

## Boycott as Symbolic Action: An Analysis of Social Action in Support of Palestine

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### Abstract

*The feud between Palestine and Israel has lasted more than seven decades, causing deep suffering for the Palestinian people who experience refugee camps, restrictions on human rights, and lack of basic needs. In this context, a boycott of products affiliated with Israel emerged as a form of moral and political protest, reflecting global solidarity and social values that underlie individual and collective participation in the movement. This study aims to study the boycott of products affiliated with Israel as symbolic social actions, and identify the types of underlying social actions, including rational actions, rational instrumental, affective, and traditional. In addition, this research also understands the motivation and meaning behind individual and collective participation in the boycott movement, using the theoretical framework of Max Weber's social action. This study uses secondary and primary data. Secondary data obtained from articles, journals, and relevant internet sources. Primary data is collected through questionnaires to obtain information directly from respondents. The combination of these two types of data allows an understanding of respondents' perceptions and experiences related to a boycott of products that support Israel, with voluntary and anonymous participation. This study found that the boycott actions reflect the types of social action Max Weber, driven by sympathy and human values, and were influenced by social media and support of public figures. Respondents interpret the boycott as an act of economic impact and moral statement of injustice, a social action that reflects values, emotions, and rationality in solidarity with Palestine.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Palestine and Israel has been going on for almost seven decades, and has become an issue that has attracted the attention of all people in the world. Palestine was forced to leave their homeland and take refuge in various countries and refugee camps. Palestine is a region that is part of the Middle East region which is around 27,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The Palestinian region is bordered by the Jordan River to the east, borders the Mediterranean Coast to the west, borders Sinai to the south, and borders Lebanon to the north. The Palestinian region is also called Filastin (Al-ard Al-Muqaddasa) which means "The Holy

Land" (Sugandi, 2024). Initially, the Palestinian people lived in peace and harmony under the rule of the Ottoman Turks, until finally Palestine was freed from the rule of the Ottoman Turks due to the defeat in World War 1 of the Ottoman Turks against England. The conflict between Palestine and Israel has been going on for around 75 years, starting in 1917. This feud heated up in 1947 when the UN adopted the Partition Plan for Palestine which aimed to divide the territory of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states.

For decades they - the Palestinian people, have been tortured in their own beautiful land with some of its people forcibly locked up in open prisons in the Gaza Strip, its people who lack food, clothing, education because they are restricted, and their human rights which are also confiscated by the Israeli Zionist regime. As written on the news on the site *online Tempo*, around 50,600 people have died as a result of the genocide carried out by Israel since October 2023. Also, hundreds of thousands of people have been injured as a result of attacks by Israel. Because all the suffering experienced by the Palestinian people has encouraged global solidarity in various forms. One form is the Boycott action of products, companies or institutions that support, finance, or profit from the Israeli occupation of Palestine, which until now has always been attacked by people who support or are on the side of Palestine. This Boycott action is not only a rejection of the consumption of a product, not only an economic expression but also a deep symbolic and sociological form. As a form of moral and political protest, people from various countries who are not directly involved in the war deliberately choose not to support or consume certain products. This seemingly simple activity actually reflects the reasons, values, and social meanings that can be studied using Max Weber's theory of social action. Max Weber divided social action into four ideal types: instrumental rational action (*purposively rational*), value rational action (*value-rational*), affective actions, and traditional actions.

In the context of solidarity with Palestine, this study aims to examine the boycott of goods affiliated with Israel as a form of symbolic social action. This study also aims to identify the types of underlying social actions, including value-rational, instrumental-rational, affective, and traditional actions, and to understand the motivations and meaning orientations behind individual and collective participation in the boycott movement using Max Weber's Social Action Theory framework. Using this method, this study seeks to show how boycotts and other symbolic actions function as a means to express moral principles, justice, and international solidarity in the context of political and humanitarian crises.

Max Weber's theory of social action is one of the main concepts in sociology that seeks to understand human behavior in a social context and how individuals give meaning to the actions they take. According to Weber, social action is behavior carried out by individuals by considering the intent or meaning contained in their actions and their impact on others around them. Social action, in Weber's view, always occurs in social interactions and is influenced by the values and goals held by individuals. In this case, Weber tries to explain how individuals act in society based on their subjective understanding. Weber, as a classical sociologist, emphasized that social action must be understood in a subjective framework, namely how individuals give meaning to their actions in a particular social context. He did not see human action as a mechanical response to external stimuli alone, but as a result of the individual's meaning and consideration of the situation they face. By using Max Weber's theory of Social Action to analyze the boycott of pro-Israeli products, researchers found that every action taken by the boycotters reflected the types of social action as classified by Max Weber, namely instrumental rational action, value-oriented rational action, affective action, and traditional action.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach where researchers can obtain respondents' perceptions and experiences of the case being studied, namely the phenomenon of boycotting products that are indicated to be pro-Israel (Rita, 2022). The boycott of social products can be analyzed through a phenomenological study procedure to understand the shared experiences of individuals involved in the phenomenon (Rita, 2022). First, the researcher determined that this research problem was best studied using a phenomenological approach, because it is important to understand the general experience of society regarding boycotts, which can contribute to the development of better practices or policies. Furthermore, the phenomenon of boycotts itself is interesting to study, given the underlying emotions and motivations, such as anger or solidarity. Data were collected from individuals who had experienced boycotts through in-depth interviews and possibly also observation or analysis of related documents. Participants were asked general questions about their experiences in relation to boycotts and the contexts that influenced those experiences. From the statements and themes that emerged, researchers were able to compile descriptions of participants' experiences and the contexts that influenced their experiences. With this approach, it is hoped that a deeper understanding can be obtained regarding the social dynamics related to the boycott action (Rasyid, 2022). The testing of the research instrument was carried out by distributing a questionnaire in the form of a Gform to respondents via WhatsApp media and then transcribed to facilitate further analysis. In this way, it is hoped that the data obtained can provide sufficient insight into the views and experiences of respondents regarding the boycott of social products. The researcher ensured that each respondent who filled out the questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously.

## 3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1.1. Reasons and Values Behind Boycott Actions



Figure 1: Questionnaire results

The escalating conflict between Israel and Palestine has triggered various responses from people around the world. Various actions have been carried out as a form of support for Palestine, one of which is still quite popular now is the form of boycotting products or companies that support Israel. Supporters of Palestine use this method as an effort to pressure Israel from an economic and political perspective, in the hope that the oppression of the Palestinian people can be stopped. Basically, a

boycott is a form of campaign that is organized globally. In Indonesia itself, the boycott of products or companies that support Israel is fully supported by the government on the basis that the MUI Fatwa Commission issued the Latest Fatwa Number 83 of 2023 concerning the Law on Support for the Palestinian Struggle. This fatwa recommends that Muslims avoid using products affiliated with Israel as much as possible (MUI, 2023).

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that the majority of people know about the boycott movement from social media, this is due to the increasing amount of information related to the boycott of Israeli products circulating on various social media such as X, Instagram, Tiktok, and others. This is also influenced by the fatwa issued by the MUI along with a list of names of products or companies that will be boycotted globally. In addition, public figures such as influencers, clerics, and activists who voiced the boycott action helped provide initial public understanding of these issues. Social communities, especially those based on religion and human solidarity, also became the main channels in spreading information and the spirit of the boycott.

The main purpose or reason for the boycott actions carried out by respondents also varies as seen from the data, but in general it is based on the intention to reject their respective involvement from parties who economically support human rights violations or oppression of the Palestinian people. In this case, boycotting is also a way to express an individual's moral and political position on global issues. The values that underlie this action include solidarity with victims, religious beliefs, respect for human rights and a strong anti-oppression stance. Boycotting is not only a form of ethical consumption, but also a manifestation of personal values in the public sphere. In Weber's theory of social action, boycotting can be seen as a form of value-oriented rational action (*value-rational action*), namely actions that are not carried out solely for personal gain, but are driven by the belief that the action is morally right and reflects the values held by the individual. In this context, a boycott is an expression of value orientation in addition to being based on religion, as well as a high sense of humanity.

## 1.2. Emotions and Social Pressure in Boycott Actions



Figure 2: Questionnaire results

Based on a survey of 18 respondents shown in the pie chart, it appears that the dominant emotion felt when deciding to boycott is sympathy, which reaches 55.6%. This finding indicates that most individuals are driven by deep empathy for the suffering of the Palestinian people. This sympathy reflects a strong emotional response to the injustice and violence seen in the conflict. Followed by feelings of sadness at 27.8%, other emotions such as anger, disappointment and discomfort due to attachment to certain products also appear, although in smaller proportions. This diversity of emotions shows that the decision to boycott is not a neutral or rational action, but is full of affective content that reflects the individual's emotional involvement in the ongoing humanitarian issue. This finding is in line with the results of research by Munandar, Yaasin, and Firdaus (2023) which revealed that Indonesian netizen sentiment towards the product boycott movement is greatly influenced by emotional factors. They noted that narratives that develop on social media often contain elements of sympathy, anger, and moral solidarity, which significantly influence public opinion. This emotional narrative then becomes the main trigger for many individuals to take part in boycott actions as a form of concern and support for victims of injustice. Social media in this case, acts as a space for collective emotional articulation that not only spreads information, but also forms awareness and encourages real action.

In addition, boycott actions are not only driven by individual emotional drives, but are also greatly influenced by the social environment in which the individual is located. The decision to boycott is often the result of social pressure, both explicit such as direct invitations from family, friends, or communities, or implicit such as discomfort when acting differently from prevailing social norms. In this context, the research of Nugraha et al. (2024) is relevant to explain how social identity influences participation in collective movements. Through the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) approach, they show that emotional and ideological attachment to groups that support boycotts will strengthen individual motivation to participate in the action. The act of boycotting, thus, becomes not only an expression of personal morals, but also a symbol of group solidarity and a manifestation of mutually reinforcing social identities.

From the perspective of the theory of social action proposed by Max Weber, boycotts can be categorized as affective actions, namely actions driven by strong emotions such as sympathy and anger towards injustice. However, if examined more deeply, boycotts also contain normative elements that come from collective values, both from the social environment and religious beliefs. In this regard, the research of Suherman et al. (2024) provides important insights into the role of religious values in boycott decision-making. They found that both Muslim and non-Muslim communities use the values of justice, humanity, and solidarity as moral foundations in supporting boycott actions. In the Muslim community, for example, teachings about Islamic brotherhood and defending fellow human beings are strong drivers for expressing solidarity through boycotting certain products. Thus, boycott actions in the context of the Palestine-Israel conflict cannot be seen unilaterally as merely spontaneous or emotional actions. Boycotts are the result of a complex interaction between personal emotions, social pressure, group identity construction, and internalization of religious and moral values. This action serves as an expression of collective solidarity and an affirmation of individual moral positions in the face of global issues that are full of injustice. Therefore, understanding the emotional and

social dynamics behind the boycott decision is important to see how social consciousness is formed, as well as how society articulates its moral response in the realm of real action.

### 1.3. Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Boycotts



Figure 3: questionnaire results

### 1.4. Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Boycotts

Based on the diagram above, it shows that respondents interpreted this boycott action as a variety of actions. In the diagram above, 44.4% interpreted this boycott action as an action that had a direct economic impact. With the boycott of pro-Israel products, this has caused a decrease in interest in buying a product which automatically also reduces their economic profits. One of the products or companies that really felt the decline in their economy was the fast food company McDonald's in Indonesia. The McDonald's boycott movement has been going on since November 2023 because of McDonald's support for the Israeli military by distributing free food to the IDF and investing in Israel. The McDonald's boycott movement is not only happening in Indonesia but almost all over the world. On the Kompas news page, it was written that the Management of PT Rekso Nasional Food admitted that there had been a decline in turnover due to the conflict between Palestine and Israel in 2024. Not only McDonald's was affected by this boycott movement, but also Starbucks, Coca Cola, KFC, and several other products or companies that support or are pro-Israel. This caused respondents to feel that this boycott had a direct impact on the existing economy. Furthermore, the diagram above shows that 38.9% of respondents interpreted the boycott as an action that had a moral and symbolic impact. This shows that for some respondents who were boycotters, the action was interpreted not only as an economic effort, but also as an expression of values and ethical attitudes. This boycott action was positioned as a form of moral statement against the injustice experienced by the Palestinian people, as well as a symbol of resistance against global powers that were considered oppressive. In this case, it can be concluded that according to respondents, this boycott action had a real impact. In this response, when viewed from the perspective of Max Weber's Theory of Social Action, this action is included in value-oriented rational action where individuals carry out actions based on beliefs in the values of humanity, justice, and solidarity, regardless of the efficiency or concrete results that may be achieved.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that the boycott movement is not solely based on economic motives, but is an expression of moral values, religious beliefs, humanitarian concerns, and emotional responses. The majority of respondents stated that their involvement in the boycott was motivated by a sense of sympathy and empathy for the suffering of the Palestinian people. Social media also plays a major role in disseminating information and raising public awareness, while social and religious communities strengthen collective identity in supporting this movement. In Weber's theory of social action, boycotts can be seen as a form of value-oriented rational action (*value-rational action*), namely actions that are not carried out solely for personal gain, but are driven by the belief that the action is morally right and reflects the values held by the individual. From the perspective of social action theory, boycotts can also be categorized as affective actions, namely actions driven by strong emotions such as sympathy and anger towards injustice. Thus, it can be concluded that boycotts are a complex social phenomenon, functioning as a symbolic act of resistance as well as a means of economic pressure on parties who support oppression. This action reflects the conscious efforts of individuals to adjust their consumption behavior to the ethical and political values they believe in, and is reinforced by social pressure and group attachment as a form of expression of collective moral attitudes.

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