



Consumer Boycotts: Corporate Response and Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

Boycotts, once intended as short term signals to business to improve performance, are proving to have increasingly long term ramifications. Yet there is limited number of studies in consumer boycotts area and specifically on the effect of motivational factors. The current study investigates the effect of company response to crisis (appropriate vs. inappropriate) and company responsibility for the crisis (responsible vs. not responsible) on the perceived egregiousness of a company's act, corporate image and boycott decision. Our study tests hypotheses and reports implications for marketing strategy and further research.

Keywords: Consumer Boycotts, Product Harm Crisis, Corporate Response

JEL Classifications: H12, M14

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer boycotts as defined by Garrett (1987) is "the concerted but non-mandatory refusal by a group of actors (the agents) to conduct marketing transactions with one or more other actors (the targets) for the purpose of communicating displeasure with certain target policies and attempting to coerce the target to modify these policies." Friedman (1999) argues that there could be as many as five main groups of boycotts. These are labor, ecological, minority, religious, and consumer boycotts. Consumer boycotts have a long history of use as a coercive strategy to promote changes in marketing decision-making and to promote broader social and political change (Friedman, 1999; Garrett, 1987). The Economist (1990, p. 69) writes: "Consumer boycotts are becoming an epidemic for one simple reason: They work,"; and a recently conducted survey reports that 50% of Americans claim to have taken part in a product boycott (Dolliver, 2000). According to the Ethical Consumer Markets Report (2013), there has been a 37% increase in the value of boycotts from 2010 to 2012 (£m 2.485 vs. £m 3.630). In fact, according to Ethical Consumer, a UK-based consumer activist magazine, there are 50 active, "progressive" boycotts currently under way in January, 2017. The Cooperative Bank's consumer panel (The Ethical Consumerism Report, 2003) revealed that 52% of people claiming to have boycotted at least one product over 1 year; with two-thirds of them claiming not to return to a brand once they have boycotted

it. Yet there is limited number of studies in consumer boycotts area (Sen et al., 2001) and specifically on the effect of motivational factors (an exception is Klein et al., 2004).

Another focus of this research is on organizational crisis and the response strategy a company uses. An organizational crisis can be defined as a significant threat to organizational operations or reputations that can have negative consequences for stakeholders and/or the organization if not handled properly (Coombs, 2015). A particular type of crisis of great concern to marketers and advertisers is product harm crisis. When a crisis happens to an organization it typically results in negative publicity and corporate image is being threatened. Consistent with the boycott literature (e.g., Friedman, 1999; Garrett, 1987), in general, boycott participation is prompted by the belief that a firm has engaged in conduct that is strikingly wrong and that has negative and possibly harmful consequences for various parties (e.g., workers, consumers, society at large). Boycotts today are more typically focused on corporate practices rather than on broader sociopolitical goals such as civil rights. Therefore, with so much at stake, managers should be concerned with trying to minimize the negative effects of a product harm crisis. Consequently, crisis response strategy has been the center of a rapidly growing body of crisis management research (Coombs, 2014). This study focuses on product harm crisis related boycotts and aims to understand the

effect of company response strategy to crisis (described as being appropriate vs. inappropriate) on the perceived egregiousness of the company's act, corporate image and boycott decision.

The study also examines the interactions between individual factors (beliefs about whether boycotts work, self-enhancement, and consumer interaction style-aggressiveness), and company actions (company response after crisis) affecting consumers' perceived egregiousness, boycott decision and perceived corporate image to improve the generalizability of a previous study results by Klein et al. (2004). After a review of pertinent literature we report an experimental study to test hypotheses and conclude with implications for marketing strategy as well as for further research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Friedman (1999, p. 4) 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." Therefore, a better understanding of boycott participation is useful in understanding ethical influences on buyer behavior. In the next section, we focus on product harm crisis and how a company's response to crisis can affect consumers' perception of egregiousness and willingness to boycott.

2.1. Product Harm Crisis, Company Response Strategy and Company Responsibility

Coombs (2015) defines two types of crisis; operational and reputational. A key difference between the two crises is the threat to public safety and/or stakeholder welfare which is typically created by the former type. Operational crises create an actual or potential disruption to organizational operations due to product harm. Crisis due to product-harm is defined as "discrete, well publicized occurrences wherein products are found to be defective or dangerous" (Dawar and Pillutla, 2000). For example in 2006 the Taco Bell chain had to deal with a crisis resulting from an *Escherichia coli* outbreak linked to its lettuce, (http://money.cnn.com/2006/12/13/news/tacobell_lettuce/index.htm?postversion=2006121322). Another typical example is the China's well known milk scandal in 2008 stemming from milk being spiked with melamine (<http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2008/10/09/the-story-behind-chinas-tainted-milk-scandal>). In 2013 a wide-scale recall of products sold by dairy producer Fonterra was announced after suspected botulism-causing bacteria were found during safety tests (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/08/new-zealand-government-fonterra-crisis>). Companies may incur substantial revenue losses due to negative publicity as well as product recall leading to out-of-stock situation. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (2016), injuries, deaths, and property damages related to crises cost more than \$1 trillion annually. Devastating effect of such crisis on company is inevitable. Previous literature on product harm crisis provided valuable insight on the moderating role of certain consumer characteristics, such as commitment to the brand (Ahluwalia et al., 2000), perceived severity of the crisis (Laufer et al., 2005), and brand familiarity (Ahluwalia, 2002) but did not illuminate the area of individual differences in how consumers react to the crisis. Herr et al. (1991) stated that bad

publicity surrounding the crisis is perceived both as diagnostic and surprising which tends to be weighed heavily when making product judgments- a phenomenon referred to as negativity bias.

When the product harm crisis is initially reported in the media there is often an ambiguity regarding the responsible party for the crisis. Attribution theory predicts that individuals search information to determine the cause of an observed behavior based on the information made available to them (Weiner, 1986). Jones and Richard (1972) describe that there is tendency for observers to attribute the responsibility for negative actions to stable personal dispositions of the involved actor (e.g., dishonesty, greed, irresponsibility) and ignore important situational determinants which is called fundamental attribution error. On the other hand, if an accused actor provides an appropriate explanation for an allegedly offensive behavior, observers may use this information to refute the negative nature of the allegations (Kelley, 1973). Therefore, corporate response to crisis during the period right after the crisis, may have critical importance. Fairness theory suggests that (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998) corporate responses to crisis should address issues of corporate control over the event and the processes and procedures for dealing with the event to ensure fair treatment for all affected parties. For example, seeking to assist the victims shows the organization acting appropriately by trying to reestablish the norms it violated when the crisis created victims as well as protecting reputational assets (Coombs and Holladay, 1996).

Boycott participation is generally prompted by the belief that a company has carried out some egregious act (Friedman, 1999; Garrett, 1987), but perception of egregiousness varies across consumers (Klein et al., 2004). We propose that company's response to product harm crisis is one of the important factors that can influence perceived egregiousness of company's act. Accordingly, our first hypothesis predicts that company's response to crisis, appropriate versus inappropriate, will influence consumers' perception of egregious act of company which in turn will affect the willingness to boycott the company. We also posit that the level of perceived egregiousness will have a direct impact on boycott (Klein et al., 2004). Therefore,

H_{1a}: Consumers will find the firm's actions to be more egregious when company response to crisis is not appropriate.

H_{1b}: Consumers will be more willing to boycott the firm when company response to crisis is not appropriate.

H_{1c}: Consumers will be more willing to boycott the firm when company's act is perceived to be more egregious.

It is well established within social psychology that actions can intensify attitudes in the direction of the behavior (e.g., Festinger, 1957; Bem, 1972). Specifically, we propose that consumers who are willing to boycott a company will have negative corporate image, merely because they boycotted.

H_{1d}: Willingness to boycott will have a negative relation to corporate image. Consumers who are more willing to boycott will have more negative corporate image.

The discounting principle of attribution theory (Kelley, 1973), states that an obvious causal inference will be discounted if a reasonable alternative explanation is present. Within the context of our study this principle pertains to the situation when an outside authority determines that the company is/is not responsible for the crisis. In such cases, consumers will/will not attribute the negative event to the company. Therefore, we predict that company's responsibility for crisis will influence consumers' perception of egregious act of company and the willingness to boycott the company. Accordingly,

H_{2a} : Consumers will find the firm's actions to be more egregious when company is determined by an organization to be responsible for the crisis.

H_{2b} : Consumers will be more willing to boycott the firm when company is determined by an agency to be responsible for the crisis.

2.2. Aggressiveness

In the context of consumer complaining behavior, attribution theory predicts that the perceived reason for a product's failure influences how a consumer responds (Bettman, 1979). Consumers may experience anger towards the firm and generate negative word-of-mouth behavior (Folkes, 1988). When a bad outcome is due to another's controllable actions, a person feels angry (Weiner, 1986). Thus when product harm crisis is due to controllable actions of a firm, the consumer should feel angry toward the firm. Therefore, we would expect a consumer with aggressive disposition in the market place interactions to perceive the company's actions as more egregious and more willing to boycott the company and/or its products compared to less aggressive consumers. Accordingly,

H_{3a} : Aggressive consumers will find the firm's actions to be more egregious.

H_{3b} : Aggressive consumers will be more willing to boycott the firm due to product harm crisis.

2.3. Gender

A common finding in the gender differences literature is that women express more fear about being the victim of aggression and crime than men (Harris and Miller, 2000). Few studies have examined the differences between men and women in consumer blame attributions (Laufer and Gillespie, 2004; Su and Tippins, 1998). These studies manipulated the severity of the problem and found that females placed more blame on the retailer for a major problem than did men. Therefore, one would expect similar results regarding differences between men and women in company action viewed as remarkably wrong and as having negative and possibly harmful consequences and therefore more likelihood of boycott decision.

H_{4a} : In a product harm crisis women will perceive the firm's actions to be more egregious than men do.

H_{4b} : In a product harm crisis women will boycott the firm more than men.

2.4. Boycott Motivations

Our first motivation factor, make-a-difference, can be defined as boycotter's desire to communicate a message to the target firm and to pressure the firm to change its behavior (Klein et al., 2004). A similar concept in the literature is self-efficacy. It refers to the belief that one's action can make a difference in the final outcome. Efficacy has a robust effect in enhancing cooperation (e.g. De Cremer and van Vugt, 1998; Kerr, 1992; Seijts and Latham, 2000; Sen et al., 2001). Social dilemma research suggests that cooperation varies directly with consumers' perception of the extent that each participant can contribute significantly to the achievement of collective goals (van Lange et al., 1992). In particular, studies confirm that consumers are less likely to free ride if they perceive that their own contribution can actually "make a difference." Accordingly we posit that,

H_{5a} : Beliefs in boycotting to make a difference will predict willingness to boycott. Those who believe that boycotting is appropriate and that it can be effective, will be more willing to boycott.

In situations where there is a conflict between the self-interest of a person and interest of a group (boycotting the product versus consuming the product), moral emotions (guilt) are claimed to motivate people to act in favor of other people's interests (Ketelaar, 2004). Guilt motivates reparative behavior in order to undo the wrongdoing (Tangney et al., 1996). As cooperative behavior is a way to repair, guilt motivates cooperation in social dilemmas and in everyday situations (de Hooge et al., 2007). Another factor affecting willingness to boycott is feeling better about oneself. The goal of enhancing the self is regarded as one of the core social motives (Fiske, 2002; Sedikides, 1993). Boycott participation allows the boycotter to boost self-esteem through feelings of "doing the right thing" (Klein et al., 2004) and "clean hands" (Smith, 1990) and by permitting a bettering of oneself "akin to a hygienically cleansing process" (Kozinets and Handelman, 1998). Therefore, we conjecture that:

H_{5b} : Beliefs in boycotting helping with "feeling better about oneself" and "avoidance of guilt" will predict willingness to boycott. The more the perceived possibility for feeling better about oneself and avoidance of guilt, the more likely the consumer will be willing to boycott.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Experimental Design

To test the hypotheses we conducted an experiment in which two independent variables, corporate response to an event (appropriate vs. inappropriate), and corporate responsibility for an event (not responsible vs. responsible), were combined in a 2×2 between subject factorial ANOVA design. To investigate the central issues of concern, this study examines the effects of two independent manipulated variables on dependent variables, i.e. corporate image, egregiousness, and willingness to boycott. The study also examines the effect of boycott motivators such as make a difference, feeling better about oneself and avoidance of guilt, as well as person characteristics such as aggressiveness on dependent variables.

3.2. Dependent Variables

3.2.1. Corporate image

The dependent variable, corporate image, was measured based on the eight statements to identify (1) Honesty, (2) responsibility, (3) concern, and (4) responsiveness dimensions of a corporation's perceived image (Bradford and Garrett, 1995).

3.2.2. Boycott decision

The next dependent variable was boycott decision which was measured by agreement with a willingness to boycott item on a five-point scale (1 = "strongly agree", and 5 = "strongly disagree") (Klein et al., 2004).

3.2.3. Perceived egregiousness

The last dependent variable of the study was perceived egregiousness which was measured by two scale items on a five-point scale (1 = "strongly agree", and 5 = "strongly disagree") and was computed as the average of these items (Klein et al., 2004).

3.3. Independent Variables

3.3.1. Corporate response

Corporate response to an event (appropriate vs. inappropriate) was operationalized by first presenting a product harm crisis event to which the Company X would respond (Dean, 2004). We used a product safety issue as the basis for consumer boycotts as shown in Appendix. We expect this type of scenario to generate considerable media coverage and require a corporate response to protect corporate image. The next step in operationalizing this variable was to present a Company X's fair, equitable, and just (appropriate) or insincere and blame shifting (inappropriate) response to the event (Appendix). In the appropriate response, the company offers to help affected individuals but in no way admits to guilt. In the inappropriate response, the company responds by attempting to shift the blame to another company.

3.3.2. Corporate responsibility

Corporate responsibility for an event (not responsible vs. responsible) was manipulated by presenting the final findings from a government agency bearing the company as either responsible or not responsible for the event (Appendix).

3.3.3. Boycott motivators

The study also examines the effect of boycott motivators such as make a difference, feeling better about oneself and avoidance of guilt on dependent variables. Questions regarding the boycott motivators were measured on a 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) scale (Klein et al., 2004).

3.3.4. Aggressiveness

Aggressiveness was measured via battery of scale items (Richins, 1983). Items were rated on a 5-point scale with endpoints labeled 1 (strongly agree) and 5 (strongly disagree). Respondents were then categorized as either high on aggressiveness (mean = 4.39, standard deviation [SD] = 0.31) or Low on aggressiveness (mean = 3.22, SD = 0.67) based on a median split.

3.4. Subjects and Procedure

Subjects were ninety eight undergraduate business students enrolled in a mid-size eastern university in the United States.

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed with a resulting 74 complete questionnaires (32% female, 68% male). Each subject was randomly assigned to one of the four treatments. In all four treatment conditions, a brief scenario describing the company as helpful and socially responsible to those communities in which it operates was presented first. After that, corporate response to a product harm crisis event (inappropriate vs. appropriate), and corporate responsibility for that event (responsible vs. not responsible) were presented to participants as separate, written scenarios. Following scenarios, respondents were asked two questions that measured their perceptions of the egregiousness of the product harm crisis event. The next question asked about boycott participation followed by eight statements measuring corporation's perceived image. Following this, the second scenario was presented and participants answered to the same scales like they answered after the first scenario. Next, participants answered six questions of boycott motivators (make a difference, feeling better about oneself and avoidance of guilt). These were followed by aggressiveness scale and finally manipulation checks and demographic questions. Upon completion of the questionnaire, subjects were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

3.5. Manipulation Checks

The manipulation check questions tested participants' factual understanding of the scenarios in the format of a five-item, multiple choice questions. The probability of randomly guessing the correct response on all checks is 1 in 125 ($P = 0.008$). It was confirmed that the manipulation of corporate response and corporate responsibility was successful. Reliability analyses were performed on the scales for aggressiveness ($\alpha = 0.79$, 6 items), Perceived egregiousness ($\alpha = 0.78$, 2 items), make a difference ($\alpha = 0.63$, 3 items), feeling better about oneself and avoidance of guilt ($\alpha = 0.82$, 3 items), corporate image ($\alpha = 0.50$, 8 items), and reliability levels were deemed acceptable.

4. RESULTS

Although data were collected sequentially using the same measures, the data were not examined with repeated measures analysis. That is, the response factor can affect participants at times 1 and 2, and the responsibility factor can only influence respondents at time 2. This underweight problem leads to dramatic differences in results between repeated measures versus simple ANOVA analysis. Therefore, we analyzed data more simplistically without using repeated measures technique. Deletion of unusable questionnaires resulted in a final sample size of 74 (68% male and 32% female, average age = 20.94 \pm 3.75 years). Hypothesis H_{1a} predicted a main effect for response on dependent variable, i.e. perceived egregiousness. ANOVA analysis supported the hypothesis ($F(1, 73) = 3.71, P < 0.05$); respondents perceived company's act in product harm crisis as more egregious when company's response was not appropriate than when it was appropriate ($M_{\text{appropriate}} = 3.41, M_{\text{not-appropriate}} = 3.00$, lower scores show higher perceived egregiousness). Hypothesis H_{1b} predicted a main effect for response on dependent variable, i.e., willingness to boycott. ANOVA analysis supported the hypothesis ($F(1, 73) = 5.97, P < 0.02$); respondents were more willing to boycott when company's response to product harm crisis

was not-appropriate then when it was appropriate ($M_{\text{appropriate}} = 3.46$, $M_{\text{not-appropriate}} = 2.83$, lower scores show higher willingness to boycott). Hypothesis H_{1c} predicted a significant effect of perceived egregiousness on willingness to boycott. A simple ordinary least square (OLS) regression results showed that perceived egregiousness has an effect on willingness to boycott ($\beta = 0.49$, $P < 0.001$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.18$) suggesting that as respondent's perceived egregiousness level increases so does the willingness to boycott. Hypothesis 2 predicted that respondents will find the company's actions more egregious (H_{2a}) and will be more willing to boycott if the company is determined to be responsible for the product harm crisis (H_{2b}). ANOVA results supported both the first part of the hypothesis ($F(1, 73) = 25.27$, $P < 0.0001$) and the second part of the hypothesis ($F(1, 73) = 7.99$, $P < 0.01$); respondents perceived the company's actions as more egregious when company was determined to be responsible for the crisis ($M_{\text{responsible}} = 2.48$, $M_{\text{not-responsible}} = 3.61$, lower scores show higher perceived egregiousness) and respondents were more willing to boycott when company was determined to be responsible for the crisis than it was not responsible ($M_{\text{responsible}} = 2.86$, $M_{\text{not-responsible}} = 3.53$, lower scores show higher willingness to boycott). Hypothesis 3 predicted that aggressive consumers will find the company's actions to be more egregious (H_{3a}) and will be more willing to boycott the company due to product harm crisis (H_{3b}). A simple OLS regression results showed that aggression has an effect on perceived egregiousness ($\beta = 0.54$, $P < 0.005$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.18$) suggesting that as respondent's level of aggression increases so does the perceived egregiousness of the company's act in product harm crisis. Similarly, aggression predicted willingness to boycott by interacting with the type of response ($\beta = 0.19$, $P < 0.01$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.06$) such that aggressive respondents were willing to boycott more when the company response was inappropriate.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that women will perceive the firm's actions to be more egregious than men (H_{4a}) and will boycott the firm more than men (H_{4b}). The difference of males and females for perceived egregiousness and willingness to boycott were negligible (3.15 vs. 2.83 for perceived egregiousness), $t(73) = 1.16$, $P > 0.10$ and (3.28 vs. 3.04 for willingness to boycott), $t(73) = 0.91$, $P > 0.10$. Therefore, hypothesis 4 was not supported. Hypothesis 5 predicted that the more respondents believe that the boycott will make a difference the more they will be willing to boycott (H_{5a}). It also predicted that the more the perceived possibility for feeling better about oneself and avoidance of guilt, the more likely the consumer will be willing to boycott (H_{5b}). Both predictors were significant (make difference $\beta = 0.38$, $P < 0.02$, feel better about oneself and avoid guilt $\beta = 0.34$, $P < 0.01$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.45$) suggesting that respondents will be more willing to boycott if they believe that they can make a difference, and that by boycotting they can "feel better about themselves" and can "avoid guilt."

5. CONCLUSIONS

Boycotts, once intended as short term signals to business to improve performance, are proving to have increasingly long term consequences. Even when businesses respond, consumers are slow to revert to previous suppliers of goods and services (The Ethical Consumerism Report, 2003).

In this study, we use an experiment, and shed light on the impact of corporate response and corporate responsibility, while accounting for individual level differences, such as consumer interaction style, and gender on how consumers react to the crisis, i.e., boycott decision.

Most boycott studies have been conceptual or descriptive (case studies), with a focus on boycott organizers and targets rather than on the consumer. Only three studies have reported empirical research focusing directly on variables that influence an individual consumer's boycott decision. Kozinets and Handelman's (1998) netnographic study suggested that boycott participation is a collective effort and a complex emotional expression of individuality as well as a means for moral self-realization. Sen et al. (2001) theoretical framework suggests that an individual's boycott participation is influenced by his or her perception of the likelihood of the boycott's success, susceptibility to normative social influences (social pressure), and the costs associated with boycotting. Klein et al. (2004), drawing upon the helping behavior, took a cost-benefit approach to the decision to boycott. They tested their framework during an actual boycott of a multinational firm that was prompted by factory closings. Four factors were found to predict boycott participation: The desire to make a difference, the scope for self-enhancement, counterarguments that inhibit boycotting and the cost to the boycotter of constrained consumption.

The objective of present study was to determine the factors affecting willingness to boycott.

This article contributes to the existing limited knowledge of consumer boycotts research by taking an additional step in understanding the effect of corporate response and responsibility on consumers' perceived egregiousness of a company's act in product harm crisis context as well as on their boycott decision. Our study showed that the way of responding to crisis during the period right after the crisis, has critical importance and significant ramifications for its reputation. Respondents perceived the company's act as more egregious when company response to crisis was not appropriate than when it was appropriate. Moreover, respondents were more willing to boycott the company when company response to crisis was not appropriate. Therefore, corporate response to crisis should deal with issues of corporate control over the event and the processes and procedures for dealing with the event to guarantee fair treatment for all affected parties. Current crisis communication research emphasizes the use of crisis response strategies to protect the company's reputation. Our study used a product harm crisis context in which corporate responsibility was manipulated as responsible versus not responsible. Our inappropriate and appropriate company response options can compare to response strategies of deny ("scapegoat") and deal (a combination of "concern" and "regret") in Coombs' study (2007). Therefore, further research could explore how different cluster of crisis and crisis response strategies relate to perceived egregiousness and boycott decision. Furthermore, as this study showed the effect of individual characteristic, namely, aggressiveness, on perceived egregiousness, future research must explore how crisis response strategies can be used effectively to suppress the anger triggered by crisis.

Finally, this study provides additional empirical evidence for the motivators of boycott decision, namely, feeling better about oneself, avoiding guilt, and believing that one can make a difference by boycotting (Klein et al., 2004). Beyond theoretical contribution to the literature of establishing the link between boycott decision of consumers and corporate response to and responsibility for product harm crisis as well as other individual differences and motivations toward boycott decision, these findings have several important practical implications for companies as we discussed above. Though company social responsibility, crisis severity, external effects, perceived brand equity may be considered as some important factors that can influence consumer reactions to company crisis (Rea et al., 2014), our results indicate that appropriate corporate response should not be ignored. Since the different sources of crisis responsibility and different corporate responses for the crisis are confronted with varied levels of consumer responses following a product-harm crisis, tailored crisis management strategies should be used by companies. Regardless of the number of initial protestors, a firm should measure the level of perceived egregiousness and try to know the reasons behind this perception. The firm can then formulate its boycott strategy and decide whether to change current practice, engage in mitigating actions, or communicate the reasons behind its actions.

This research has implications for boycott organizers as well. De Cremer (2001) reported that making salient the collective identity, rather than personal identity, increased cooperation. It is suggested that if players have a strong collective identity, they may perceive their own choices and actions as representative of their group, and hence self-efficacy will be increased. This has implications for boycott organizers as they can increase the boycott participation by increasing self-efficacy through collective identity. Finally, boycott participation can also be increased by organizing group by presenting boycott as an instrumental expression of anger. Individuals tend to express their emotions in varying ways and degrees. As this study showed, consumers with aggressive disposition to perceive the company's actions as more egregious and more willing to boycott the company to express the anger. In conclusion, our research joins a growing number of studies that examine the causes of boycotting and individual differences and motivations for boycotting.

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APPENDIX

Corporate Response Stimulus

The product harm crisis event and appropriate corporate response was presented as follows:

Brand XYZ (we will call it that instead of its real name) is a chain of 658 company owned fast food restaurants on the West Coast. Brand XYZ has a history of supporting those communities in which it operates. For example, Brand XYZ donates \$500 in scholarship money per year for each restaurant operated, directing school administrators to choose a local high school senior as recipient. The company also encourages volunteerism to benefit the community. As an example, Brand XYZ donates a free noon meal to all those participating in the local habitat for humanity project.

Recently, doctors at Children's Hospital in Seattle notified the Washington State Health Department that they were treating an unusually high number of children with *E. coli* infections—a form of food poisoning that is life threatening to children. The only thing the children had in common was eating hamburgers from a Brand XYZ restaurant. The Health Department immediately informed Brand XYZ that the *E. coli* outbreak was apparently due to contaminated hamburger meat at the company's restaurants, pending the results of a complete investigation.

Brand XYZ responded to these events with a press conference in Seattle, releasing the following statement: "We at Brand XYZ are deeply sad to learn of an apparent connection between illness and the consumption of our food products. Customer safety has always been our first priority. To emphasize this, we have taken the following steps. First, we are withdrawing from our inventory all hamburger meat in stock. Second, we are cooperating fully with the Washington State Health Department in their investigation, and we are launching our own internal investigation as well—we never want this to happen again. Third, we realize that now is not the time for excuse making or finger pointing. What is most important now is the welfare of those immediately affected by this unfortunate incident—the determination of facts and blame can come later. Therefore, Brand XYZ has offered to pay the hospital bills for those whose illness has been linked to the consumption of Brand XYZ food. We take these steps because we consider the trust the public places in us to be our most important asset. We will not be satisfied until the cause of this incident is determined and steps are taken to ensure that a similar occurrence will not happen in the future."

Alternately, the product harm crisis event and inappropriate corporate response was presented as follows:

Brand XYZ (we will call it that instead of its real name) is a chain of 658 company owned fast food restaurants on the West Coast. Brand XYZ has a history of supporting those communities in which it operates. For example, Brand XYZ donates \$500 in scholarship money per year for each restaurant operated, directing school administrators to choose a local high school senior as recipient. The company also encourages volunteerism to benefit the community. As an example, Brand XYZ donates a free noon meal to all those participating in the local Habitat for Humanity project.

Recently, doctors at Children's Hospital in Seattle notified the Washington State Health Department that they were treating an unusually high number of children with *E. coli* infections—a form of food poisoning that is life threatening to children. The only

thing the children had in common was eating hamburgers from a Brand XYZ restaurant. The Health Department immediately informed Brand XYZ that the *E. coli* outbreak was apparently due to contaminated hamburger meat at the company's restaurants, pending the results of a complete investigation.

Brand X responded to these events with a press conference in Seattle, releasing the following statement: "We at Brand X are shocked to hear of a potential connection between illness and the consumption of our food products. Customer safety has always been our first priority. Our company has a long history of compliance with the health regulations of federal, state, and local governments. If any contamination was present, it most likely originated in the slaughterhouse and processing plant—long before the beef was received by us. We relied on our hamburger meat supplier to deliver beef that was fit for human consumption and we are horrified that this may not have been the case. This incident underscores the need for better federal inspection of meat; only more rigorous standards for inspection can prevent a future occurrence of this situation."

Corporate Responsibility Stimulus

The government agency announcement finding Brand XYZ not responsible for the event was presented as follows:

The Health Department subsequently determined that Brand XYZ was in compliance with all regulations regarding the storage temperature, cooking temperature, kitchen sanitation, and paperwork documentation for its hamburger meat. Attention then shifted to the supplier of Brand XYZ hamburger patties—Hudson Foods. A coalition of federal and state agencies ultimately traced the source of the *Escherichia coli* contamination to a Hudson processing plant in Columbus, Nebraska. Brand XYZ fired Hudson as its hamburger meat supplier and instituted industry-leading standards for inspecting meat from suppliers. Unfortunately, four children died as a result of this food contamination incident.

The government agency announcement finding Brand XYZ responsible for the event was presented as follows:

The Washington State Health Department subsequently determined that Brand XYZ was not in compliance with cooking temperature requirements for hamburger meat. Most *E. coli* infections in the United States are due to undercooked beef. Although the source of the *E. coli* was probably a distant meat processing plant, the Health Department attributed the proximate cause of the outbreak to the Brand XYZ practice of cooking hamburgers for less time or on a cooler grill. Brand XYZ fired its hamburger meat supplier and instituted industry-leading standards for inspecting meat from suppliers. Unfortunately, four children died as a result of this food contamination incident.