

FROM BOYCOTT TO BUYCOTT: HOW SOCIOPOLITICAL CRISES SHAPE BRAND TRUST, PREFERENCE, AND INTENTION TO PURCHASE BISCUIT PRODUCTS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Consumer boycotts have become a form of political consumerism that shapes brand evaluation, yet little research addresses habitual, low-involvement fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) categories. This study examines how sociopolitical boycott sentiment, triggered by the 2023 Israel-Palestine conflict, influences Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and Purchase Intention toward multinational and local biscuit brands (Oreo and Roma) in Indonesia. A sequential explanatory mixed-method design combined Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) on survey data from 300 valid Indonesian biscuit consumers with thematic analysis of ten in-depth interviews. Results show that boycott sentiment significantly but weakly reduces Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and Purchase Intention, while Brand Trust strongly drives Brand Preference and Brand Preference remains the strongest determinant of Purchase Intention. Mediation analysis confirms that Brand Trust and Brand Preference partially mediate the boycott-purchase intention relationship. Qualitative findings reveal that consumers separate moral concern from product evaluation, relying on accumulated trust, taste, familiarity, and household habit, while expecting transparent, culturally sensitive, and action-based responses from multinational brands. The study extends political consumerism and brand equity literature by showing that boycott effects in habitual FMCG categories are evaluative rather than binary, and offers managerial guidance for sustaining brand resilience during sociopolitical crises.

Keywords: *Boycott Sentiment; Brand Preference; Brand Trust; FMCG; Purchase Intention.*

INTRODUCTION

Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) are embedded in everyday household routines and are purchased frequently, at low cost, and with minimal cognitive effort (Aaker, 1996; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Within this category, biscuits occupy a distinctive position in Indonesia: Kantar's Brand Footprint data show biscuits reach more than 95 percent of Indonesian households, with local brand Roma exceeding 90 percent penetration (Kantar, 2021, 2025). Because biscuits are purchased routinely and across all socioeconomic segments, shifts in consumer sentiment toward this category are a useful lens for observing broader consumer behaviour.

Late in 2023, the escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict triggered a wave of sociopolitical boycott sentiment in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country. Boycott narratives spread rapidly through social media, religious discourse, and community conversation, and began to intersect with consumers' evaluation of everyday FMCG brands, including biscuits. Nielsen and Reuters market-tracking data illustrate the scale of this shift: multinational biscuit companies recorded a value-sales decline of 7.5 percent in Q4 2024 versus Q4 2023 and 11.4 percent for full-year 2024, while local biscuit producers grew 18.5 percent and 5.3 percent over the same periods. At the brand level, Oreo declined 19.8 percent (Q4) and 16.9 percent (FY), while Roma grew 25.6 percent (Q4) and 15.7 percent (FY) (Naidu & Sulaiman, 2025). Comparable pressure was reported for Unilever Indonesia, whose market share fell from 38.5 percent to 34.9 percent in Q3 2024 as local players such as Wings Group and Mayora Indah gained ground (Naidu & Sulaiman, 2025).

These shifts raise a critical question that remains underexplored in the boycott literature: does sociopolitical boycott sentiment translate into a durable change in how consumers evaluate multinational brands, or does it operate alongside more established, brand-related mechanisms? Prior research has examined boycott intention in the contexts of fast-food chains, corporate reputation, and religiously motivated product avoidance (Elshaer et al., 2025; Fitri et

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al., 2024; Mulyono & Rolando, 2025), but limited attention has been paid to habitual, low-involvement FMCG categories such as biscuits, where purchase decisions are repeated frequently and are less deliberative by nature.

This study addresses that gap by examining how sociopolitical boycott sentiment influences Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and Purchase Intention toward multinational biscuit brands in Indonesia, using Oreo (multinational) and Roma (local) as reference brands. Specifically, the study asks: (1) to what extent does boycott sentiment influence Brand Trust and Brand Preference; (2) to what extent do Brand Trust and Brand Preference mediate the relationship between boycott sentiment and Purchase Intention; and (3) how do Indonesian consumers expect multinational biscuit brands to respond strategically and communicatively to rebuild trust, preference, and purchase intention. A sequential explanatory mixed-method design, combining PLS-SEM with thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, was used to answer these questions and is described in the Method section below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer boycotts are a form of political consumerism through which individuals withhold consumption to express moral, political, or social disapproval of a company (Friedman, 1999). Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz (2001) explain that boycott participation is shaped not only by moral conviction but also by perceived boycott effectiveness, social influence, participation cost, product preference, and the availability of substitutes, meaning that boycott sentiment does not automatically convert into complete purchase avoidance. Klein, Smith, and John (2004) similarly show that boycott motivation combines instrumental goals, such as changing corporate behaviour, with expressive, identity-based motives. Braunsberger and Buckler (2011) add that moral anger, desire to punish, and cause identification drive boycott participation, while Nordin, Khalid, and Hassan (2024) find that attitudes toward boycott action shape boycott intention without guaranteeing that intention becomes actual behaviour.

Brand Trust reflects consumers' confidence that a brand will consistently deliver on its promises (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001) and is a central driver of brand loyalty and performance (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand Preference captures consumers' favourable evaluation of one brand relative to alternatives, shaped by familiarity, perceived quality, and emotional attachment, and is an established antecedent of repurchase intention (Hellier et al., 2003). Purchase Intention, in turn, reflects consumers' conscious plan or willingness to buy a brand (Spears & Singh, 2004). In the Indonesian context, Fitri et al. (2024) found that religious motivation and product judgment shaped Muslim consumers' intention to boycott Israel-affiliated products, while Andriani and Himawan (2025) and Mulyono and Rolando (2025) show that boycott pressure places multinational brands under heightened scrutiny that can affect trust and reputation.

Building on this literature, boycott sentiment is theorised as a negative external trigger that is filtered through the psychological mechanisms of Brand Trust and Brand Preference before translating into Purchase Intention. Six hypotheses were developed and tested:

H1: Boycott sentiment negatively influences brand trust.

H2: Boycott sentiment negatively influences brand preference.

H3: Boycott sentiment negatively influences purchase intention.

H4: Brand trust positively influences brand preference.

H5: Brand trust positively influences purchase intention.

H6: Brand preference positively influences purchase intention.

Together, these hypotheses form the proposed conceptual model (Figure 1), in which Boycott Sentiment acts as a negative external trigger, Brand Trust and Brand Preference serve as brand-equity mechanisms that partially mediate its effect, and Purchase Intention emerges as the behavioural outcome.

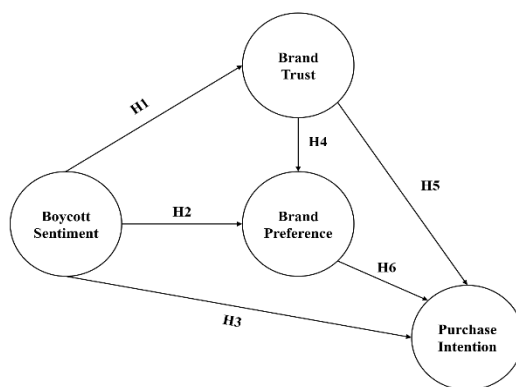


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

Source: Author's Analysis

Although prior studies establish these relationships individually, few have tested them jointly within a single structural model applied to a habitual, low-involvement FMCG category. This gap forms the empirical contribution of the present study.

METHOD

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed-method design, in which a quantitative phase testing the hypothesised relationships was followed by a qualitative phase that explained the quantitative findings in greater depth (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative phase used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4, which is appropriate for predictive and explanatory research involving latent variables, mediation, and moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019, 2022).

The population comprised Indonesian consumers aged 17 years and above who had purchased biscuits within the previous three months and were familiar with both Oreo and Roma. Purposive sampling was used to ensure respondents had sufficient product experience and boycott awareness to evaluate the constructs meaningfully. Data were collected through structured online questionnaires distributed via Google Forms and the Populix panel, yielding 300 valid responses after data screening. All constructs (Boycott Sentiment, Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and Purchase Intention) were measured using multi-item, validated Likert-scale indicators.

Following the quantitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten respondents who met the same screening criteria, to explain consumers' reasoning, brand-switching considerations, and expectations toward multinational brands during boycott situations. Interview data were analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006). Consistent with the explanatory mixed-method design, the qualitative phase was used to elaborate and contextualise the quantitative results rather than to independently test the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 300 valid respondents, 56 percent were female and 44 percent male, and 79 percent were aged 25 to 34 years, reflecting an economically active consumer segment with independent purchasing power. Fifty-five percent were private-sector employees, and respondents were drawn from across Indonesia, with the largest concentration (55 percent) in Jabodetabek. All respondents reported boycott awareness and prior purchase experience with Oreo or Roma, with 37 percent purchasing biscuits more than once a week, confirming the sample's suitability for examining habitual, boycott-related purchase behaviour.

Measurement Model

All constructs met the recommended thresholds for internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability above 0.70) and convergent validity (AVE above 0.50), as summarised in Table 1. Discriminant validity was supported by the Fornell-Larcker criterion across all constructs. The Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio between Brand Preference and Purchase Intention slightly exceeded the conventional 0.90 threshold (0.973), which is theoretically expected given that stronger brand preference is naturally associated with stronger purchase intention; both constructs were retained given satisfactory Fornell-Larcker results. Indicator collinearity was not a concern, with all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranging from 1.29 to 2.91, well below the 3.3 threshold (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 1. Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Boycott Sentiment	0.843	0.927	0.864
Brand Trust	0.803	0.884	0.717
Brand Preference	0.759	0.862	0.677
Purchase Intention	0.885	0.929	0.813

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Purchase Intention recorded the highest coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.654$), indicating that Boycott Sentiment, Brand Trust, and Brand Preference jointly explain 65.4 percent of its variance, a moderate-to-substantial

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level of explanatory power. Brand Preference recorded $R^2 = 0.517$, while Brand Trust recorded a markedly lower R^2 of 0.021, indicating that boycott sentiment explains only a small fraction of the variance in consumer trust, and that trust is shaped predominantly by factors outside the proposed model, such as accumulated product experience.

Table 2. Hypothesis Testing Results (Bootstrapping, n = 5,000 subsamples)

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	T-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	Boycott Sentiment $\rightarrow$ Brand Trust	-0.146	2.626	0.009	Supported
H2	Boycott Sentiment $\rightarrow$ Brand Preference	-0.114	2.727	0.006	Supported
H3	Boycott Sentiment $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	-0.072	2.052	0.040	Supported
H4	Brand Trust $\rightarrow$ Brand Preference	0.693	20.583	<0.001	Supported
H5	Brand Trust $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	0.171	3.211	0.001	Supported
H6	Brand Preference $\rightarrow$ Purchase Intention	0.659	12.898	<0.001	Supported

All six hypotheses were supported at the 5 percent significance level. Boycott Sentiment exerted a statistically significant but consistently weak negative effect on Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and Purchase Intention (β between -0.072 and -0.146), corroborated by negligible-to-small effect sizes (f^2 between 0.014 and 0.026). In contrast, Brand Trust exerted a large effect on Brand Preference ($\beta = 0.693$, $f^2 = 0.974$), and Brand Preference exerted a large effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.659$, $f^2 = 0.607$), the two strongest relationships in the model. Brand Trust's direct effect on Purchase Intention was comparatively modest ($\beta = 0.171$, $f^2 = 0.042$), suggesting that trust operates on purchase intention mainly indirectly, by first strengthening preference.

Mediation Analysis

The total indirect effect of Boycott Sentiment on Purchase Intention through Brand Trust and Brand Preference was significant ($\beta = -0.167$, $T = 3.912$, $p < .001$). The specific indirect path through Brand Preference alone was significant ($\beta = -0.075$, $T = 2.575$, $p < .01$), as was the serial path through Brand Trust and then Brand Preference ($\beta = -0.067$, $T = 2.544$, $p < .01$). However, the specific indirect path through Brand Trust alone was not significant ($\beta = -0.025$, $T = 1.879$, $p = 0.060$), indicating that trust affects purchase intention meaningfully only once it is translated into preference. Because Boycott Sentiment retained a significant direct effect on Purchase Intention alongside these significant indirect effects, Brand Trust and Brand Preference are best characterised as partial mediators of the boycott-purchase intention relationship.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the ten interviews produced five themes that elaborate the quantitative results. First, consumers separate sociopolitical concern from product evaluation: participants expressed genuine humanitarian concern yet did not automatically equate that concern with an intention to stop buying Oreo, consistent with the weak direct path from Boycott Sentiment to the brand-related constructs. Second, accumulated Brand Trust buffers the impact of boycott sentiment, built through years of consistent product experience and reliability. Third, Brand Preference is reinforced by accumulated product experience, particularly taste, texture, and childhood familiarity, echoing the large H4 and H6 path coefficients. Fourth, consumers consider local alternatives such as Roma but rarely treat them as complete substitutes, benchmarking them against Oreo's sensory and quality attributes rather than replacing the brand outright, which explains the moderate (rather than high) switching intention observed alongside significant, if modest, boycott effects. Fifth, consumers expect multinational brands to sustain trust through authentic, transparent, and culturally sensitive responses that are reinforced by consistent product quality, rather than through communication alone.

Table 3. Summary of Qualitative Themes

Theme	Core Insight	Key Literature Anchor
1. Separating Moral Concern from Product Evaluation	Boycott awareness and ethical concern do not automatically convert into purchase avoidance; consumers evaluate the brand separately from the sociopolitical issue	Sen et al. (2001); Klein et al. (2004)
2. Brand Trust Buffers Boycott Sentiment	Trust built through years of consistent product experience protects the brand from erosion during controversy	Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001); Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán (2001)
3. Brand Preference Reinforced by Product Experience	Taste, texture, and childhood familiarity keep preference anchored even when consumers acknowledge the boycott	Hellier et al. (2003)
4. Local Alternatives Considered, Rarely Substituted	Consumers benchmark local brands against the multinational brand rather than fully replacing it	Braunsberger & Buckler (2011)
5. Expectation of Authentic Corporate Response	Consumers want transparent, culturally sensitive action reinforced by continued product quality, not communication alone	Andriani & Himawan (2025); Mulyono & Rolando (2025)

Discussion

Integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings, this study proposes a Consumer Decision Journey during sociopolitically driven boycotts (Figure 2). Rather than reacting to boycott exposure with an immediate purchase decision, consumers move through a sequential evaluation in which boycott awareness raises ethical concern that is then reconciled against accumulated Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and habitual consumption needs before a purchase or switching decision is reached.

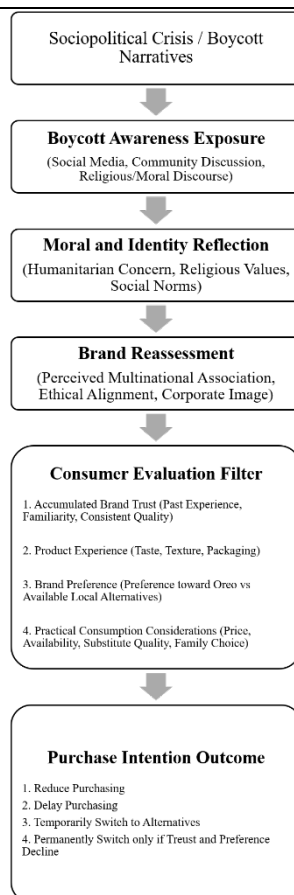


Figure 2. Proposed Consumer Decision Journey During Sociopolitically Driven Boycotts

Source: Author's Analysis

These findings extend the boycott literature by showing that, in a habitual FMCG category, boycott sentiment functions as an evaluative input rather than a deterministic trigger of brand abandonment. This nuances Sen et al. (2001) and Nordin et al. (2024), who show boycott intention does not always convert into avoidance behaviour, and Klein et al. (2004), who frame boycotts as combining instrumental and expressive motives: the present findings suggest that in low-involvement, high-frequency categories, the instrumental effect on purchase intention is present but small, because it competes with well-established brand-equity mechanisms. The dominance of Brand Trust and Brand Preference in explaining Purchase Intention ($R^2 = 0.654$) supports Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2001), who conceptualise trust as a relational asset built through repeated positive experience, and extends this work by showing that such accumulated trust also functions protectively during sociopolitical controversy. Similarly, the strong link between Brand Preference and Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.659$) is consistent with Hellier et al. (2003) and Spears and Singh (2004), and the qualitative data show this preference is anchored in taste, familiarity, and household habit rather than price or availability alone. Where multinational brands are affected, findings align with Andriani and Himawan (2025) and Mulyono and Rolando (2025) in showing that consumers expect authentic, culturally sensitive engagement, but extend this literature by showing that communication is expected to reinforce, not substitute for, product quality and accumulated brand equity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that sociopolitical boycott sentiment significantly, but only modestly, reduces Brand Trust, Brand Preference, and Purchase Intention toward multinational biscuit brands in Indonesia. Rather than triggering immediate brand abandonment, boycott awareness initiates a sequential evaluative process in which consumers reconcile moral concern with accumulated Brand Trust, product experience, and household habit. Brand Trust and Brand Preference partially mediate the effect of boycott sentiment on Purchase Intention, with Brand Preference emerging as the strongest overall determinant of purchasing behaviour. Qualitatively, consumers continue to value multinational products for their taste and consistency while expecting transparent, authentic, and culturally sensitive responses reinforced by continued product quality.

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Theoretically, the study extends political consumerism and brand equity literature by showing that boycott effects in habitual, low-involvement FMCG categories are evaluative and filtered through brand-related experience rather than binary and immediate. Managerially, the findings translate into a strategic resilience framework (Figure 3) for multinational FMCG brands operating in sociopolitically sensitive markets: monitor boycott sentiment proactively, respond with transparent and culturally sensitive communication, protect Brand Trust and Brand Preference through consistent product quality, and reinforce these with authentic, credible corporate action rather than communication alone.

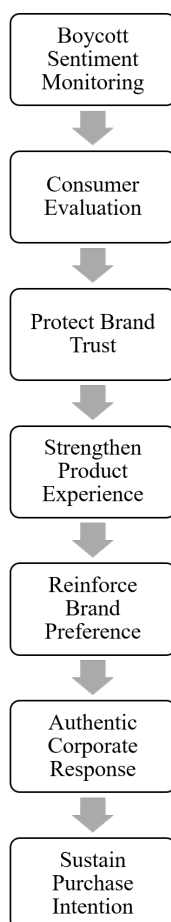


Figure 3. Strategic Resilience Framework

Source: Author's Analysis

Because the study relies on cross-sectional, self-reported data from urban and semi-urban, digitally engaged Indonesian consumers in a single FMCG category, findings may not generalise to rural consumers, other product categories, or periods of more prolonged sociopolitical crisis; future research could examine these boundary conditions and track boycott effects longitudinally.

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