

# Using the Expectancy Theory Framework to Explain the Motivation to Participate in a Consumer Boycott<sup>1</sup>

**Areeg Barakat**  
**Farmingdale State College**

**Faten Moussa**  
**State University of New York at Plattsburgh**

*Previous research on consumer boycotts has focused extensively on a target firm's misconduct and the fierce reaction from consumer boycott organizers (Klein, Smith, & John, 2004). Little research, however, has been directed toward explaining the psychological/cognitive process by which consumers decide to participate in a boycott and the factors that influence such a process. We argue that consumers' participation in a boycott is a function of their perception of expectancy that their collective effort will lead to the achievement of boycott objectives and their perception of instrumentality that the achievement of boycott objectives will lead to valued outcomes.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Consumer boycotts have long been regarded as a tool by which consumers can voice their dissatisfaction with an organization's tactics, a government's policies, and with social issues in the hopes of influencing the offending target to change its ways. Both domestic and multinational corporations may be vulnerable to the boycotts of their brands. For example, consumers may oppose a multinational corporation's government policies and may in retaliation escalate the opposition to the boycott of the multinational corporation's products. Such a tactic may negatively impact the multinational corporation's market share and overall performance.

Boycotts have become even more powerful than ever because of the advancements in technology, especially with the birth of the Internet where one click of a button can communicate consumer dissatisfaction all over the world. Further, with the unstable political and global environment and with the surge in consumer boycotts in recent years, domestic and multinational corporations need to be equipped with identifying the factors that may set the motion for a boycott and should understand the consumer motivation to participate in a boycott.

The literature on boycotts has extensively dealt with a target firm's actions that initiate the boycott behavior and the coercive nature of boycott organizers (Klein et al., 2004). Little attention, however, has been given to a consumer's decision to participate in a boycott (Klein et al., 2004) and the process by which they engage in a boycott. This paper focuses on these ignored areas of research and examines the consumer's decision to participate in a boycott using the expectancy theory as an explanatory mechanism.

The objectives of this paper, therefore, are threefold: (1) explain the psychological process of the motivation to participate in a consumer boycott using the expectancy theory framework; (2) explain the moderating variables that influence this process; and (3) generate hypotheses for future research.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF BOYCOTTS**

Boycotts are important in influencing marketing policy and strategy because of the following factors according to Garrett (1987): (1) The use of boycotts is increasing; (2) Boycott agents are becoming more sophisticated due to the advancements in technology; (3) Recent court decisions have supported boycotts as legal forms of protest; and (4) Marketing strategists have neglected marketing policy boycotts as relevant marketing forces.

Boycott organizers expose target firms' misconduct, increase public awareness of such behavior, and cause these firms to change their ways, thereby eventually leading to a better society. Smith (2000) attempts to provide support to the proposition that corporate practices have changed as a result of the pressure of consumer boycotts and concluded that such pressure is imperative in influencing corporations to apply corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices.

Target firms should pay particular attention to consumer boycotts, especially since boycotts can be very dangerous and can threaten the existence of these firms. From the study of an actual boycott (Bremmer-- a European-based multinational corporation that sells consumer food products--boycott), Klein, Smith, and John (2003), found that boycotting leads to the loss of sales, has an adverse impact on the company brand image due to the fact that the "boycotters tried competitors' products, found they preferred them, and rejected the Bremmer brand as a result" (p. 21). Boycotting can also lead to stock price decline and may damage the firm's competitive advantage.

Pruitt and Friedman (1986) applied a time-series research to study the influence of 21 consumer boycott announcements on target firms' stockholders' wealth and found that boycott announcements resulted in a statistically significant reduction in target firms' stock prices and the overall market value of these firms declined by an average greater than \$120 million. Clearly, the boycott announcement substantially destroyed the wealth position of the target firms' stockholders (Pruitt & Friedman, 1986).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW ON BOYCOTTS**

### **What is a Boycott?**

Friedman (1985, pp. 97-98) defines consumer boycotts as "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace". There is scarce empirical research regarding contemporary consumer boycotts and this is due to the fact that the nature of the boycotts is not suitable to systemic scholarly research (Friedman, 1985). The word boycott emerged "about 120 years ago during a dispute between Irish peasants and their British landlords" (Friese, 2000, p. 493). In fact, the origin of the word "Boycott" can be traced back to the name of a British estate manager, Mr. Boycott (Friese, 2000). Boycotts come in different forms such as labor boycotts, minority group boycotts, boycotts by religious groups, and ecological boycotts (Friese, 2000). Further, boycotts can be classified into two additional basic types: economic or marketing policy boycotts and political, social or ethical boycotts. Economic or marketing policy boycotts are directed toward changing target firms' marketing policies such as lowering prices (Akpoymare, Adeosun, and Ganiyu, 2012), whereas a political, social, or ethical boycott moves further by forcing target firms to behave more ethically and become more socially responsible (Sen, Gurhan-Canli, & Morwitz, 2001).

Boycotts may take the form of direct boycotts, also known as non-surrogate boycotts, against the parties that serve as the targets of the boycott activities such as retailers charging unfair prices (Friedman, 1985). Boycotts may also take the form of indirect boycotts, also known as surrogate boycotts, against the parties whose activities have offended the boycotters (Friedman, 1985). An example would be dissatisfaction with governmental policies in certain regions of the world might cause a call for a boycott of business firms operating in such areas and as a result may put pressure on the government to change its

offensive policies. The Middle East is a hot bed for this type of boycott whereby nationals who are displeased with U.S. policy in the Middle East boycott U.S. brands.

Boycotts currently focus on a “quality of life” issue rather than on an emphasis to acquire economic necessities and market gain as previously seen in the past (Friese, 2000). Consumers today crave a better quality of life, especially since such an aspiration coincides with fast-paced advancements in technology making such a concept more attainable than ever. Also, boycotts today are geared towards large domestic and multinational corporations rather than at retailers and tend to be more media-orientated (Friese, 2000).

Boycotts are not the same as an individual’s personal decision to withhold purchasing of goods and services. Boycotts are organized and collective social actions but are non-mandatory (i.e., boycotts cannot mandate consumers’ participation) (Sen et al., 2001).

### **Motivation for Boycott Participation**

Several studies have attempted to explain the factors that influence an individual’s decision to participate in a boycott. Sen et al. (2001), examine the factors that influence an individual’s boycott decision using two experiments. Relying on the social dilemma theory and the reference group theory to understand an individual’s boycott decision, Sen et al. (2001) argue that social dilemmas are situations in which the interest of the individual is in conflict with the collective interest of the group, thus causing an individual to make a choice between maximizing his/her own self-interest or the collective interest of the group, thereby, making a decision to “not participate” or “participate” in the boycott, respectively. Therefore, participation in a boycott would be a function of the interplay between an individual’s self-interest and the collective interest of the group. Reference group theory, on the other hand, proposes that an individual’s assessment of his/her self-interest and the collective interest of the group will more likely depend on the degree of commitment he/she feels toward the social pressure to comply with the behavior of the reference group such as boycotters (Sen et al., 2001).

Numerous researchers (e.g., Klein et al. 2004; Sen et al., 2001) examined the effect of perceived participation of others on boycott participation and found that the perceived size of participation has a significant positive impact on participation in a boycott. In addition, Friedman (1999) found that boycott effectiveness depends upon consumer participation.

Moreover, research (e.g., Akpoyomare et al. 2012; Sen et al., 2001) also found that an individual’s motivation to participate in a boycott is influenced by his/her perceived success likelihood (such as pro-boycott message frame that demonstrates the likelihood of boycott success), perceived efficacy (the believe that one can contribute greatly to the accomplishment of the collective goal); and cost associated with boycotting (such as the preference for the boycotted products and availability of substitute products). In this regard, boycotts cause consumers to give up desired products that they repetitively consume (John & Klein, 2003). Further, the cost of boycotting may also include free riders and the problem of small numbers (John & Klein, 2003). Free riders usually do not participate in a boycott based on their perception of the number of other participants in a boycott. That is, if free riders believe that there are already a large number of participants in the boycott (John & Klein, 2003), they will not participate since there are no incentives for them to do so. On the other hand, due to a boycott’s problem of small numbers, others may choose not to participate because overall participation in a boycott is small and their role will not make a difference anyway.

Accordingly, the perceived cost-benefit that results from participation in a boycott is relevant. Drawing on helping behavior and boycotting behavior, Klein et al. (2004) tested a cost-benefit approach to boycotting during an actual boycott of Bremmer, a multinational corporation, and found that four factors can explain the motivation to participate in a boycott: making a difference, self-enhancement, counterarguments, and the cost of the boycott of constrained consumption. Further, they found that self-enhancement and constrained consumption significantly moderate the relationship between customers’ perceived egregiousness of the target firm action and their participation in a boycott.

Perceived egregiousness is another factor that influences participation in a boycott (Akpoyomare et al., 2012; John & Klein, 2003). The greater the perceived egregiousness of the target firm’s misconduct,

the greater the participation in a boycott. This may be related to the egregious act which is “a source of disutility to individuals, either directly (for example adverse health effects from a polluting firm) or vicariously (for example, the negative emotions that stem from envisioning a firm’s use of child labor)” (John & Klein, 2003, p.1198). Klein, John and Smith (2001) found that perceived egregiousness significantly predicted the intention to participate in a boycott and negatively influenced the target firm’s brand image.

Using a series of in-depth-interviews, Albrecht, Campbell, Heinrich, and Lammel (2013), discovered that a consumer’s involvement in a boycott is the most important factor in influencing a consumer’s intention to participate in a boycott. In addition, they also found that a consumer’s brand commitment negatively influenced his/her intention to participate, while the credibility of a call to participate in a boycott positively influenced a consumer’s intention to participate.

Hoffmann (2013) argues that engaging in a boycott is viewed as “pre-decisional rationalizations rather than independent rational considerations” (p. 214) by examining the indirect effect of proximity on boycott participation using several variables (self-enhancement, perceived efficacy, counterarguments, and trust in management) as mediators of this relationship. This relationship was tested using survey data gathered from 544 consumers. Using a real boycott that was initiated as a result of a factory relocation, Hoffmann (2013) found support for the mediation model which confirms the argument that motivation to participate in boycotting are “mainly rationalizations of pre-existing desire to boycott, which is contingent on proximity” (p. 214).

As previously indicated, there has been limited research that attempts to explain consumers’ motivation to participate in a boycott and the factors that influence such motivation (Klein et al., 2004). Limited research also exists toward understanding the theoretical background of the individual decision to participate in a boycott (Sen et al., 2001). “Researchers have been called upon to further clarify why consumers engage or not engage in boycotts.” (Albrecht et al., 2013, p. 181).

### **The Effectiveness of Boycotts (Boycott Success)**

The marketing discipline has rarely examined the potential effects of boycotts (Garrett, 1987). As previously indicated, Pruitt and Friedman (1986) provide evidence for boycott success in damaging the target firm’s wealth (boycott announcement caused the firms’ stock prices to drop significantly). However, imposing economic damages on a target firm may not be enough to demonstrate boycott effectiveness. A theory of the effectiveness of boycotts states that a boycott’s success can be determined by the degree of change in the target firm’s policies that are under attack (Garrett, 1987). Three determinants of boycott effectiveness are economic pressure, image pressure and policy commitment (Garrett, 1987). Garrett (1987) hypothesized that the effectiveness of a boycott is related positively to both the economic and image pressure on the target firm and is related negatively to the target firm’s policy commitment. The marketing policy boycott was collected by reviewing 16 newspapers and periodicals as well as three newsletters and identified 30 boycotts to be valid for the study (Garrett, 1987). In this research, respondents from both boycott agents and target firms were interviewed using the Telephone interview and news articles were collected regarding boycotts as well (Garrett, 1987). Garrett (1987) found that the effectiveness of a boycott is high when both the economic and image pressure are high on the target and the target’s policy commitment is low.

A boycott group’s success largely depends on the availability of substitute products in the marketplace (McCune, 1990). Lack of substitute products can contribute to the failure of a consumer boycott since consumers may find it difficult to be without the product (McCune, 1990). Furthermore, a boycott should also appeal to a broad consumer base (McCune, 1990) to be effective.

From the above review, little empirical research exists regarding the effectiveness of boycotts. This is due to the fact that empirical testing of boycott effectiveness is hard to assess (John & Klein, 2003; Pruitt & Friedman, 1986) since boycotts tend to be unpredictable and short-lived (Friedman, 1985). Pruitt and Friedman (1986) could not find a connection between boycott attributes and boycott success and conclude that the absence of a clear cut relationship between boycott attributes and boycott success rates shows that each boycott success is largely a unique case with complex ties to the behavior of a target firm. In

addition, there is a lack of integration among the theoretical foundations that explains antecedents, moderators and consequences of boycott effectiveness. Moreover, there is a lack of clear understanding of the process of consumers' participation in a boycott. Further research should look at how consumers reach the decision to participate in a boycott and how does such participation influence boycott success. Such a process is relevant in order to advance our understanding of the cognitive and psychological process that a consumer goes through in forming his/her decision to participate in a boycott and the variables associated with such a decision.

## **THE EXPECTANCY THEORY FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLAINING A CONSUMER'S MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A BOYCOTT AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

Figure 1 explains the process of a consumer's motivation to participate in a boycott and the variables associated with this process using the expectancy theory. The expectancy theory is chosen because it provides a comprehensive framework designed to explain the cognitive process that an individual will go through to choose a course of action. Accordingly, the expectancy theory is able to incorporate many variables within its framework and it is especially suitable to explain the decision to participate in a boycott since such a decision is "not only a collective effort but also a complex emotional expression of individuality" (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998, reported in Klein, et al., 2003, p. 3).

In addition, the expectancy theory is relevant in explaining a consumer's motivation to participate in a boycott. Klein et al. (2004) argue that "as a result of greater public attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the increased vulnerability of brands and corporate reputations, boycotts have become ever more relevant to management decision making" (p. 92).

Moreover, applying the expectancy theory to explain participation in a boycott will indicate that the motivation to participate in a boycott is a rational decision derived from a pre-assessment of the psychological and cognitive process that a consumer will go through to decide whether or not to participate in a boycott. Similarly, Hoffmann (2013, p. 214) argues that engaging in a boycott is viewed as "pre-rationalization rather than independent rational consideration."

The expectancy theory is a theory of motivation proposed by Vroom (1964) to explain the psychological and cognitive process that an individual will go through to determine the level of effort that he/she will choose to maximize his/her gains. According to Vroom (1964), forces over the individual to act (motivation) is a multiplicative function of perceived expectancy that effort would lead to first level outcomes (e.g., productivity), perceived instrumentality that first level outcomes would lead to second level outcomes (e.g., high pay), and valences (perceived outcome attractiveness). Therefore, applying the expectancy theory to boycott participation would involve the pre-assessment of perceived expectancy, instrumentality, and valences of the outcomes that are contingent on a consumer's participation in a boycott. In the following few pages this process will be discussed.

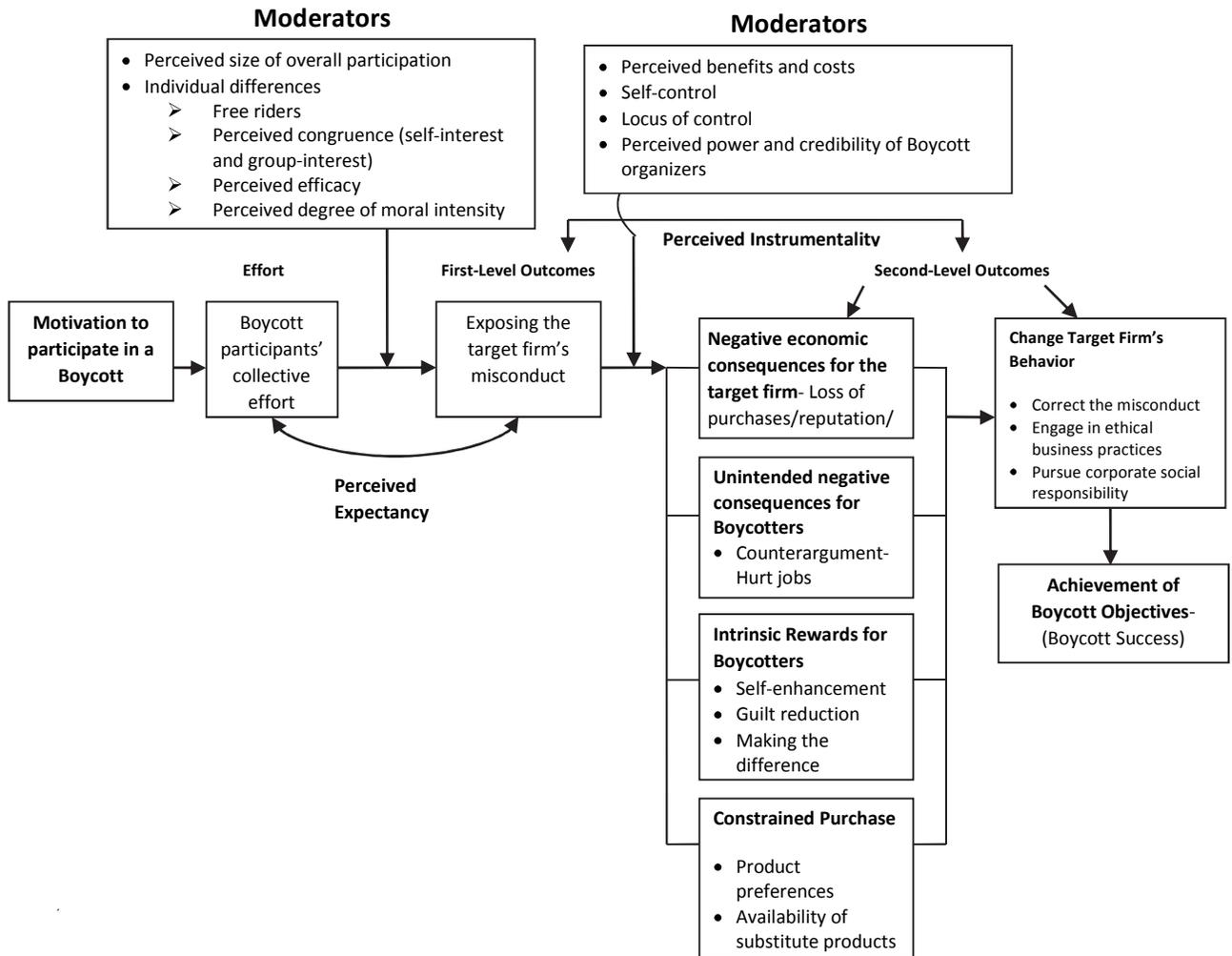
### **I. Perceived Expectancy That Participants' Collective Effort Will Lead to the Exposure of the Target Firm's Misconduct**

Figure 1 shows that participation in a boycott is a function of perceived expectancy that participants' collective effort would lead to greater exposure of the target firm's misconduct. Perceived expectancy is the first step in the process of the determination of the decision to participate. It is the individual's perceived probability that the collective effort of the boycott's participants will be successful in achieving the first level outcomes identified in Figure 1 as "exposing the target firm's misconduct." If perception of expectancy is low or zero (i.e., an individual does not believe that his/her effort and that of others are useful in achieving boycott objectives), then he/she will not participate in a boycott.

**H1: The greater the perceived expectancy that participants' collective effort in a boycott will lead to greater exposure of the target firm's misconduct, the greater the motivation to participate in a boycott.**

We argue that the following variables should moderate perceived expectancy (effort--first level outcome relationship): perceived size of overall participation in a boycott and individual differences variables such as free-riders, perceived congruence between maximizing individual self-interest and collective-interest of the group, perceived efficacy, and perceived degree of moral intensity of the target firm's misconduct (i.e., perceived egregiousness).

**FIGURE 1**  
**USING THE EXPECTANCY THEORY TO EXPLAIN CONSUMER BOYCOTT PARTICIPATION AND SUCCESS**



***Perceived Size of Overall Participation in a Boycott***

Research (Sen et al., 2001; John & Klein, 2003; Klein et al., 2004) argues that participation in a boycott is a function of the perception of size of the overall participation in a boycott. The greater the perception of size of overall participants in a boycott, the greater the effort to expose the target firm's misconduct, and the greater the perceived likelihood of boycott success. This is consistent with Albrecht et al. (2013) who argue that the higher the perceived participation by others in a boycott, the higher the perceived success of a boycott. Consumers generally believe that a larger number of people are able to

achieve more than a single person (John & Klein, 2003). This is called the ‘strength in numbers’ phenomenon (Sen et al., 2001).

The above arguments are consistent with the expectancy theory prediction since the perceived large size of participants in a boycott highlights the importance of a boycott’s causes and issues and, thereby, increases the likelihood of boycott success, which, in turn, increases perceived expectancy that boycott participants’ effort and collective power will lead to the exposure of a target firm’s misconduct, and, consequently, increases the motivation to participate in a boycott.

**H2: The greater the perceived size of overall participation in a boycott, the greater the perceived expectancy that the collective effort of the boycott participants will lead to greater exposure of the target firm’s misconduct, and the greater the motivation to participate in the boycott.**

### ***Free Riders***

Research (e.g., John & Klein, 2003; Klein et al., 2004) shows that the number of overall participation in a boycott may cause free riders to refrain from participation. This is due to the fact that as the size of overall participation in a boycott increases, the boycott likelihood of success in achieving objectives increases, and the incentives to free ride increases (Klein et al., 2004).

The behavior of free riders is consistent with the expectancy theory prediction. According to the expectancy theory, people will choose the course of action that will yield them the highest expected outcomes. Free riders are rational, and, accordingly, the best course of action that will yield them the highest expected outcomes is to do nothing (don’t participate in a boycott). The choice to not participate in a boycott would allow free-riders to get all the advantages of boycotting without enduring any cost associated with it. Although free riders would have a high perception of expectancy that participation in boycotting will lead to high outcomes, their motivation to participate will be zero because they do not have the incentive to participate.

**H3: Among free riders, the greater perceived size of overall participation in the boycott, the greater the perceived expectancy that participants’ collective effort will lead to greater exposure of the target firm’s misconduct, and the lesser the motivation to participate in the boycott.**

### ***Perceived Congruence between Maximizing Self-Interest and Maximizing the Collective-Interest of the Group***

Social dilemma situations may serve to explain the motivation to participate in boycotting, as previously indicated. Social dilemmas are situations in which members of a group face conflict between maximizing their own self-interest [by not participating in a boycott and getting the benefit of consumption] and maximizing the collective interest of the group [by participating in a boycott and withholding consumption] (see Sen et al., 2001).

The expectancy theory predicts that individuals are rational, and, therefore, if there is a conflict between their own self-interests and the collective interests of the group, they will tend to maximize their gains by pursuing their own self-interests at the expense of those of the group, and, eventually, their motivation to participate will be low or zero. However, in a social dilemma situation, pursuing one’s self-interest and ignoring the interest of others would lead to worse outcomes for all members of the group than the outcomes they would get if “they had cooperated in the collective interest,” that is, participated in a boycott (Sen et al. 2001, p. 4; Van Lange, Liebrand, Messick & Wilke, 1992).

Accordingly, when there is a conflict between an individual’s self-interest and group interest, there might be some situations in which participation in a boycott can bring greater benefits to both the individual and the group (i.e., bringing balance or congruence between an individual’s self-interest and the collective interest of the group). These situations may involve reducing group pressure, reducing guilt and boosting self-esteem, and increasing involvement in a group cause. Such particular situations will be discussed below.

Some individuals may have a high need for social approval and group acceptance and, therefore, pursuing the interest of the group could be beneficiary to them, especially if social norm is strong and group sanctions for dissenters are high. Research (e.g., Sen et al., 2001) shows that participation in a boycott is a function of pressure and susceptibility to normative influence and costs associated with boycotting. Similarly, Akpoyomare et al. (2012, p. 3) argue that, “a key factor affecting consumers’ consideration of collective interests in their boycott decision is the social pressure they are likely to experience, both internally and from external sources, to act in boycotting group’s interests.”

Although the individual self-interest may be buried in favor of the group interest (if individuals participate in a boycott to fulfill solely the collective interest of the group), an individual can also pursue his/her own self-interest at the same time if there is cost associated with his/her consumption of the boycotted products if such products are harmful. Thus, participation in a boycott will reduce an individual’s feeling of guilt and may boost his/her self-esteem. In addition, an individual’s involvement in, and identification with, a boycott cause is important for the congruence between self-interest and group interest. Albrecht et al. (2013), argue that high involvement with the cause of a boycott increases intention to participate in a boycott. Involvement is defined as a “person’s perceived relevance to the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests” (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342). Albrecht et al. (2013) found that a consumer’s involvement in a boycott cause is the strongest reason for intention to participate in a boycott.

Therefore, reducing group pressure, reducing guilt and boosting self-esteem, and increasing involvement with a boycott cause can make participation in a boycott worthwhile and beneficiary to all participants, thereby, increasing their perceived probability that their collective effort would lead to exposing a target firm’s misconduct, and, consequently, increasing the motivation to participate in a boycott. Research (e.g., John and Klein 2003; Wiener & Doescher, 1991) is consistent with the finding that people are more cooperative in social dilemmas if they expect that a group’s collective effort will lead to the attainment of its goal.

**H4: The greater the perceived congruence between an individual’s self-interest and collective interest, the greater the perceived expectancy that participants’ collective effort will lead to greater exposure of the target firm’s misconduct, and the greater the motivation to participate in a boycott.**

#### *Perceived Efficacy*

Self-efficacy is the individual’s belief that he/she can perform a given task, according to the social cognitive theory proposed by Bandura (1986, 1997). Self-efficacy is important for motivating an individual to exert a high level of effort, and perform a given task effectively to achieve task goals.

The expectancy theory states that perceived expectancy of task success is equivalent to the self-efficacy belief proposed by Bandura’s (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory which indicates that self-efficacy, i.e., task specific self-confidence is important to motivation and to achieving task goals. According to Bandura (1997), individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to perceive that high levels of effort will lead to high levels of performance (i.e., expectancy) because they believe that they can perform a given task effectively and are more likely to take action when they believe that their effort is worthwhile (outcome expectancy).

Sen et al. (2001) defined perceived efficacy as the belief that each participant in a boycott including oneself can contribute to the accomplishment of a boycott’s collective objectives. Accordingly, perceived self-efficacy is important in influencing perceived expectancy. When people feel that they are capable of attaining boycott objectives (e.g., exposing the target firm’s misconduct), they will exert high levels of effort to achieve those goals, and they will participate in the boycott.

**H5: The greater the belief that each participant in the boycott including oneself can contribute significantly to the achievement of a boycott's collective interest (perceived efficacy), the greater the perceived expectancy that participants' collective effort will lead to greater exposure of the target firm's misconduct, and the greater the motivation to participate in a boycott.**

***Perceived Degree of Moral Intensity of a Target Firm's Misconduct***

Jones (1991, p. 372) identifies moral intensity as "a construct that captures the extent of issue-related moral imperative in a situation." Jones (1991) proposed six components of moral intensity: magnitude of consequences, social consensus, probability of effect, temporal immediacy, proximity, and concentration of effect. The most important of these components are probability of effects, magnitude of consequences, and temporal immediacy (Jones, 1991).

Participation in a boycott can strongly be motivated by morality (Akpyomare et al., 2012). Perceived moral violation due to the egregious act committed by a target firm is linked to the individual's intention to participate in a boycott (Akpyomare et al., 2012). In addition, research (e.g., Friedman, 1999; Klein et al., 2004; Smith, 1990) also shows that perceived egregiousness that the firm has engaged in severe misconduct that has negative consequences increases participation.

We argue that engaging in unethical practices committed by a target firm can produce feelings of emotional distress, injustice, anger and can lead to outrageous behavior among consumer boycotters. The greater the perceived moral violation committed by a target firm's misconduct, the greater the effort to expose such misconduct, which, in turn, leads to a greater perception of expectancy that consumers' collective effort will lead to the exposure of the target firm's misconduct, and hence, the higher the motivation to participate in a boycott, especially if this misconduct is of greater magnitude, greater immediacy and has greater probability of occurrence.

**H6: The higher the perceived degree of morale intensity (in terms of magnitude, immediacy and certainty) of the target firm's misconduct, the higher the perceived expectancy that participants' collective effort will lead to greater exposure of the target firm's misconduct, and the higher the motivation to participate in a boycott.**

**II. Perceived Instrumentality that the Exposure of the Target Firm's Misconduct Will Lead to Desired Outcomes (e.g., The Achievement of Boycott Objectives)**

Friedman (1999) used the expectancy/instrumentality theory by Vroom (1964) to explain boycott success. He argues that before conducting a boycott, the group must make sure that the issues and objectives of the boycott are important, that there is a high probability that a boycott is going to be successfully executed, and that its execution will result in positive outcomes. Based on Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory and consistent with Friedman's (1999) argument that boycotts should lead to desired consequences, we argue that the motivation to participate in a boycott should be a function of perceived instrumentality that exposing a target firm's misconduct (first level outcomes) would lead to desired consequences (second level outcomes) such as achieving boycott objectives.

According to Figure 1, first level outcomes are the immediate outcomes that need to be achieved but they are not the end result outcomes. For example, according to the expectancy theory, workers should work hard to achieve high productivity (first level outcomes) in order to get high pay (second level outcomes) which is the most important to them. Accordingly, Figure 1 shows that a first level outcome is the "exposure of the target firm's misconduct". However, exposing the target firm's misconduct is not enough for achieving the boycott objectives. Boycotting should result in negative economic consequences for the target firm (e.g., hurting brand image, losing reputation, losing sales, and the reduction in stock price) which, in turn, should produce greater pressure on the target firm to change. Success likelihood of a consumer boycott depends on the ability of the boycott to hurt the target firm's profit and, therefore, force the target firm to respond to boycotters and to change its behavior (Sen et al.,

2001). Boycott success is the attainment of boycott objectives such as bringing about change in the target firm's behavior (Klein et al., 2001).

Klein et al. (2004, p. 96) argue that "Boycotters may have an instrumental motivation to change the target firm's behavior and/or to signal to the firm and others the necessity of appropriate conduct." Perceived likelihood that boycotting can change the firm's behavior can increase the motivation to participate (Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001). Accordingly, we argue that the higher the perceived instrumentality that exposing the target firm's misconduct will lead it to change its behavior, the higher the participation in a boycott.

**H7: The greater the perceived instrumentality that the exposure of the target firm's misconduct will lead to greater desired outcomes (boycott success—achieving objectives), the greater the motivation to participate in a boycott.**

Based on the literature review on boycotts (see Klein et al., 2003; 2004), Figure 1, also shows that there are an additional three types of second level outcomes: unintended negative consequences for boycotters (counterarguments—for example, boycotting induced harm such as hurt jobs if boycotting will cause target firms to go out of business), positive consequences for boycotters (intrinsic motivation derived from the participation in the boycott such as making a difference and self-enhancement), and constrained purchase (such as preferences for the boycott products and availability of substitute products) (see Klein et al., 2003, 2004). We argue that the perceived instrumentality that boycotting will result in some negative and positive outcomes will influence the motivation to participate in a boycott. These outcomes will be discussed in the next few pages.

We reason that there are several variables that should moderate the perceived instrumentality such as perceived costs and benefits associated with participation in a boycotts, self-control, locus of control, and perceived power and the credibility of boycott organizers.

#### ***Perceived Benefits and Costs Associated with Participation in a Boycott***

From the perspective of the collective action research, boycott participation is a consequence of a deliberate and rational assessment of personal costs and benefits (Klein et al., 2004, 2003). As long as benefits outweigh costs, it is beneficial for consumers to act collectively toward boycott goals (Akpyomare et al., 2012; Klein et al., 2004).

The expectancy theory states that motivation will be a function of perceived rewards and punishments that are contingent upon performing a given task. Similarly, a decision to participate in a boycott will be a function of perceived benefits and costs that are dependent on boycotting, as previously indicated.

Research (e.g., Klein et al., 2003; Akpyomare et al., 2012) proposed four cost-benefit factors that predict boycott participation: (a) making a difference, (b) self-enhancement, (c) counterarguments, and (d) constrained consumption. Individuals are more likely to participate if such participation makes them feel important by doing something good and worthwhile (making a difference) that will benefit consumers and society at large (Klein et al., 2004). In addition to the above instrumental rewards, self-enhancement includes psychological variables that boost social self-esteem (admiration by others) and personal self-esteem (increase feelings of self-worth) (Klein et al., 2004). Self-enhancement positively predicts participation (Klein et al., 2004). Furthermore, counterarguments are related to the fact that a boycott can cause unintended harm (e.g., hurt jobs) which directs attention to the costs associated with a boycott and eventually reduces the motivation to participate (Klein et al., 2004). If the exposure of the target firm's misconduct leads to severe negative consequences to the target firm such as closing the company which results in many workers losing their jobs, then, consumers would not participate in the boycott even for those who have a high perception of the egregiousness of the target firm's misconduct due to the expected induced harm that boycotting will have on workers (Klein et al., 2004).

According to the expectancy theory, perception of instrumentality that high productivity would lead to negative consequences reduces the motivation to act. Similarly, we argue that perception of

instrumentality that exposing the target firm misconduct would lead to unintended harm can reduce the motivation to participate in a boycott.

**H8: The greater the perceived instrumentality that the exposure of the target firm's misconduct will lead to greater unintended negative consequences for consumer boycotts such as hurting jobs (counterarguments), the lower the motivation to participate in a boycott.**

Moreover, consumers are less likely to participate in a boycott if their consumptions are constrained by boycotting (Klein et al., 2004). Similarly, a lack of substitute products will also cause consumers not to participate in a boycott (Klein et al., 2004). However, individual differences in self-control can play a role.

### ***Self-Control***

We argue that perceived instrumentality that exposing the target firm's misconduct will lead to costly consequences regarding constrained purchase will be greater for individuals who have low self-control than for those who have high self-control, and, hence, motivation to participate in a boycott will be lesser for the former individuals than for the latter.

The reason for this is that an individual with low self-control is susceptible to compulsive behavior due to his/her inability to deter gratification for immediate desired rewards (Nagin & Paternoster, 1993). Therefore, individuals who are low in self-control are characterized as being self-centered, focused on short-term planning, and risk-takers (Nagin & Paternoster, 1993). Thus, individuals who are low in self-control, as opposed to individuals who are high in self-control, will not be able to participate in a boycott due to the fact that the costs of participation will be high for them if they refrain from buying the desired products, especially if there are no substitutes.

**H9: Perceived instrumentality that exposing the target firm's misconduct will lead to costly consequences (such as constrained purchase) will be greater for consumers who are low in self-control than for those who are high in self-control, and hence the motivation to participate in a boycott will be lower for the former consumers than for the latter.**

### ***Locus of Control***

Locus of control is proposed by Rotter (1966) in which he states that the interpretation of the causality of events in one's life is an important factor that influences motivation. Rotter (1966) classified individuals into two types: Internals who believe that the events in their life are related to their action such as their abilities and effort, that is, they are the masters of their universe and externals who believe that the events in their life are related to external factors, and therefore, they are not responsible for these events.

Applying locus of control to explain the motivation to participate in a boycott, we argue that perceived instrumentality that the exposure of the target firm's misconduct will lead to the achievement of boycott objectives will be greater for consumers who are internally controlled than for those who are externally controlled, and, hence, the motivation to participate in a boycott will be higher for the former consumers than for the latter.

The reason for this is because the former consumers should have a high perception of instrumentality that exposing the target firm's misconduct by boycotters would strongly contribute to the success of achieving the objectives of the boycott, and hence their motivation to participate in a boycott will be high, while the latter should have low perception of instrumentality that exposing a target firm's misconduct by boycotters will contribute to the success of achieving the objectives of the boycott, since achieving a boycott objective would be a function of external uncontrolled factors and, accordingly, their participation will not add anything.

**H10: Perceived instrumentality that the exposure of a target firm's misconduct will lead to the achievement of a boycott's objectives and, hence, the motivation to participate in a boycott will be stronger for those who are internally controlled than for those who are externally controlled.**

***Perceived Power and Credibility of Boycott Organizers***

Albrecht et al., (2013) found that the credibility of a call to participate in a boycott positively influenced a consumer's intention to participate in the boycott. Exposing the target firm's misconduct must be effective in producing greater negative economic consequences for it, which, in return, generates great pressure for change and forces the target firm to correct its misconduct and change its policy. The target firm's reaction to a consumer boycott can take several forms such as it may attempt to counterattack boycott organizers' claims, deny responsibility, or highlight a boycott's inability to effectively resolve the focal issue (Sen, et al., 2001). Therefore, in order to make sure that a boycott will be successful in achieving its objectives and in offsetting the target firms' counterattack, the boycott organizers must be powerful and credible (Albrecht et al. 2013). Credibility refers to the positive characteristics of the communicator that influence the acceptance of his/her message by others (Ohanian, 1990). These positive characteristics involve two factors: expertise (competence, knowledge, authority) and trustworthiness (honesty and believability) (Ohanian, 1990). Both expertise and trustworthiness are important in conceptualizing credibility (Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000). Prior research (Goldsmith et al., 2000) has found that credible sources influence consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions. In addition, credible sources have been found to have an effect on the persuasiveness of the communication message (Ohanian, 1990).

Further, well known boycott organizers are more likely to be powerful and may have a connection to the government and other influential entities that exert greater influence on target firms to change their policies and engage in ethical practices. As previously indicated, a boycott is instrumental because it produces change. In order to achieve the boycott objectives, boycott organizers must be perceived to be powerful and credible in order to offset any attempt by the target firms to fight back and challenge the boycotters' claims. Therefore, perceived power and credibility of boycott organizers should increase perceived instrumentality that the exposure of the target firm's misconduct will lead to achieving a boycott's objectives, and, hence, increase the motivation to participate in a boycott.

**H11: The higher the perceived power and credibility of a boycott's organizers, the higher the perceived instrumentality that exposing the target firm's misconduct will lead to the achievement of boycott objectives, and, hence, the higher the motivation to participate in a boycott.**

**III. Perceived Attractiveness of Benefits and Costs that are Contingent on Participation in a Boycott**

The expectancy theory notes that perceived attractiveness of rewards and punishments that are contingent on performance is an important component of motivation. Motivation for participation in a boycott should also be a function of the consumer's perception of the attractiveness of benefits and costs associated with boycotting (valences of boycotting), that is, the higher the valences (attractiveness) of boycotting, the higher the motivation to participate in a boycott.

**H12: The greater the perceived attractiveness of the outcomes that are contingent on a boycott, the greater the motivation to participate in a boycott.**

In addition, perceived attractiveness (valences) of outcomes that are contingent on participation in a boycott should be influenced by individual differences. Individuals who believe in, and identify with, the boycotters' cause that target firms should be socially responsible organizations, should value more the boycott outcomes that are related to changing a target firm's behavior (to become more socially

responsible organizations) than on those outcomes that are related to changing a target firm's marketing policy such as reducing prices.

Klein et al. (2001) argues that consumers may have different motives (instrumental, expressive or mixed) for participation in a boycott. In instrumental motive, the boycotting goal involves changing the target firm's behavior while in an expressive motive, the boycott goal is more precise such as lowering prices. Other consumers may have mixed motives such as feeling angry at a firm and therefore wanting to change its bad practices or wanting to avoid feelings of guilt (Klein et al., 2001). Accordingly, outcome attractiveness will be a function of the fulfillment of these various motives for diverse consumers.

**H13: Perceived attractiveness of the outcomes that are contingent on a boycott, and hence, the motivation for participation in the boycott will be different for different consumers depending on their motive for participation in a boycott, such that, perceived attractiveness of boycott outcomes that are related to changing a target firm's behavior to become more socially responsible will be stronger for consumers who believe that "boycotters should result in changing a target's firm behavior to become more socially responsible" than for those consumers who do not believe in such a goal.**

### **Expectancy Theory Overall Prediction**

**H14: Motivation to participate in a boycott is a multiplicative function of perceived expectancy that boycott participants' collective effort will lead to the exposure of the target firm's misconduct, the perceived instrumentality that the exposure of the target firm's misconduct will lead to desired outcomes (the achievement of boycott objectives), and perceived attractiveness of outcomes that are contingent on participation in a boycott.**

The multiplicative function is vital because if one of the above expectancy theory components is zero, then motivation to participate will be zero.

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The motivation to participate in a boycott is an important topic. Yet there has been little research directed toward understanding the factors that influence participation in a boycott and the process or the mechanism by which consumers decide whether or not to participate in a boycott.

The present paper contributes to the boycott literature by explaining the psychological cognitive process that a consumer will go through in order to decide whether or not to participate in a boycott using the expectancy theory framework. The literature on boycotting does not focus on this process, especially with regard to the expectancy theory. Friedman (1999) mentions the expectancy theory by Vroom (1964) in terms of perceived instrumentality but Friedman did not fully focus on the process of boycotting. The present research is the first to fully utilize the expectancy theory in this regard and to integrate the expectancy theory with the boycott literature in explaining the motivation to participate in a boycott.

This research argues that motivation to participate in a boycott is a multiplicative function of "perceived expectancy" that a boycott participants' collective effort would lead to exposing the target firm's misconduct (first level outcomes), "perceived instrumentality" that exposing the target firm's misconduct would lead to desired consequences (achieving boycott objectives), and "valences," that is, perceived attractiveness of the outcomes that are contingent on participation in a boycott.

We argue that perceived size of overall participation, free riders, perceived congruence between self-interest and collective interest, perceived efficacy and perceived degree of moral intensity of the target firm's misconduct should moderate the perceived expectancy (that the collective effort of a boycott's

participants will lead to the exposure of the target firm's misconduct), and, hence, influence the motivation to participate.

Additionally, this research also argues that perceived cost-benefit analysis, self-control, locus of control, and perceived power and credibility of boycott organizers should moderate the perceived instrumentality that exposing the target firm's misconduct will lead to desired consequences (i.e., achieving boycott objectives), and hence influence the motivation to participate in a boycott.

Furthermore, the present research suggests that explaining the psychological cognitive process of boycotting and understanding the factors that influence such a process is central to our understanding of the motivation to participate in a boycott. Consumer boycott organizers should understand how consumers decide to participate in a boycott and the factors that influence such a process to learn how to effectively prepare for and to successfully execute a boycott to maximize the boycott objectives. Similarly, the target firm's management should understand how consumers decide to participate in a boycott and the factors that influence such a process to learn how to effectively respond to boycotter's demands and how to avoid the initiation of a boycott by eliminating the factors that lead to it and by behaving ethically and by being a socially responsible organization. Future research should focus more on this psychological process using the expectancy theory and explore additional moderating variables that influence the expectancy theory components in order to increase our understanding of participation in a boycott.

Future research should empirically examine the process of participation in boycotting and the expectancy theory variables using an ongoing boycott as well as the moderating variables specified in Figure 1. The role of individual differences such as gender in terms of participation in a boycott should be explored. Research shows that women are more ethical than men, and, accordingly, they should have a higher motivation to participate in a boycott than men. The present research proposed several new individual differences variables that influence perception of expectancy and perception of instrumentality, and hence influence the motivation to participate in a boycott such as perceived congruence between maximizing self-interest and group interest, perceived degree of moral intensity of the target firm's misconduct, self-control, and locus of control. These variables should be empirically investigated. The costs of boycotting and their impact on boycott success should also be studied. Factors influencing boycott success have received little attention and their empirical testing is difficult to assess. Quantitative analysis on boycott effectiveness should evaluate the consequences of the boycott on the target firm's economic wealth.

## ENDNOTES

1. A version of this paper originally appeared in *Competition Forum*, Vol 14(1), 2016.

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