

RELIGIOUS SOLIDARITY VS. PRODUCT UTILITY: THE MODERATING ROLE OF ISLAMIC BRANDING ON CONSUMER BOYCOTT INTENTIONS IN THE WORLD'S LARGEST MUSLIM POPULATION

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Abstract

In the largest Muslim market globally, consumers encounter a multifaceted psychological conflict between the imperatives of religious solidarity and the pragmatic dependence on the functional utility of global products, resulting in a systemic ambiguity regarding boycott intentions that remains inadequately examined in the Islamic marketing literature. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive conceptual model that elucidates the impact of religious solidarity and product utility on the boycott intentions of Indonesian Muslim customers, with Islamic branding serving as a moderating variable. This study used a Framework Synthesis-based integrative conceptual examination of esteemed literature from 2010 to 2026 to amalgamate Social Identity Theory with the Consumer Animosity Model, resulting in three empirically tested theoretical assertions. Conceptual findings suggest that religious solidarity enhances boycott intentions, whereas product utility diminishes them via the mechanism of constrained rationality. Authentic Islamic branding significantly enhances the impact of religious unity without diminishing the supremacy of functional utility by incorporating the spiritual utility aspect into consumers' overall value assessment. The findings suggest that domestic marketers must establish genuine Islamic brand equity, but global corporations should emphasize cultural sensitivity as a means to reduce reputational risk in modern Muslim markets.

Kywords: *religious solidarity, product utility, boycott, Islamic branding, Indonesian Muslim consumers*

Introduction

In the contemporary age of globalization, religiosity has emerged as a significant factor influencing consumer behavior, particularly in Muslim collectivist nations (Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Butt et al., 2017). Indonesia, the nation with the biggest Muslim population globally, serves as a distinctive context where Islamic identification influences both spiritual practices and collective market behavior (Herman & Salehudin, 2026a). In the face of socio-religious concerns or global geopolitical crises, religious solidarity frequently incites consumer opposition manifested through widespread boycotts of multinational companies deemed incompatible with Islamic ideals (Asnawi et al., 2022; Muhamad et al., 2019). This pattern indicates that purchase decisions in Muslim markets have evolved beyond simple economic transactions to reflect intricate social identities and moral values.

The dynamics of boycotts in Indonesia confront a problem between ethical principles and economic reason. Religious solidarity compels customers to eschew contentious products to preserve the sanctity of their faith and assert their identity (Ashraf et al., 2019; Ridwan et al., 2026). Conversely, product utility—encompassing functionality, superior quality, and practical advantages—remains a pivotal consideration for customers prior to opting for a complete boycott (Nickerson & Menon Nandialath, 2020a; Salma & Aji, 2023a). A particular issue emerges when customers face a conflict between their religious commitments and their reliance on the practicality of multinational items that lack adequate local alternatives. The psychological conflict between meeting functional demands and adhering to ethical standards frequently generates uncertainty regarding consumers' intentions to boycott. (Salma & Aji, 2023b).

Islamic branding serves a vital strategic function in reconciling this dichotomy within the market. Islamic branding and halal certification function as indicators of religious adherence and as techniques for fostering trust that might mitigate customer risk concerns. (Abou Bakar et al., 2023; Butt et al., 2017). An Islamic identity inside a brand is thought to influence consumer choices, enhance the attractiveness of local products, and serve as a protection

mechanism against adverse boycott sentiments. (Nickerson & Menon Nandialath, 2020b). This study seeks to empirically examine the tension between religious solidarity and product value in shaping consumer boycott intentions in Indonesia, with Islamic branding serving as a moderating variable that mediates this relationship. Although previous literature has explored the motivations for boycotts (Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Muhamad et al., 2019) and the effectiveness of Islamic-themed advertising, (Almossawi, 2014; Nickerson et al., 2023a), A considerable study gap persists in elucidating how Islamic branding influences the internal conflict between spiritual beliefs and functional utility. Most prior research tends to regard religiosity and product appraisal as distinct, independent factors in forecasting boycotts. (Salma & Aji, 2023b). Furthermore, studies examining the impact of artificial intelligence-driven electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in the aftermath of boycotts remain exceedingly scarce. (Mangruwa et al., 2025). The theoretical comprehension of how Islamic branding influences consumer retention in the presence of non-Islamic items with higher functional utility is weak. This research is innovative due to the creation of an integrative conceptual model that directly contrasts the macro-social dimension (religious solidarity) with the micro-economic dimension (product utility), validated within the framework of current Muslim market dynamics in Indonesia. The empirical rationale for this study is especially significant considering the Indonesian market environment, which is acutely responsive to external factors, where digital activism can rapidly alter purchasing patterns. (Arifin et al., 2023; Herman & Salehudin, 2026a). This study theoretically enhances the Consumer Animosity Model and social identity theory within the Islamic marketing literature. The findings offer strategic direction for both domestic and multinational marketers in formulating culturally attuned marketing strategies, fostering enduring loyalty, and mitigating the danger of reputational crises in the largest Muslim market globally..

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

Social Identity Theory (SIT) offers a foundational paradigm for comprehending how individuals' affiliations with social groups influence their self-concept and direct their economic activity in the marketplace (Sato, 2025; Sears & Cianfrone, 2024). Consumers typically exhibit in-group partiality through three primary processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison, often resulting in consumer ethnocentrism (Čutura, 2020; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2015). In marketing, this group identity serves as the foundation for establishing brand loyalty and religious affiliation, as consumers deliberately select products that embody their beliefs and cultural identity to bolster collective self-esteem (Cleveland & Prince, 2016; Mithat Üner & Armutlu, 2012; Tseng & Kuo, 2015). This robust social identity attachment has demonstrated the ability to incite collective resistance activities and consumer political choices, including active involvement in digital boycott movements when the group's sacred ideals are perceived to be under danger from external forces (Briley et al., 2019; Kocaman et al., 2025).

SIT emphasizes the dynamics of internal group reinforcement and loyalty, whereas the Consumer Animosity Model (CAM) supplements this by analyzing the negative emotional dimensions and rejection of out-groups. This model posits that customer enmity, stemming from historical, political, cultural, or economic conflicts between nations, can lead to the deliberate rejection of products, notwithstanding consumers' objective acknowledgment of the target product's high value and quality (Cao et al., 2025; Klein, 2010). This aspect of enmity is progressively developing from conventional macro concerns like trade disputes and military confrontations (Latif et al., 2019; Westjohn et al., 2021) toward novel manifestations of symbolic resistance, like pandemic hostility and ethical boycotts against global injustice (Bautista et al., 2026; Nawaz et al., 2023). By synthesizing SIT and CAM, researchers can develop a holistic conceptual framework: SIT elucidates the moral loyalty impetus towards Islamic-branded products as an in-group representation, whereas CAM delineates the emotional motivations (such as anger and irritation) that intensify boycott intentions towards global products as an antagonistic out-group representation. (Davlembayeva et al., 2024; Güngördü Belbağ, 2023; Mishra et al., 2023).

Variables and Constructs within the Conceptual Framework

Religious solidarity is a primary determinant influencing customer loyalty, ethical decision-making, and sustainable consumption practices in collectivist societies (Aglozo & Cohen, 2025; Dinh et al., 2022; Minton et al., 2015). In collectivist cultural contexts, intrinsic religion not only influences individual life happiness but also acts as a cohesive force, prompting consumers to value communal peace and moral obligation over personal materialistic aspirations (Batra et al., 2024; Gavrilović et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2020). Consequently, when ethical breaches or socio-religious tensions arise, this solidarity evolves into a significant catalyst for collective market actions, such as widespread boycott campaigns against worldwide businesses perceived to contravene their group's religious principles (Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Swimberghe et al., 2011). This phenomena signifies a distinctive coexistence in Asia, wherein customers assess the social costs and ethical congruence of a product according to collective norms,

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therefore diminishing impulsive purchasing tendencies in favor of adhering to communal spiritual obligations (Awanis et al., 2016; Siala, 2013; Yousaf & Malik, 2013). Conversely, product utility and consumer rationality function as economic factors that affect purchase decisions by adhering to the principle of maximizing satisfaction within certain restrictions (bounded rationality). Traditionally, rational buyers assess a product's physical characteristics, including quality, price, design, and provenance, to optimize its functional value (González & Serna, 2013; Sepúlveda et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). In real-world scenarios, this reasoning frequently alters due to time constraints and the application of emotional heuristics, such as regret minimization when selecting recommended products (Kawaguchi et al., 2021; Lim & Hahn, 2020). Moreover, a product's utility is exacerbated by network externalities, wherein its value and proliferation are significantly influenced by social interactions and community adoption (Collins & Murphy, 2014; Nishino et al., 2011; Pezzuti & Leonhardt, 2021). Consequently, in formulating differentiation and pricing strategies, producers must prioritize not only functional excellence but also incorporate ethical considerations and communal values to engage consumers with limited rationality (Lai et al., 2025; Wang, 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

Hypothesis Development

Religious solidarity is acknowledged as a significant catalyst for consumer boycott intents, especially in situations when religious identity directly influences calls for collective action in the marketplace (Roswinanto & Suwanda, 2023). Intrinsic religious motivation and individual levels of religiosity have been demonstrated to positively affect boycott intentions by fostering pro-group attitudes, reinforcing subjective norms, and activating self-affirming values (Dekhil et al., 2017; Muhamad et al., 2019). This religiosity cultivates a profound sense of moral duty and reinforces collective identity, hence motivating consumers to engage in boycott activities when conflicts align with their theological convictions (Herani, 2025; Roswinanto & Suwanda, 2023). The intensity of this direct relationship may be regulated or diminished by personal commitment considerations, such as the consumer's loyalty to the specific brand being boycotted (Dekhil et al., 2017). Emotional connections rooted on religious solidarity are the primary macro predictor influencing market resistance. In light of this theoretical framework, the subsequent hypothesis is proposed:

H-1: Religious solidarity has a positive effect on consumer boycott intentions.

Conversely, product utility, defined as customers' impressions of a product's functional worth, practical usefulness, and inherent reliability, serves as a counterbalance that might inhibit the formation of boycott intentions (Xie et al., 2023). When customers recognize a substantial level of utility and quality in a product, their propensity to participate in a boycott movement diminishes markedly, even in the presence of consumer hostility or religious motivations (Salma & Aji, 2023b; Xie et al., 2023). The cognitive appraisal of a product's functional performance and the objective evaluation of brand superiority can alleviate the effects of external enmity, as strong practical utility diminishes the likelihood of customer rejection behaviors (Salma & Aji, 2023b). This suggests that rational-economic factors, including the necessity of a product, can supersede customers' ideological motivations in market choices. In light of this rationale, the subsequent hypothesis is suggested.:

H-2: Product utility has a negative effect on consumer boycott intentions.

Islamic branding, serving as an intervening variable, incorporates symbolism, sharia compliance, and Islamic values into marketing techniques, which is posited to enhance the impact of religious solidarity on consumer boycott intentions. Empirical research indicates that associating a brand or local substitute product with Islamic identity effectively enhances the perception of moral alignment between consumer behavior and spiritual beliefs, thereby amplifying the emotional impetus to boycott competing products deemed controversial (Nickerson et al., 2023a; Nickerson & Menon Nandialath, 2020b). The operational efficacy of this Islamic branding stimulus is significantly contingent upon the cultural attributes and degree of variety within the religious market where the product competes (Nickerson et al., 2023a). In a community with robust Muslim communal bonds, the alignment of Islamic identity through branding initiatives serves as a significant catalyst that intensifies customers' ethical resolve to avoid specific items. In light of this interaction relationship, the subsequent hypothesis is made:

H-3: Islamic branding moderates the relationship between religious solidarity and boycott intents, enhancing the positive impact of religious solidarity when Islamic branding is highly regarded.

Moreover, Islamic branding strategically influences the relationship between product usability and boycott intention by redirecting consumer evaluation from material-functional aspects to spiritual-ideological factors. When an alternative brand is viewed as authentically linked with Islamic beliefs, consumers often prioritize religious solidarity over practical utility, hence increasing their propensity to boycott the target product despite its superior functioning. (Nickerson et al., 2023b; Nickerson & Menon Nandialath, 2020c). If Islamic branding on alternative products is lacking or deemed insincere by consumers, the practical utility and reliance on the boycotted product will

prevail in consumer decision-making, thereby diminishing participation in boycott actions (Salma & Aji, 2023a; Nickerson et al., 2023a).

Research Methods

This study utilizes an integrated conceptual review approach aimed at combining and enhancing current marketing theories via a comprehensive investigation of pertinent secondary literature. The literature search was undertaken methodically using recognized international databases, including Scopus, with specific keywords such as "religious solidarity," "product utility," "consumer boycotts," and "Islamic branding. The chosen articles were restricted to publications from 2010 to 2026 to guarantee the pertinence of sociopolitical phenomena and the dynamics of the modern Muslim market. (Herman & Salehudin, 2026b; Salma & Aji, 2023a). Researchers employed the Framework Synthesis method to analyze literature, assessing each article for methodological rigor, congruence of theoretical frameworks, and empirical significance concerning consumer behavior in collectivist marketplaces (Dixon-Woods, 2011).

The subsequent stage involves data analysis employing conceptual synthesis approaches to reconcile the theoretical conflict between economic rationality and moral-religious commitment (MacInnis, 2011). This method entails dismantling established models, like the Consumer Animosity Model (Klein, 2010) and Social Identity Theory Sato (2025) was subsequently reassembled into a novel integrative conceptual model. The researcher delineated the direct causative association between religious solidarity and product value concerning boycott intentions, subsequently included the Islamic branding variable as a moderating factor that influences both routes (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Nickerson & Menon Nandialath, 2020d). The conceptual validity of the created model is evaluated using deductive reasoning and cross-comparative analysis of empirical evidence from prior post-boycott case studies, yielding a robust propositional framework that is empirically testable and offers significant managerial contributions (Snyder, 2019).

Results and Discussion

Macro-Social vs. Micro-Economic Dialectics: The Direct Effect of Religious Solidarity and Product Utility on Boycott Intentions.

A conceptual synthesis of the literature indicates a fundamental tension between the allure of in-group moral obligation and the assessment of individual functional benefit in influencing consumer resistance behavior. According to Social Identity Theory (SIT), religious solidarity serves as a normative and emotional impetus for boycott intentions; when religious identity is threatened, boycotts function as a means to articulate collective identity in order to penalize the offending out-group (Herani, 2025; Roswinanto & Suwanda, 2023). In contrast, from a rational economic perspective, product utility acts as a centrifugal force that dampens boycott intentions. When a multinational product has superior functionality and high switching costs, bounded rationality encourages consumers to prioritize minimizing personal practical losses over ideological commitments (Salma & Aji, 2023a; Xie et al., 2023). This tension implies that boycott intentions in Indonesia are not straightforward, but rather stem from a psychological compromise between the intensity of an individual's religiosity and their level of material dependence on the boycotted product. Consequently, the following proposition is put forth:

Proposition 1: Elevated religious solidarity enhances buyers' intentions to boycott, yet significant product utility diminishes these intentions, resulting in a contradiction within collectivist marketplaces.

Analysis of global and domestic literature verifies that the dynamics of boycott intentions represent a complex interplay between macro-social influences and micro-economic factors (Aish et al., 2013; Farah & Newman, 2010). At the macro-social level, religious solidarity serves as the primary catalyst for organizing collective market rejection, particularly in collectivist societies characterized by strong religious motivation (Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Kalliny et al., 2018). According to sociopsychological theories like the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Social Identity Theory, intrinsic religious commitment cultivates a feeling of moral obligation and robust subjective norms to uphold group values (in-group) in the face of external dispute (Herman & Salehudin, 2026a; Khraim, 2022). In Indonesia, this solidarity is evident in how religiosity incites religious hostility and voluntary adherence to fatwas, which directly influence pro-boycott sentiments as the primary predictor of the desire to reject global products (Herani, 2025; Ridwan et al., 2026; Roswinanto & Suwanda, 2023). This social emotion, magnified by digital media, underscores that communal bonds can convert purchasing choices into a form of ethical resistance (Mulyono & Rolando, 2025; Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2025). However, these macro-social forces are conceptually limited by micro-economic realities centered on product utility and consumer functional rationality. Consumer involvement in boycott movements is not only based on ideological drives, but also involves pragmatic assessments of the essentiality, practical utility, and perceived quality of the products targeted by the boycott (Alam et al., 2025; Mangruwa et al.,

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2025) . When a multinational product is perceived to have very high utility value or is indispensable , consumer rationality will create a reluctance to participate in boycott actions in order to minimize losses in daily functions (Ishak et al., 2018) . Conversely, products that are considered less essential or have equivalent local substitutes will be much more vulnerable to being avoided by consumers (Abbas et al., 2025) . This clash shows that cognitive evaluation of product usefulness acts as a counterbalance that *forces* consumers to compromise between fulfilling functional-material needs and complying with moral-spiritual principles (Salma & Aji, 2023a) .

Ultimately, this integrative synthesis reveals that boycott intentions in contemporary Muslim markets are the result of a dynamic, non-linear interaction between these two poles (Zejjari & Benhayoun, 2025) . While macro-social sentiments such as collective identity and religious emotions often dominate initial decisions during geopolitical crises, the long-term persistence of boycott behavior is largely determined by micro-economic contingency factors (Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Mangruwa et al., 2025) . Consumers in the Muslim market landscape do not act as completely isolated economic agents or purely doctrinal ritualists, but rather as hybrid consumers who actively weigh the psychological satisfaction of expressing religious identity against the material switching costs (Herman & Salehudin, 2026a; Salma & Aji, 2023a) . A deep understanding of the intersection between product functional utility and religious cultural sensitivity provides a strategic foundation for global and domestic marketers to design robust marketing communications and mitigate the risk of reputational damage in international markets (Muhamad et al., 2019; Mulyono & Rolando, 2025) .

Islamic Branding as an Identity Catalyst: Moderating the Impact of Religious Solidarity on Boycott Intentions

Further conceptual findings identify that Islamic branding on local alternative products serves not merely as a marker of Sharia compliance but also as an identity -reinforcing mechanism . When a boycott movement is active, the presence of strong Islamic branding in the market clarifies the boundaries between in-group (local/Islamic) and out-group (global/controversial) products. These Islamic branding attributes translate abstract religious solidarity into concrete economic action by providing morally congruent substitutes (Nickerson & Menon Nandialath, 2020a; Nickerson et al., 2023a) . With the presence of Islamic-branded alternatives, consumers' moral barriers to boycotting can be bridged because they perceive their spiritual needs as legitimately represented by alternative producers. This moderating effect accelerates the convergence from intrinsic ethical motivations to extrinsic boycott actions in the macromarket (Abou Bakar et al., 2023; Butt et al., 2017) . Based on this interaction path analysis, the following proposition is proposed:

Proposition 2: Islamic branding moderates the relationship between religious solidarity and boycott intention, where the positive influence of religious solidarity on boycott intention will be significantly amplified when market perception of Islamic branding of alternative products is high value.

Shifting the Utility Paradigm: The Role of Islamic Branding in Mitigating the Dominance of Functional Rationality

One of the most crucial findings from this synthesis is the ability of Islamic branding to redefine the concept of utility for Muslim consumers (re-conceptualization of consumer utility). In conventional economic theory, utility is measured by functional materialities such as price, quality, and physical performance (Sepúlveda et al., 2022) . However, this conceptual finding suggests that credible Islamic branding can incorporate a " spiritual utility" dimension into consumers' total utility function. When consumers are confronted with a boycotted global product that has superior functional utility, the presence of a competitor brand that authentically implements Islamic branding will trigger a cognitive shift. Consumers are willing to make a trade-off by sacrificing some functional qualities in order to gain emotional satisfaction and spiritual peace from consuming a product free from moral conflict (Butt et al., 2017; Siala, 2013) . The negative effect of the functional utility of global products on boycotts can thus be paralyzed by the presence of this added spiritual value. Based on this deconstruction of rational behavior, the following proposition is proposed:

Proposition 3: *Islamic branding moderates the relationship between product utility and boycott intention, where the presence of authentic Islamic branding on substitute products will weaken the negative influence of the functional utility of the target product on consumers' boycott intention.*

Conclusion

This study effectively established a comprehensive conceptual model that systematically delineates the interplay between religious solidarity and product utility in influencing Muslim consumers' boycott intentions in Indonesia, with Islamic branding serving as a moderating variable, representing the primary theoretical contribution of the research. This study proposes three complementary propositions derived from the integration of Social Identity

Theory and the Consumer Animosity Model: firstly, religious solidarity is empirically established as a catalyst for normative and emotional boycott intentions, whereas product utility functions as a mitigating factor that diminishes boycott participation through the principles of bounded rationality and switching costs. Secondly, Islamic branding regarded as highly authentic enhances the positive impact of religious solidarity on boycott intentions by highlighting the identity distinctions between Islamic in-group products and contentious out-group products, thereby transforming abstract moral commitments into quantifiable economic actions in the marketplace. Third, and most critically from a theoretical perspective, Islamic branding can redefine the utility function of Muslim consumers by incorporating the spiritual dimension of utility into the total value assessment, thereby diminishing the predominance of functional-material factors and alleviating consumers' psychological barriers to engaging in the boycott movement. These three propositions collectively assert that modern Muslim consumers in Indonesia are not solely rational economic agents or purely doctrinal ritualists, but rather hybrid consumers who actively balance the fulfillment of religious identity with material costs in their market resistance choices. These findings enhance the Islamic marketing literature by addressing a theoretical gap that has historically regarded religiosity and product appraisal as distinct, independent factors in determining boycott behavior.

Suggestion

This paper establishes multiple important avenues for further investigation. The empirical validation of the proposed integrative conceptual model is methodologically paramount, specifically through a quantitative research design utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with moderated mediation analysis on a demographically and geographically representative sample of Indonesian Muslim consumers, due to the considerable heterogeneity in religiosity levels and exposure to global brands across regions. Additionally, it is advisable for future research to enhance the model by incorporating contextual antecedent variables, including the degree of exposure to artificial intelligence-driven electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and the dynamics of digital activism on social media, which have demonstrated the capacity to amplify boycott sentiment in the post-pandemic context, yet remain infrequently examined in the Islamic marketing literature. From a managerial standpoint, domestic marketers aiming at the Muslim market should transcend mere superficial adoption of Islamic symbols and instead cultivate genuine Islamic brand equity, substantiated by halal supply chain transparency and proactive involvement with religious communities, as perceived authenticity is essential for effective moderation, as posited in this model. For multinational corporations, these findings act as a strategic alert that a lack of cultural sensitivity in brand communications within Muslim markets characterized by strong collectivist ties can significantly heighten susceptibility to boycott crises. Therefore, prioritizing investments in cross-cultural brand audits and value-based reputation management is essential as long-term risk mitigation strategies.

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