



# Under Which Conditions Are Consumers Ready to Boycott or Buycott? The Roles of Hedonism and Simplicity

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## ABSTRACT

There are two fundamental ways in which consumers can express their concerns and obligations for society through their consumption decisions: They can boycott companies that they deem to be irresponsible or they may deliberately buy from companies that they perceive to act responsibly ('buycott'). It has been largely ignored that individuals are driven by different motivational mechanisms to join boycotts and buycotts (punishment vs. reward of corporate behaviors), and thus, these mechanisms have disparate implications for the participating individual (e.g., high vs. low subjective costs because of a restriction in consumption habits). This paper fills this void and develops a framework suggesting that the extent to which consumers translate their concerns and obligations for society into a willingness to boycott and/or buycott is bounded by self-interest. Using a unique, representative sample of 1833 German consumers, this study reveals that the effects of environmental concerns and universalism on buycotting are amplified by hedonism, while the effects of social concern on buycotting and boycotting are attenuated by hedonism and simplicity, respectively. These results have far-reaching implications for organizations and policy planners who aim to change corporate behavior.

## 1. Introduction

Consumers are increasingly aware of the fact that their consumption behavior—besides positive personal effects—has negative social and ecological consequences with considerable long-term implications. Many people, therefore, feel obligated to consume more consciously and ethically. In principle, there are two levers that people can pull in order to jointly respond to the socially irresponsible or responsible actions of firms by means of their consumption decisions. Consumers can join boycotts of the companies that they deem to be irresponsible or they may join initiatives to deliberately buy from companies that act responsibly, so-called buycotts (Friedman, 1996; Hoffmann and Hutter, 2012; Klein et al., 2004; Neilson, 2010). The concerted consumption decisions of a great number of consumers have the potential to prompt companies to improve their corporate social responsibility (Crane et al., 2004; Shaw et al., 2006).

Although both options have the very same overarching objective to ensure that firms behave responsibly, we assume that boycotts and buycotts are two idiosyncratic concepts that individuals evaluate differently. To date, little is known about the motivational mechanisms that determine whether consumers are prone to joining boycotts and/or

buycotts (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014; Neilson, 2010; Yates, 2011). We expect that both boycotting and buycotting are driven by a general concern about the consequences of consumption patterns for the environment, society, and other people (e.g., Neilson and Paxton, 2010; Newman and Bartels, 2011; Shah et al., 2007). However, the question of whether these drivers ultimately lead to boycotting and/or buycotting may be bounded by self-interest goals that may even conflict with a prosocial or pro-environmental mindset.

This paper makes the following contributions. First, we explore the underlying motivational mechanisms that are believed to guide participation in the two archetypes of collaborative actions of consumers to modify corporate behavior, namely boycotting and buycotting. The research demonstrates that environmental concerns, social concerns, and the universal value orientation are central drivers of both boycotting and buycotting. Second, building on the specific unique properties of these actions, the framework developed in this paper identifies the self-interest of the consumer, or more precisely, hedonism and simplicity, as critical contingency variables that determine whether consumers are more or less willing to boycott or to buycott. Boycotts require consumers to restrict their habitual consumption patterns and demand a limitation of choices, which is why our framework derives

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**Table 1**  
The most relevant empirical research that jointly considers boycotting and buycotting.

Paper	Main finding regarding boycott/buycott	Type of research	Boycott/buycott distinguished	Items	Scaling	Concerns as predictors	Specific interaction
Shah et al. (2007)	Demographics (age, education), predispositions (moral obligations), and consumption orientation (environmental concern) drive political consumerism (which consists of boycotting and buycotting).	Survey, self-reporting	No <sup>a</sup>	3-item scale, mixed <sup>a</sup>	6-point	Partly <sup>c</sup>	No
Neilson and Paxton (2010)	Individuals with greater personal social capital and individuals living in regions with higher average social capital are more likely to engage in political consumerism.	Survey, self-reporting	No <sup>a</sup>	2-item scale, mixed <sup>a</sup>	Binary	No	No
Newman and Bartels (2011)	Education, political interest, citizen duty, political distrust, general discontent civic initiative, and individualized activism promote political consumerism.	Survey, self-reporting	No <sup>a</sup>	2-item scale, mixed <sup>a</sup>	Binary	No	No
Copeland (2014)	Boycotting is more strongly associated with dutiful citizenship norms, while buycotting is more strongly associated with engaged citizenship norms.	Survey, self-reporting	Yes	Single items, separate	Binary	Partly <sup>c</sup>	No
Neilson (2010)	Buycotting (in contrast to boycotting) is more prevalent among consumers who are female, trusting, altruistic, and involved in voluntary associations.	Survey, self-reporting	Yes	Single items, separate	Binary	No	No
Baek (2010)	Boycotting is more prevalent among consumers with higher income and education levels, while buycotting is more prevalent among those less educated and with lower income levels.	Survey, self-reporting	Yes	Single items, separate	Binary	No	No
Yates (2011)	Both boycotting and buycotting are more widespread among consumers who are in higher class positions and who are older, more highly educated, and female. Buycotting is more resource-dependent and individualistic than boycotting. Differences are found between the impacts of people's resources in different countries.	Survey, self-reporting	Yes	Single items, separate	Binary	No	No
Wicks et al. (2014)	Parental modeling is the most important predictor of young consumers' boycotting and buycotting.	Survey, self-reporting	Yes	Single items, separate	5-point	No	No
Hutter and Hoffmann (2013)	Ecological concern drives boycott (carrotmob) participation. The strength of the influence is moderated by past boycotting.	Survey, self-reporting	Partly <sup>b</sup>	Single items, separate	Continuous	Partly <sup>c</sup>	Partly <sup>d</sup>
This study	Social and environmental concerns as well as a universal value orientation foster boycotting and buycotting. The effects of universalism and environmental concerns on buycotting are amplified by hedonism, while the effects of social concern on boycotting and buycotting are attenuated by hedonism and simplicity.	Survey, self-reporting	Yes	Multi-item scales, separate	7-point	Yes	Yes

Notes.

<sup>a</sup> Boycott/buycotting merged to form a joint scale of political consumerism.

<sup>b</sup> Boycott is only included as a moderator, not as a dependent variable.

<sup>c</sup> Only environmental concerns.

<sup>d</sup> Only for boycott.

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