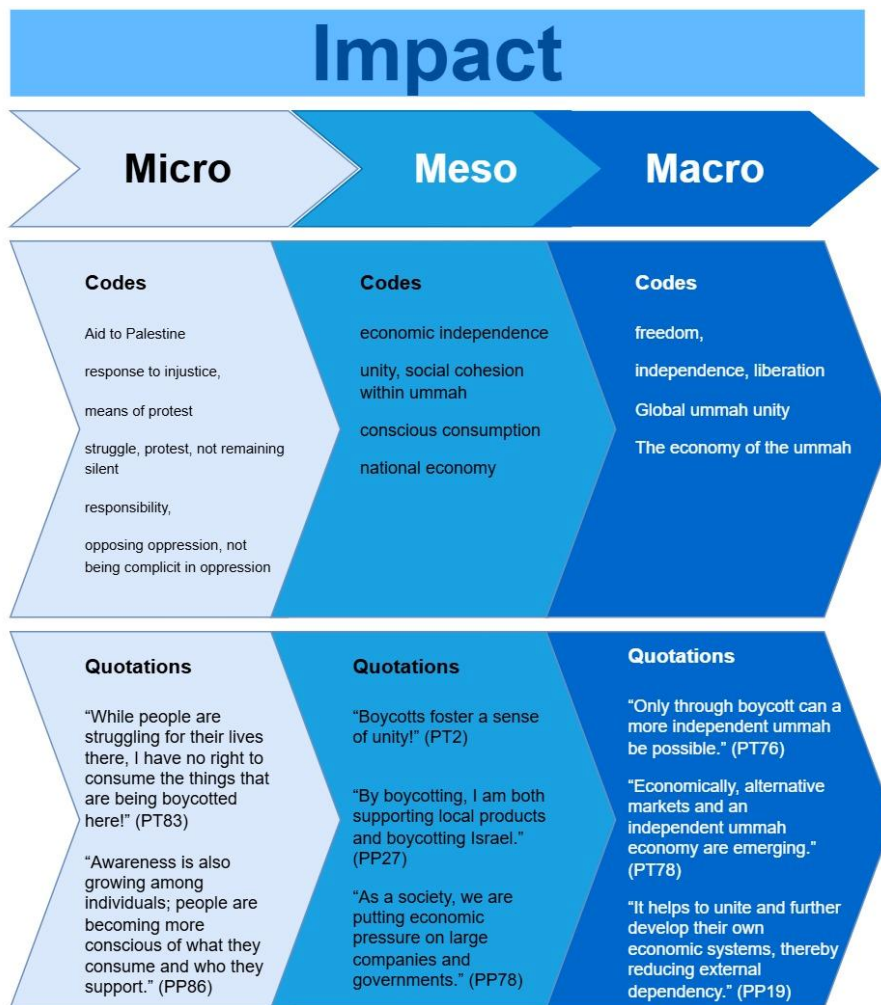


Figure 3. The impact of the boycott – micro, meso, and macro levels

At the micro level, the boycott is perceived to raise awareness of local and global injustices and to promote consumer consciousness. These findings support efforts to raise consumer awareness and encourage responsible behavior in response to injustices (Aydınbaş et al., 2025; Farah & Newman, 2010; Klein et al., 2004; Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2011).

At the meso level, it is seen as a tool for fostering social solidarity, national unity, and Muslim unity. Political science students specifically highlighted economic independence and the importance of supporting domestic production through the use of substitute goods. Many participants agreed that the boycott could influence the market by encouraging responsible consumption –supporting the growth of some companies while contributing to the decline of others. For both groups, meso-level effects also include the strengthening of local economies, with the expectation that local and national production will increase as a result of reduced dependence on foreign products. Boycotts unite individuals around a common goal, making them part of a larger collective consumer group (Farah & Newman, 2010). This collective group uses its economic power to engage in conscious consumption (Klein et al., 2004). By promoting a “*local and national*” approach, boycotts can strengthen local economies (Mulyono & Rolando, 2025). Given their significant financial impact, they can also exert considerable pressure (Aydınbaş et al., 2025).

Social media was another prominent theme mentioned by nearly all participants. It was considered a key factor in amplifying the reach and influence of boycott campaigns and in raising public awareness. Social media has transformed the nature of boycott movements, acting as the

primary catalyst for faster, larger-scale, and more intense actions (Herman & Salehudin, 2026). This is due to its speed and low cost (Avci, 2024). Social media facilitates rapid mobilization, and studies indicate that its use has a positive and significant impact on consumer boycott intentions (Avci, 2024; Herman & Salehudin, 2026). Many participants reported that exposure to news and images related to Palestine and Gaza on social media played a central role in motivating their boycott participation. Additionally, public figures—such as intellectuals, opinion leaders, and influential activists—voicing support for boycotts or participating in them were described as important sources of influence. For many participants, social media not only supports the effectiveness of boycott efforts but also enhances their potential for macro-level impact.

PT76 states that *“Social media is very helpful in spreading information and raising awareness.”* PT28 adds, *“It encourages me to continue the boycott.”* PP23 mentions, *“We are guiding people by sharing posts about this on social media,”* while PP32 notes, *“It changes habits and contributes to raising awareness.”*

At the macro level, the vast majority of participants believe that boycotts can contribute to halting injustice and oppression and support the liberation and independence of oppressed peoples. Theology students, in particular, emphasized that the long-term impact of sustained boycott efforts may include the establishment of broader unity across the Muslim world, economic independence for Muslim countries, and even the emergence of cohesive Muslim economies. In this way, boycotts are not only viewed as tools of protest but also as catalysts for systemic change at a global scale (Mulyono & Rolando, 2025).

### **Emotional and psychosocial dimension**

The emotional dimension is generally similar in both groups. Empathy is the most frequently mentioned concept in this process. In addition, the news participants see on social media and television causes deep sadness and anger. The vast majority of participants define the boycott as a reaction to injustice. In this context, participants feel deep sorrow when they empathize with what a child in Gaza is going through. They sometimes feel helpless because they cannot stop the war and prevent the oppression, and they want to do whatever they can.

While PP50 feels that *“sadness is generally a loss of conscience, that is, humanity”*, PT85 expresses experiencing *“determination, anger, sadness, and peace of conscience.”*

Furthermore, an important feeling that arises as a result of boycotting and is common to both groups is peace of mind. Boycotting somewhat alleviates the helplessness of not being able to do anything in the face of the drama unfolding and brings peace of mind to individuals with the thought that they are doing what they can. Those who boycott feel a measure of peace by thinking, *“I did not remain silent and unresponsive to the oppression; I did what I could.”* According to them, boycotting brings peace to those who listen to their conscience. Furthermore, when they are unable to boycott, feelings of guilt arise.

PP4 states, *“I feel peace because I feel like I'm doing my best”* due to the boycott. Similarly, PT61 expresses, *“I feel peaceful because I know I'm doing the right thing.”*

Conversely, when participants are unable to boycott for various reasons, this often gives rise to feelings of guilt. This guilt stems from the internal conflict between their moral awareness and their inability to act accordingly. As such, the emotional dimension of boycotting is deeply tied to both the participants' sense of justice and their psychological need to respond meaningfully to global suffering. In conclusion, the interpretive analysis indicates that the boycott fulfills a therapeutic function by enabling participants to regain a sense of agency. In the context of

overwhelming geopolitical violence, where individual political influence is perceived as minimal, the boycott provides a tangible sphere of personal control. Whether framed as a religious duty (*fard*) or as an expression of political rights, this practice allows participants to transform feelings of grief and helplessness into forms of active resistance, thereby contributing to the preservation of their psychological well-being.

### **Practical difficulties and contradictions**

The difficulty of the boycott is similar for students in both groups. Boycotting is challenging for various reasons, with the primary difficulty being that major brands commonly encountered in daily life are on the boycott list. Participants generally agree that few products are not boycotted, but the range of boycotted products is extensive.

*“Even though it's difficult, it makes up a large part of our lives.” (PP16)*

*“We found that all cleaning brands are generally at least 90% boycotted. Our hands were tied because we had to choose... well, the alternatives are generally of poor quality, so it's difficult to find a product that isn't boycotted.” (PP2)*

The challenge lies in giving up familiar and frequently used items, many of which are basic necessities. On the other hand, participants mentioned that the majority of non-boycotted products are of “poor quality.” As a result, they experience frustrations, such as, in their words, giving in to temptation and losing stability. The willingness to accept functional disadvantages, such as lower product quality, represents a departure from the classical *Homo economicus* model, which prioritizes utility maximization. Instead, participants display behavior more consistent with the *Homo Islamicus* framework, in which “spiritual benefit” (*thawāb*) is valued above material comfort. By deliberately choosing lower-quality products, students effectively pay a “moral premium” to alleviate the cognitive dissonance between their consumption practices and ethical commitments. This finding indicates that, for these participants, the psychological cost of acting against their conscience outweighs the physical discomfort associated with using lower-quality goods.

It has been observed that boycotts have created tensions in social relations. In particular, minor conflicts have arisen between those who boycott and those who do not, with reactions directed at cafes selling boycotted products. Participants have reported that those who boycott tend to filter their social circles and experience divisions with non-boycotters. However, they also engage in ‘awareness-raising efforts’ aimed at those who do not participate in the boycott. These social frictions illustrate that the boycott has evolved into a mechanism for establishing “moral boundaries” and reshaping Islamic social capital. Participants actively redefine the boundaries of their communities (in-group) by filtering their social networks not only on the basis of shared identity, but also according to demonstrated ethical practices. Within this framework, consumption choices function as a litmus test for loyalty to the *ummah*. Tensions with those who do not support the boycott thus extend beyond interpersonal disagreement and reflect a systematic effort to enforce a collective norm of “social responsibility” aimed at aligning the community's social relations with its political and religious ideals.

### **Conclusion**

This study examines the phenomenon of boycotting from a phenomenological perspective, based on the lived experiences of theology and political science students. The findings reveal that boycott is not perceived merely as an economic consumption choice, but rather as a multidimensional social practice grounded in religious, moral, and political foundations. Theology students tend to view the boycott primarily as a religious and moral duty, while political science

students also interpret it as a form of political pressure and a method of social struggle. For both groups, boycotting is associated with supporting the oppressed, the pursuit of justice, and fulfilling moral responsibility. On an individual level, the boycott provides a sense of inner peace, while on a social level, it fosters awareness, solidarity, and unity.

The findings also highlight the layered impact of boycotting at the micro, meso, and macro levels. At the micro level, participants emphasized themes such as personal consumption awareness, moral consistency, and inner peace. At the meso level, key themes included social solidarity, a shift toward local or substitute products, and network effects that facilitate the spread of boycott behavior. At the macro level, political consumerism was shown to connect normative agendas—such as human rights, independence, and justice—with economic outcomes, including shifts in demand, brand reputation risks, and supply chain pressures, via both symbolic and material mechanisms.

Social media plays a particularly significant role in the dissemination of boycotts, especially among younger demographics. Therefore, communities and civil society organizations aiming to promote boycott campaigns and raise awareness must utilize social media effectively. Participants emphasized that social media can substantially amplify the impact of boycotts. Moreover, they noted that such campaigns can contribute to strengthening the local economy, as domestic companies that produce substitute goods may benefit financially. In addition, public intellectuals and opinion leaders were seen to have a major influence on the spread of boycotts; the content they share on social media can significantly boost participation and visibility.

This study is limited in that it was conducted solely in Türkiye, and the qualitative data collected are situated within a specific temporal context centered on Gaza, which may affect generalizability. In light of these limitations, future research could expand its scope. Comparative studies across different countries and cultural contexts could offer valuable insights. Longitudinal studies may help to uncover the dynamics of continuity and intensity in boycott behavior. Future research might also explore the connection between media exposure (news and social media content) and participation in boycotts. Additionally, by applying a religiosity scale to participants, further insights into the relationship between religiosity and boycott motivations could be developed. This study is subject to several limitations, including sampling bias, social desirability effects, temporal context, and the generalizability of its findings. The sampling strategy may not fully capture the characteristics of the broader population, potentially influencing the results. Moreover, social desirability effects may have led participants to provide responses aligned with socially acceptable norms rather than their genuine views. The temporal context in which the data were collected also likely shaped the findings, as it reflected the specific socio-political environment of that period. Finally, although the study offers valuable insights, the extent to which its results can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or groups warrants careful consideration.

Another limitation of this study lies in its focus on active participants. Because the IPA methodology emphasizes the examination of the “lived experience” of a phenomenon, the sample was limited to students who actively participated in the boycott. Consequently, the perspectives and motivations of those who did not boycott or were unaware of the boycott fall outside the scope of this research. Future studies may address this limitation by employing comparative research designs to explore the reasons for non-participation and the factors that constrain ethical consumption among different student groups.

**Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process**

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT-3.5, ChatGPT-4 and DeepL for language editing and proofreading. After using these tools, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the final content of the publication.

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