

Determinants of Consumer Boycott Intention in Malaysia: An Application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The growing trend of consumer boycotts reflects increasing awareness of ethical, humanitarian, and social issues among consumers, particularly in emerging markets such as Malaysia. This study aims to examine the factors influencing Malaysian consumers' intention to engage in boycott behaviour by applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Specifically, the study investigates the effects of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on boycott intention. A quantitative research design was employed using a cross-sectional survey approach. Data were collected from Malaysian consumers aged 18 years and above through a structured questionnaire, with items adapted from established literature. A pilot study confirmed the reliability of the measurement scales, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Multiple regression analysis revealed attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control have significant positive effects on boycott intention. Among these, perceived behavioural control emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by subjective norms and attitude. The findings indicate that consumers are more likely to engage in boycott behaviour when they perceive greater ability and resources to do so, alongside social support and favourable evaluations. This study contributes to the literature by validating the applicability of TPB in explaining boycott behaviour in the Malaysian context. Practically, the results suggest that enhancing consumers' perceived capability and leveraging social influence are crucial in encouraging boycott participation. Future research is recommended to incorporate additional variables and adopt longitudinal designs to further understand consumer boycott behaviour.

Keywords: Consumer Boycott Intention, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Perceived Behavioural Control.

INTRODUCTION

The trend of consumer boycotts has increased significantly in recent years, reflecting a growing awareness of humanitarian issues and ethical responsibility among consumers (Mady et al., 2025). Humanitarian concerns have become a central priority, often surpassing other emerging issues in shaping consumer decisions. The sustainability of the firm in the market is largely contingent upon the consumer (Nasir et al., 2020). Individuals are increasingly expressing solidarity across racial, cultural, religious, and national boundaries, demonstrating a collective moral response to global events. In 2026, the global boycott landscape continues to be strongly

influenced by geopolitical and ethical movements, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. What initially began as temporary protest actions has gradually evolved into a structural shift in consumer behaviour. These sustained boycotts have contributed to long-term transformations in purchasing patterns, leading to the continuous growth of local and alternative brands (Rahim et al., 2025).

Consumers generally possess significant power through boycott actions, which can directly affect a company's revenue, reputation, and long-term sustainability (Mulyono & Rolando, 2025). When businesses face persistent local and nationwide boycotts, they are placed in a vulnerable position, as consumer sentiment can rapidly influence market performance. This phenomenon is particularly evident in Malaysia, where consumer activism has evolved beyond merely ceasing purchases. In recent years, one of the most notable trends in Malaysia is localization as a form of boycott behaviour (Sanusi et al., 2025).

Rather than simply refraining from consumption, many consumers are actively switching to domestic brands that better align with their national identity, cultural values, and social sentiments (Ulfah et al., 2025). This shift indicates that contemporary boycotts are not merely reactive but also transformative, reshaping purchasing behaviour and overall market dynamics.

As a result, domestic brands are experiencing substantial growth, significantly influencing Malaysian consumption patterns (Alias et al., 2024). One prominent example is ZUS Coffee, a rapidly expanding local coffee brand. Strong and sustained consumer confidence in local products has helped reinforce its market position. Serving as a competitive alternative to Starbucks in Malaysia, ZUS Coffee is increasingly securing a place in the preferences of Malaysian consumers.

This reflects how consumer-driven localization trends can elevate domestic brands while reshaping competitive dynamics within the industry. In addition to ZUS Coffee, Ahmad's Fried Chicken represents another rapidly growing local business. Positioned as a domestic alternative to McDonald's, the brand has expanded aggressively across the country. Ahmad's Fried Chicken opened more than 30 outlets in the first half of 2025 and aims to reach 66 outlets by the end of 2025, with a long-term target of 110 outlets by the end of 2026. This rapid expansion reflects increasing consumer support for local brands, particularly amid rising awareness of boycott movements in Malaysia.

The growing boycott movement suggests that consumer awareness and participation in boycott behaviour are likely to continue increasing. However, empirical research on consumer boycott behaviour within the Malaysian context remains limited. According to Chiang & Arif (2024), there is a lack of comprehensive empirical studies examining boycott behaviour, particularly in emerging markets such as Malaysia.

The Malaysian setting provides a distinctive contribution to the international literature on consumer boycott intentions. Most core consumer boycott models, including those by Klein, Smith, and John, were formulated in Western, individualistic, and secular contexts, whereas Malaysia presents a distinctly collectivist, multi-ethnic, and profoundly religious Muslim-majority setting (Abdul Shukor & Emhemad Tariki, 2019). Furthermore, the specific factors influencing consumers' intention to engage in boycott behaviour remain unclear (Shim & Cho, 2022). This research gap highlights the need for a robust theoretical framework to better understand the determinants of boycott intention.

To address this issue, an established and comprehensive theoretical framework is required to examine the factors influencing consumers' intention to boycott a brand. Previous studies have widely adopted the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to explain behavioural intentions (Ibrahim & Arshad, 2018). Developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991, TPB posits that behavioral intention is determined by three key factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control.

For the purpose of this study, TPB is selected for several reasons. First, the theory demonstrates strong explanatory power in predicting various forms of consumer behavior, including ethical consumption and boycott actions. Second, TPB incorporates both volitional and non-volitional elements through perceived behavioral

control, which captures consumers' perceived ease or difficulty in performing a behavior. This aspect is particularly relevant in boycott contexts, where factors such as the availability of alternatives, price differences, and convenience may influence consumers' ability to act on their intentions. Therefore, TPB provides a comprehensive and appropriate framework for examining the determinants of consumers' intention to boycott brands in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Boycott Behaviour

Consumer boycott refers to the deliberate refusal to purchase products or services from a company in response to perceived unethical practices, political issues, or social concerns consumers (Mady et al., 2025). According to previous studies, boycott behaviour has evolved from short-term protest actions into a more sustained and value-driven form of consumer activism. Modern consumers are increasingly motivated by ethical considerations, humanitarian awareness, and social responsibility, which significantly influence their purchasing decisions (Yu, 2026). In emerging markets, boycott behaviour has taken on a more transformative dimension. Consumers are not only rejecting certain brands but are also actively supporting local alternatives (Mulyono & Rolando, 2025). This shift reflects a deeper alignment between consumer values and consumption patterns, where purchasing decisions are used as a tool to express moral and social positions. Despite its growing importance, empirical studies on boycott intention, particularly within the Malaysian context, remain limited (Chiang & Arif, 2024; Rahim et al., 2025), thus requiring further investigation.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1991), is widely used to explain and predict human behaviour in various contexts, including ethical consumption and boycott actions. TPB posits that an individual's behavioural intention is determined by three key constructs: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. This theory is particularly relevant in explaining boycott behaviour, as such actions often involve deliberate decision-making, social influence, and perceived constraints (Nordin et al., 2024; Rahim et al., 2025). TPB has been extensively validated in prior studies examining pro-social and ethical consumer behaviour, making it an appropriate framework for this study as demonstrated in the Figure 1.

Attitude

Attitude refers to an individual's overall evaluation of performing a particular behaviour, whether favourable or unfavourable (Nasir et al., 2017). In the context of consumer boycotts, attitude reflects how positively or negatively consumers perceive boycott actions as a means of expressing ethical or humanitarian concerns. Previous studies have consistently found that individuals with a positive attitude toward ethical consumption are more likely to engage in boycott behaviour (Kamil et al., 2026; Jedicke et al., 2025; Onyia et al., 2022; Harun et al., 2021). When consumers believe that boycotting a brand can contribute to social justice, support humanitarian causes, or influence corporate behaviour, they are more inclined to develop strong boycott intentions. Therefore, attitude is expected to play a significant role in shaping consumers' intention to boycott.

H1: Attitude has a significant positive influence on consumers' intention to engage in boycott behaviour.

Subjective Norm

Subjective norm refers to the perceived specific pressure to perform or not perform a particular behaviour (Nasir et al., 2021). It reflects the influence of important referent groups such as family, friends, peers, and society (Nasir et al., 2022; Nasir et al., 2020). In boycott contexts, subjective norms are particularly influential, as boycott movements are often driven by collective action and social influence. With the rise of social media, information about boycott campaigns spreads rapidly, increasing peer influence and social expectations (Mady et al., 2025). Consumers may feel encouraged or even obligated to participate in boycott actions when they

perceive that significant others support such behaviour. Empirical studies suggest that social influence plays a crucial role in shaping ethical consumption and boycott participation, especially in collectivist societies like Malaysia (Arsad, 2025; Harun et al., 2024; Tariki, 2019). Therefore, subjective norm is expected to play a significant role in shaping consumers' intention to boycott.

H2: Subjective norm has a significant positive influence on consumers' intention to engage in boycott behaviour.

Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)

Perceived behavioural control (PBC) refers to an individual's perception of their ability to perform a particular behaviour. It encompasses factors such as resources, opportunities, and perceived ease or difficulty of engaging in the behaviour. In the context of consumer boycotts, PBC is highly relevant because consumers may face practical constraints, such as limited availability of alternative products, higher prices of substitutes, or inconvenience. Even if consumers have a positive attitude and strong social support, they may not engage in boycott behaviour if they perceive it as difficult or impractical (Lestari et al., 2025). Prior research indicates that higher perceived behavioural control increases the likelihood of behavioural intention, as individuals are more confident in their ability to perform the action (Yusof & Roslan, 2024; Salma & Aji, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2020). Therefore, perceived behavioural control is expected to play a significant role in shaping consumers' intention to boycott.

H3: Perceived behavioural control has a significant positive influence on consumers' intention to engage in boycott behaviour.

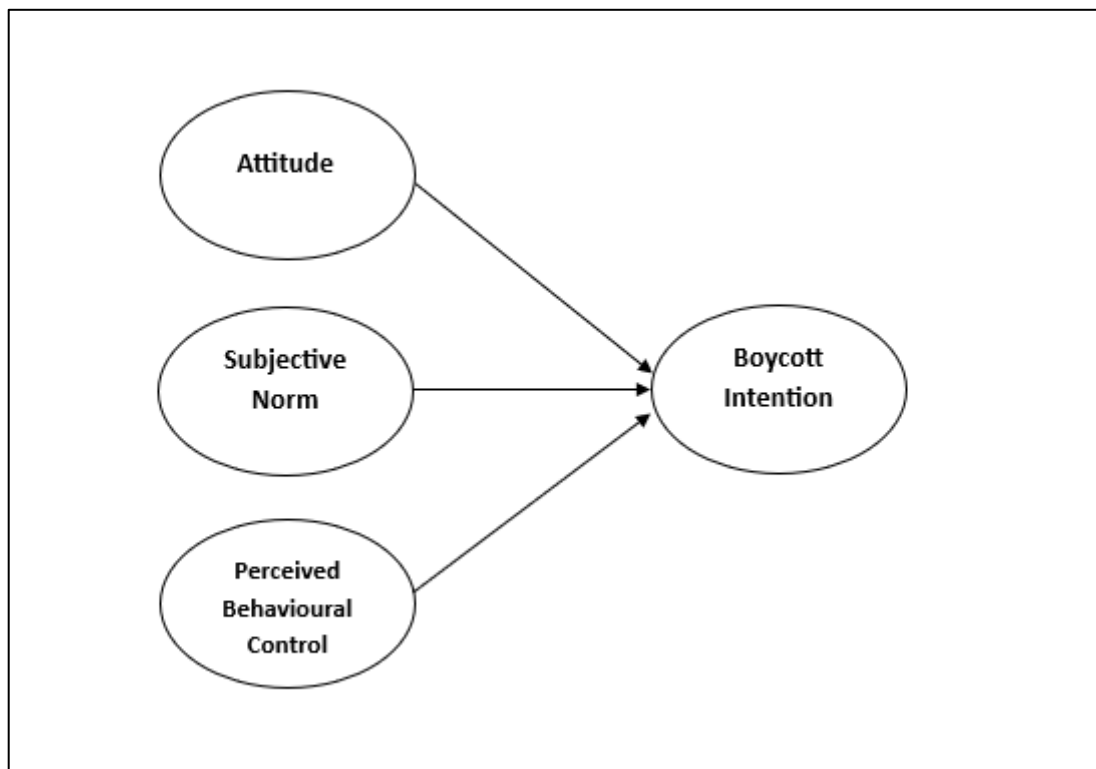


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the factors influencing Malaysian consumers' intention to engage in boycott behaviour. Quantitative research allows for the measurement of relationships between variables and the testing of hypotheses in a structured and systematic manner. Specifically, the study adopts a cross-sectional survey approach, collecting data at a single point in time from Malaysian consumers to

examine their attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control in relation to boycott intention. The target population for this study comprises Malaysian consumers aged 18 years and above, representing a diverse demographic in terms of age, gender, income, and educational background. A purposive sampling method is employed to ensure that respondents have prior awareness or experience of consumer boycotts or ethical consumption behaviour. This approach ensures the relevance of collected data to the research objectives. Data is collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire distributed both online and offline to maximize accessibility and respondent diversity.

The questionnaire items are adapted from validated scales in previous literature to ensure content validity. A pilot study with 206 respondents is conducted to assess reliability and clarity of the items. Cronbach's alpha is calculated for each construct to test internal consistency, with a threshold of 0.70 considered acceptable for reliability (Taber, 2018). In addition, multiple regression analysis was employed in this study to examine the relationships between the independent variables (Hasim et al., 2019). Regression analysis is particularly suitable because it allows researchers to determine the strength, direction, and significance of the effects of multiple predictors on a single outcome simultaneously (Hasim et al., 2026). All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This study adheres to ethical research standards. Participation is voluntary, and respondents are provided with informed consent explaining the study's purpose and ensuring confidentiality. No personally identifiable information is collected, and all data is stored securely to protect respondents' privacy. Finally, the questionnaire items were adapted from Hamzah & Mustafa (2019) and modified to fit the context of boycott intention, while preserving consistency with the original TPB constructs, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Questionnaire Items

Items	Question
Attitude (AT)	
AT1	I believe that participating in a boycott against unethical companies is a good idea
AT2	I believe that boycotting products from irresponsible companies is beneficial for society
AT3	I believe that consumer boycotts are effective in influencing company behaviour
AT4	I believe that participating in a boycott is a wise decision
AT5	I feel that boycotting products is a positive action
Subjective Norms	
SN1	I feel that people who are important to me think that I should participate in consumer boycotts
SN2	I feel that my family supports me in boycotting unethical companies
SN3	I feel that my friends encourage me to avoid products from irresponsible companies
SN4	I feel that most people around me approve of participating in boycotts
SN5	I feel that there is social pressure on me to boycott companies that behave unethically
Perceived Behaviour Control	
PB1	I find it easy to identify products that I should boycott

PB2	I believe that whether I boycott certain products is entirely up to me
PB3	I feel confident that I can consistently avoid products from targeted companies
PB4	I believe that I can still boycott products even if it is inconvenient
PB5	I believe that I have the ability to avoid buying products from companies I disagree with
Boycott Intention (BI)	
BI1	I intend to boycott products from companies that behave unethically
BI2	I plan to avoid purchasing products from such companies
BI3	I am willing to participate in consumer boycotts in the future
BI4	I am likely to stop buying from companies that violate ethical standards
BI5	I intend to encourage others to join boycott actions

RESULT

In this study, the reliability analysis was performed to determine the alpha coefficients for each construct and the internal consistency of each item (Cronbach, 1951). In this study, most of the alpha coefficients of the constructs ranged from 0.882 to 0.899, as presented in Table 2. According to commonly accepted thresholds, a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher indicates acceptable internal consistency, while values above 0.80 are considered good, and above 0.90 are excellent (Taber, 2018, Hasim et al., 2022). The results show that all constructs demonstrate high reliability which exceed the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70, confirming that the measurement scales used in this study are reliable and suitable for further analysis. The consistently high values (above 0.88) suggest that the items within each construct are well-correlated and effectively capture their respective theoretical concepts.

Table 2: Reliability Result

No	Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Attitude (AT)	5	0.899
2	Social Norms (SN)	5	0.882
3	Perceived Behaviour Control (PB)	5	0.899
4	Boycott Intention (BI)	5	0.891

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of attitude (AT), social norms (SN), and perceived behavioural control (PB) on boycott intention (BI), as demonstrated in Table 3. The results indicate that all three independent variables significantly predict boycott intention. Specifically, attitude has a positive and statistically significant effect on boycott intention ($\beta = 0.265$, $t = 4.152$, $p < 0.001$). This finding suggests that individuals who hold more favourable evaluations toward boycotting are more likely to develop stronger intentions to engage in such behaviour. Similarly, social norms demonstrate a positive and significant influence

on boycott intention ($\beta = 0.340$, $t = 7.233$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that individuals are more likely to intend to boycott when they perceive that important other such as family, friends, or society support or expect such behaviour. Notably, social norms emerge as one of the strongest predictors in this model.

In addition, perceived behavioural control is found to have a positive and significant relationship with boycott intention ($\beta = 0.365$, $t = 5.502$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that individuals who perceive greater ease, ability, or resources to engage in boycott activities are more inclined to form of intentions. Finally, perceived behavioural control emerges as the most influential predictor of boycott intention, as indicated by its highest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.365$).

This suggests that individuals' perception of their ability, resources, and opportunities to engage in boycott behaviour plays a more critical role than their attitudes or perceived social pressures. In other words, even if individuals hold positive attitudes or experience social encouragement, they are more likely to form strong boycott intentions when they feel capable of performing the behaviour. This finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which posits that perceived behavioural control can directly influence behavioural intention, particularly in contexts where the behaviour requires effort, resources, or personal capability.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.058	0.242		0.237	0.813
Attitude (AT)	0.284	0.068	0.265	4.152	0.000
Social Norms (SN)	0.339	0.047	0.340	7.233	0.000
Perceived Behaviour Control (PB)	0.374	0.068	0.365	5.502	0.000
Dependent Variable: Boycott Intention (BI)					

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the determinants of Malaysian consumers' boycott intention using the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The findings provide strong empirical support for the applicability of TPB in explaining consumer boycott behaviour within the Malaysian context. In other words, empirical findings of the study both support and structurally challenge the basic assumptions of the Theory of Planned Behaviour first articulated in Western, individualistic cultures. Specifically, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control were all found to have positive and statistically significant effects on boycott intention.

Among these factors, perceived behavioural control emerged as the most influential predictor, indicating that consumers' perceived ability, resources, and ease of engaging in boycott behaviour play a critical role in shaping their intention. This suggests that even when individuals hold favourable attitudes or perceive social support, their intention to participate in boycotts is more strongly driven by their confidence in their ability to act. The significant influence on perceived behavioural control on intention is line with previous studies (Yusof & Roslan, 2024; Salma & Aji, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2020). Subjective norm were identified as the second strongest predictor, highlighting the importance of social influence, including family, friends, and societal expectations, in encouraging boycott participation. This result is in line with past research (Arsad, 2025; Harun et al., 2024; Tariki, 2019). Conversely, attitude, while still significant, demonstrated a comparatively weaker effect,

indicating that positive evaluations alone may not be sufficient to drive behavioural intention without supportive conditions and social reinforcement. In line with this, numerous studies have documented similar results (Kamil et al., 2026; Jedicke et al., 2025; Onyia et al., 2022; Harun et al., 2021).

These findings contribute to the existing literature by reinforcing the robustness of TPB in the context of ethical consumption and consumer activism. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that policymakers, advocacy groups, and consumer organizations should focus on enhancing consumers perceived behavioural control by providing accessible information, increasing awareness of boycott alternatives, and reducing barriers to participation. Additionally, leveraging social influence through campaigns and community engagement may further strengthen consumers' intention to engage in boycott behaviour. This study highlights that consumer boycott intention is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced not only by individual attitudes but also by social pressures and, most importantly, by perceived capability. Future research may extend this study by incorporating additional variables such as moral obligation, media influence, or cultural factors, as well as employing longitudinal designs to better understand changes in boycott behaviour over time.

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