



Relations among consumer boycotts, country affinity, and global brands: The moderating effect of subjective norms

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 July 2024

Received in revised form

10 November 2024

Accepted 27 November 2024

Available online 6 December 2024

Keywords:

Consumer boycotts

Brand strength

Country affinity

Subjective norms

International conflict

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of consumer boycotts on global brand strength by investigating country affinity and subjective norms. We analyze longitudinal data from South Korea over three years and test the moderated mediation hypothesis using the PROCESS macro. We show that consumer boycotts negatively affect brand strength indirectly by reducing country affinity across all years. We observed a significant negative moderated mediation effect of subjective norms only in 2020, the initial year of South Korean boycotts of Japanese products. Unlike prior literature focusing on boycott motivations, this study provides insights into the effects of actual boycotts on global brands, emphasizing country affinity and subjective norms in a longitudinal context.

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1. Introduction

In today's globalized marketplace, experts have warned that global companies must possess a strong crisis consciousness regarding the negative impacts of unpredictable consumer boycotts. It is defined as "a voluntary and deliberate abstention by consumers from purchasing or using or dealing with the specific target, such as a product, organization, country, or even person, to achieve a certain objective" (Kim, Kim, & Nakami, 2022, p. 2), in response to international conflicts (Kim & Kinoshita, 2023; Maher & Mady, 2010; Pandya & Venkatesan, 2016), as well as unethical corporate behaviors (Dekhil et al., 2017; Delistavrou et al., 2020; Joo & Shin, 2018; Scheidler & Edinger-Schons, 2020). For instance, in

2023, Bud Light experienced a 7.3% decrease in beer sales in the United States due to a boycott initiated by conservative consumers against a social media marketing campaign led by a transgender influencer (The New York Times, 2023). Additionally, owing to South Korean boycotts triggered by historical and political disputes between South Korea and Japan, sales at Uniqlo, the Japanese fashion retailer, experienced a decline of 54% in fiscal year 2020 compared to the previous year, resulting in substantial losses in operating profits (US\$74.7 million) and net income (US\$84.1 million) (Oh, 2021).

Moreover, the repercussions of a boycott extend beyond financial losses and significantly undermine the consumer-brand relationship. For instance, consumer negativity toward Bremmer increased to approximately 30% following boycotts over factory closures (Klein et al., 2004). Saudi Arabians boycotted Arla Foods because of its Danish origin following the Jyllands-Posten cartoon publication in an independent Danish newspaper, resulting in reduced brand loyalty and image (Abosag & Farah, 2014). More recently, Ltifi (2021) empirically documented that Saudi Arabian

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and Tunisian student boycotting Chinese products amid the COVID-19 crisis has weakened the brand image of Chinese products. A particularly telling case is that of Bud Light, which illustrates that even a year after the initial boycotts, a brand with a compromised image continues to struggle to regain its market position. According to [Forbes \(2024\)](#), Bud Light has dropped from the leading position to third place in the U.S. beer market, likely due to the erosion of its core customer base and a decline in brand reputation as it attempted to cultivate a more inclusive image.

In summary, these empirical examples show that various types of consumer boycotts (i.e., country boycotts and company boycotts) can significantly weaken the connections consumers develop with brands, further causing financial setbacks. However, particularly in cases of country boycotts, where the target company is not directly linked to the cause or motivation behind the boycott ([Kim & Kinoshita, 2023](#)), our understanding of the specific mechanisms that explain and extend consumer boycott-brand relationships remains limited. We identify three key limitations in prior research.

First, although early studies have documented the direct detrimental impact of consumer boycotts on brand dimensions (e.g., [Dekhil et al., 2017](#); [Klein et al., 2004](#); [Ltifi, 2021](#)), global companies like Arla Foods ([Abosag & Farah, 2014](#)) continue to grapple with the rationale behind this phenomenon and struggle to formulate appropriate responses to country boycotts. In the field of international marketing, it is crucial to understand the role of cross-cultural emotions—such as consumer animosity and affinity—due to their significant effects on global product and brand evaluation. Indeed, these two cross-cultural emotions can coexist rather than function as opposing constructs; thus, consumers' purchasing behavior is a blend of both negative and positive feelings toward a particular country ([Kim, Yan, et al., 2022](#)). For instance, the direct influence of animosity toward economic sanctions on boycott behavior was significant only for South Koreans, while the moderating effect of consumer affinity on boycott attitudes was notable solely for Japanese consumers ([Kim, Yan, et al., 2022](#)). This finding suggests that even when two countries face identical conflicts, the effects of cross-cultural emotions on consumer boycotts may vary significantly based on the involved nation. However, while early investigators tend to particularly conceptualize negative emotions, such as animosity, as drivers of consumer boycotts ([Kim, Yan, et al., 2022](#); [Xie et al., 2023](#)), it remains unclear how positive emotions, such as affinity, are contingent upon consumer boycotts. Consequently, managerial guidelines on whether and how consumer boycotts targeting a specific country influence the evaluations of global brands originating from that country—particularly concerning cross-cultural emotions—remain insufficiently developed.

Second, considering that boycott behaviors involve political consumerism motivated by the public ([Neilson, 2010](#)), consumers' decisions regarding boycotts are influenced by the perspectives of individuals within their social circles, alongside the social pressures associated with boycott-related matters ([Kim et al., 2023](#)). This consumer boycott literature has consistently highlighted the importance of subjective norms (i.e., defined as the perceived social pressure and opinions of others) as antecedents to boycott behavior. However, it has often overlooked the potential amplifying role subjective norms may play. Much of this research emphasizes the direct and positive effects of the three main determinants—perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and attitudes—on boycott decision-making ([Delistavrou, 2022](#); [Hamzah & Mustafa, 2019](#)), using the theory of planned behavior. This focus has resulted in a limited understanding of whether and how individual perceptions of subjective norms influence the intricate relationship between consumer boycotts and evaluations of specific countries and brands.

Third, although a few recent studies provided insights into the consumer boycott literature by conducting comparative analyses between conflicting countries and/or conducting longitudinal surveys across two phases (e.g., [Kim & Kinoshita, 2023](#); [Lee et al., 2017](#)), the prevailing approach in most other boycott studies has been limited to single cross-sectional analyses. Given the dynamic nature of boycott participation, where levels of activeness and size may weaken and dilute over time ([Lasarov et al., 2023](#)), we argue that investigating shifts in consumer attitudes and decisions within actual boycott cases through a longitudinal approach is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of consumer boycotts. As highlighted by [Kim, Yan, et al. \(2022\)](#), South Korea—the focus of our study—is geographically close to Japan yet politically distant, reflecting a complex interplay of animosity and affinity. These cross-cultural emotions can fluctuate over time as individuals engage in various social exchanges and cultural events. Nevertheless, providing managerial implications regarding how consumer boycott-brand relationships evolve over time remains a significant challenge.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to empirically analyze the impact of actual consumer boycotts on the brand strength of global companies by considering country affinity and subjective norms. Specifically, we advance literature in three major ways. First, to overcome the first limitation of prior research, we examine the positive cross-cultural emotions of country affinity (i.e., the emotional inclination of attachment and liking toward a foreign country; [Oberecker et al., 2008](#)). Unlike prior studies that have analyzed the direct relationship between consumer boycotts and brands (e.g., [Ltifi, 2021](#)), we extend this direct link by considering the mediating role of country affinity. Therefore, in the context of country boycotts, our study advances understanding of how consumers' affinity toward a conflicting country can influence the brand strength of global products (i.e., the degree of familiarity and favorable evaluation of a specific brand, as per [Wang and Zhang \(2018\)](#)).

Second, to address the limitation of prior studies, drawing on the theory of planned behavior, we propose a moderating effect of subjective norms by focusing on the impact of consumer boycotts on country affinity in determining brand strength. Unlike the theory of planned behavior-based consumer boycott literature, which predominantly examines the direct impact of subjective norms on boycott intention (e.g., [Delistavrou, 2022](#); [Roswinanto & Suwanda, 2023](#)), our study is the first to attempt to scrutinize the moderating effect of subjective norms on the indirect effect of country affinity on the link between consumer boycotts and brand strength.

Third, we enrich the boycott literature on consumer boycott-brand relationships by conducting a longitudinal data analysis spanning 2020 to 2022 (i.e., 571 data in 2020, 528 in 2021, and 547 in 2022). By examining a real-world case of a consumer boycott of Japanese products in response to economic sanctions in the form of strict export regulations imposed by the Japanese government in South Korea, we argue that the impact of consumer boycotts on the brand strength of global products may vary over time. This approach addresses the third limitation in the literature and also underscores the importance of considering the dynamics of hot and cold cognition in exploring the combined effects of consumer boycotts and subjective norms on brand strength via country affinity.

2. Background research and hypotheses

2.1. Consequences of consumer boycotts

We can categorize previous research on consumer boycotts into studies targeting specific companies ([Dekhil et al., 2017](#); [Klein et al.,](#)

2004; Roswinanto & Suwanda, 2023) and those focusing on specific regions or countries (Ali, 2021; Cuadras-Morató & Raya, 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Mrad et al., 2014). Boycott literature has predominantly focused on the determinants of boycott participation. These studies offer initial insights into the motivations and reasons for consumer boycotts from diverse perspectives, such as religious inspiration (Muhamad et al., 2019), consumer animosity in inter-country conflicts (Kim, Yan, et al., 2022), ethnocentrism (Abdul-Latif & Abdul-Talib, 2017), self-efficacy in implementing boycotts (Smith & Li, 2010), brand loyalty (Roswinanto & Suwanda, 2023), corporate culpability (Scheidler & Edinger-Schons, 2020), consumers' concern and trust in management (Hoffmann & Müller, 2009), and corporate social contribution (Kim & Kinoshita, 2023).

Yet, surprisingly, we found that relatively few studies have investigated the consequences of consumer boycotts on targets. Table 1 offers key empirical studies that explicitly test the relationship between consumer boycotts and their impact on targets in terms of financial and non-financial performance. While Cuadras-Morató and Raya (2016) suggested that consumers' different reactions of boycott vs. anti-boycott behaviors are triggered by boycott calls in different territories, a large body of studies have focused on the detrimental effects of consumer boycotts on financial performance, such as sales volume (Pandya & Venkatesan, 2016), bilateral trade (Heilmann, 2016), revenue losses in tourism destinations (Ahn et al., 2022), impulsive buying and spending (Seegebarth et al., 2016), and actual purchase behavior in terms of purchase frequency, number of items purchased, and purchase amount (Kim et al., 2023). However, given the significance of intangible assets such as brands for companies, managerial implications on whether and how consumer boycotts influence targets in terms of a non-financial performance indicator have been under-investigated.

Although the causes, contexts, and targets of consumer boycotts are diverse, by adopting a non-financial performance perspective, a few studies in Table 1 have consistently emphasized that consumer boycotts directly and negatively impact consumer attitudes toward brands of both companies and products, such as brand attitude (Dekhil et al., 2017), brand loyalty (Abosag & Farah, 2014), and brand image (Klein et al., 2004; Ltifi, 2021). Studies in Table 1 offer a theoretical rationale to underlie this direct relationship using social psychological theories (e.g., Klein et al., 2004; Ltifi, 2021), namely self-perception and cognitive dissonance theories. According to these studies, consumers participating in a boycott are more likely to diminish their brand attitude and evaluation owing to the discomfort caused by the dissonance between their existing brand perception and the brand's behavior. This reduces the inconvenience caused by the inconsistency between their brand perception and the brand behavior caused by dissonance.

2.2. Theory and conceptual framework

Although prior literature in Table 1 provides valuable insights into consumer boycotts and their negative effects on brand attitude and evaluation, it is still unclear whether and how positive cross-cultural emotions toward a country (i.e., country affinity) and social pressure on social activities by others (i.e., subjective norms) are associated with consumer boycotts. To fill this literature gap, as depicted in Fig. 1, we advance our knowledge of consumer boycott-brand relationships (i.e., our baseline argument) by drawing on the cognitive dissonance theory and the theory of planned behavior.

Cognitive dissonance theory (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Festinger, 1957; Kim & Kinoshita, 2023; Klein et al., 2004) posits that individuals generally strive to maintain consistent thoughts or beliefs. When inconsistencies arise, it leads to a mentally

uncomfortable state known as cognitive dissonance. This discomfort (Savas, 2016) prompts consumers to either take actions to alleviate it or engage in behaviors that align with their attitudes to prevent this discomfort. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that this unpleasant feeling motivates individuals to take action to eliminate or reduce dissonance across multiple consumption stages, including the information search process for product purchase (Chatterjee et al., 2023), the post-purchase phase when evaluating product performance (Savas, 2016), and boycott behaviors (Ltifi, 2021).

Additionally, according to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Kim et al., 2023; Lavorata, 2014), individuals are more likely to engage in behavioral intention if they hold favorable beliefs toward the action (i.e., attitude), perceive significant others as endorsing the behavior (i.e., subjective norms), and feel a sense of personal control over executing the behavior (i.e., perceived behavioral control). Among the three major psychological motives, subjective norms can significantly influence individuals' boycott decisions (Delistavrou, 2022; Hamzah & Mustafa, 2019; Lavorata, 2014), particularly given that boycotts are intricately intertwined with political and social conflicts (Kim et al., 2023; Neilson, 2010), where diverse perspectives and beliefs coexist.

Our conceptual framework in Fig. 1 summarizes our main arguments on 1) the mediating role of country affinity and 2) the moderated mediation effect of subjective norms on boycotts in better explaining consumer boycott-brand relationships. Specifically, by drawing upon cognitive dissonance theory, we propose the conceptualization of country affinity as the mediating variable to extend the direct relationship between consumer boycotts and brand strength. Additionally, drawing on the theory of planned behavior, we highlight the role of subjective norms on boycotts and examine whether and how it moderates the indirect effect of consumer boycotts on brand strength. We provide a more detailed theoretical rationale for each hypothesis in the following section.

2.3. Hypotheses development

2.3.1. Direct effect of consumer boycotts and brand strength

Given that in brand literature, brand strength correlates closely with brand value, brand image, and brand equity (Baniyani et al., 2021; Kao et al., 2017; Şahin et al., 2024), consumer boycott-brand relationships that support a negative impact of consumer boycotts on brands, such as loyalty (Abosag & Farah, 2014), attitude (Dekhil et al., 2017), image (Klein et al., 2004), and brand image of overall Chinese products (Ltifi, 2021) has been well documented. The rationale for this argument between consumer boycotts and brands is based on cognitive dissonance theory. According to this theory, consumers, in their pursuit of cognitive consistency, have tendencies to align their behaviors and attitudes (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Festinger, 1957; Klein et al., 2004). By applying this insight to our context, we anticipate that consumers actively participating in boycott campaigns against previously favored global brands are likely to diminish their perceptions and attitudes toward those brands. Consequently, their relationship with brands could weaken, ultimately leading to decreased strength in brand image and attitude.

However, our study is different from key literature in Table 1 that has examined consumer boycott decisions or intentions at specific points in time. To better predict actual boycott behaviors (Kim et al., 2023), we conceptualize consumer boycotts by analyzing behavioral changes in consumers' actual consumption of global products before and after country boycotts. This approach enables us to accurately measure and recognize the relationship between boycott behaviors and brand strength. Taken together, drawing on the cognitive dissonance theory underlining consumer

Table 1
Key empirical research on the impact of consumer boycotts on targets.

Study	Study context	Theoretical perspective	Independent variable	Explanatory mechanism(s)		Outcome variable	Key findings
				Moderator	Mediator		
Klein et al. (2004)	Survey of 486 European consumers regarding boycotts against European-based multinational food manufacturing company Bremmer, in reaction to the factory closing	Cognitive dissonance theory; Self-perception theory	Boycott decision	N/T	N/T	Brand image (of a target company)	• Boycott decision directly decreases brand image of a target company.
Abosag and Farah (2014)	Survey of 261 Saudi Arabian consumers regarding boycotts against the Danish company Arla Foods, in response to the publication of Jyllands-Posten's cartoon in an independent Danish newspaper	Cognitive dissonance theory; Self-perception theory	Boycott	N/T	Brand Image	Brand loyalty (of a target company)	• Boycott directly decreases the brand image and brand loyalty of the target company.
Cuadras-Morató and Raya (2016) ^a	Study on data for sales of Catalan sparkling wine (<i>cava</i>) and the number of news that address the <i>cava</i> boycott in Spain regarding the separation movement of Catalonia from Spain	N/A	Boycott calls	N/T	N/T	Sales	• Depending on regions in Spain, there exist either positive and negative relationship between boycott calls and the sales of Catalan <i>cava</i> .
Heilman (2016)	Study on cases of the politically motivated boycotts: the Muslim countries' boycott of Danish goods in 2005/2006, the Chinese boycott of Japanese goods in 2012, the boycott of French products in the U.S. in 2003, and Turkey's boycott of Israel over the Gaza conflict in 2014	N/A	Boycott	Product type	N/T	Bilateral trade	• Boycott directly decreases bilateral trade. • Consumer goods are most susceptible to the impact of boycotts, while their effects on intermediate and capital goods tend to be short-lived.
Seegebarth et al. (2016)	Survey of 1833 German respondents regarding boycotts in response to companies that are irresponsible for sustainability	N/A	Boycott	N/T	N/T	Product possession; Impulsive buying & spending; indebtedness Psychological well-being	• While boycott willingness directly decreases the impulsive buying & spending and indebtedness, it doesn't affect product possession.
Pandya and Venkatesan (2016)	Study on supermarket sales data regarding American consumers' boycott of French-sounding brand in response to the 2003 U.S.-France dispute over the Iraq war	N/A	Boycotts	N/T	N/T	Sales	• Boycott directly decreases the sales of French-sounding brand.
Dekhil et al. (2017)	Survey of 165 Tunisian consumers regarding boycotts against Coca-Cola in response to its support of the Israeli army against Palestine	N/A	Decision to boycott	N/T	N/T	Brand attitude (of a target company)	• Decision to boycott directly decreases the brand attitude of a target company.
Ltifi (2021)	Survey of 153 Saudi Arabian students and 147 Tunisian students' boycotting of Chinese products in response to the COVID-19 crisis	Cognitive dissonance theory; Self-perception theory	Boycott	N/T	N/T	Brand image (of Chinese products)	• Boycott directly decreases the brand image of Chinese products.
Ahn et al. (2022) ^a	Study on prefecture-month foreign visitor data in Japan 2019 regarding South Korean boycott of travel to Japan in respond to Japan's restrictions on exports	N/A	Boycott	N/T	N/T	Exports of accommodation services to South Korea	• The boycott's negative effect on Japan's accommodation service exports to South Korea varies among different prefectures, with the impact being more pronounced in areas that rely heavily on South Korean tourists.
Kim et al. (2023)	Survey of 571 South Koreans regarding boycotts of Japanese products in respond to Japanese government's economic sanctions	Theory of planned behavior	Boycott intention	Gender difference	N/T	Actual purchase behavior ^b	• Boycott intention directly decreases the actual purchase behavior. • Men strengthens the negative impact of boycott intention and actual purchase behaviors.
Our study	Survey of 571 South Koreans in 2020, 528 South Koreans in 2021, 547 South Koreans in 2022 regarding boycotts of Japanese products in response to economic sanctions imposed by the Japanese government	Cognitive dissonance theory; Theory of planned behavior	Consumer boycotts	Subjective norms	Country affinity	Brand strength (of global products)	• Consumer boycotts directly decrease brand strength only in the data of 2020 and 2022. • Country affinity negatively mediates the impact of consumer boycotts and brand strength in all three years. • Subjective norms strengthen a negative indirect effect of consumer boycotts on brand strength only in the 2020 data.

Note: N/A = Not applicable; N/T = Not tested; ^aAlthough these two studies did not explicitly conceptualize and empirically test the impact of geographical area as a moderating variable, they offer insights on whether and how the boycott's impact varies with geographical area within the country; ^bActual purchase behavior was measured in terms of purchase frequency, number of items purchased, and purchase amount.

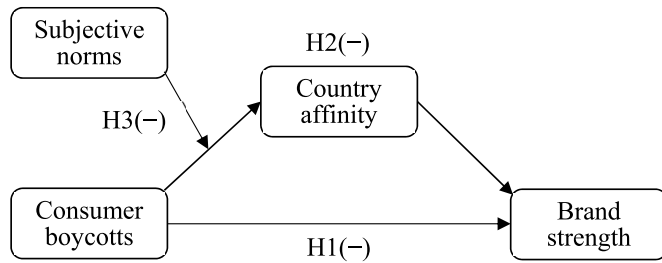


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of consumer boycott–brand relationship.
Note: H1, H2, and H3 represent direct, indirect, and moderated mediation effects, respectively.

actions and behavior-consistent attitudes, this study posits a negative and direct consumer boycott–brand relationship. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1. Consumer boycotts directly decrease brand strength of global products.

2.3.2. Mediating effect of country affinity

The consumer affinity model provides a theoretical basis to comprehend consumer attitudes and behaviors toward specific countries in cross-cultural contexts (Kim, Yan, et al., 2022; Ma & Kim, 2021; Oberecker et al., 2008). Prior studies have posited that country affinity is predominantly affect-based, differentiating it from the cognition-based construct of country image (Oberecker et al., 2008; Wongtada et al., 2012). The country affinity also significantly influences consumers' boycott-related actions (Kim, Yan, et al., 2022), as well as product judgment and self-brand connection in the context of global branding (Fazli-Salehi et al., 2021). While Kim, Yan, et al. (2022) explored how country affinity mitigates the negative emotion of animosity in predicting boycott behaviors, little is known about how individuals' participation in boycott behaviors shapes country affinity. This investigation is also important to advance our knowledge on the role of country affinity in understanding global products' brand strength.

Drawing on cognitive dissonance theory, this study extends H1 by investigating the psychological mechanism involving country affinity as the consequence of boycott and examines the underlying mechanism through which consumer boycotts impact brand strength. The literature on cognitive dissonance theory assumes that individuals with inconsistent cognitive beliefs often experience a negative intrapersonal state, compelling them to seek coping behaviors to alleviate this aversive state (Chatterjee et al., 2023; Kim & Kinoshita, 2023). For instance, in the context of consumption, individuals tend to reinforce their purchase decisions by presenting stronger arguments after reporting higher satisfaction levels (Chang & Tseng, 2014). Conversely, consumers may adjust their post-purchase feelings of regret to rationalize their initial purchase (Park & Hill, 2018).

Applying this theory to our research context, we anticipate that, due to behavior-consistent attitudes, consumers who participate in boycotts against a global company may be likely to view the country associated with the company less favorably. Since it is widely known that the behaviors and attitudes that are inconsistent with one's belief are unpleasant and often threatening to self (Sherman & Gorkin, 1980; Song et al., 2021), it is expected that consumers form a diminished country affinity after they assent to the boycott. Consequently, such diminished country affinity sequentially reduces consumers' favorable perceptions and attitudes toward the brand's strength. This occurs because it decreases consumers' sympathy, favorability, or attachment to the target

country (Ma & Kim, 2021), while increasing the psychological distance between consumers and the target country (Terasaki et al., 2022). Therefore, we expect country affinity to mediate the relationship between boycotts and brand strength. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis.

H2. Consumer boycotts indirectly decrease brand strength of global products via country affinity.

2.3.3. Moderated mediation effect of subjective norms

Subjective norms, a crucial component of the theory of planned behavior, are formed by a person's belief about the general opinion of others regarding their behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Kruglanski, 2019; Ellis et al., 2021). These norms are influenced by a person's normative beliefs (i.e., what others expect of them) but also by individuals' motivation to conform to these expectations (Ajzen, 1991) and are formed by a set of normative beliefs from various references (e.g., thoughts of close acquaintances, environmental values, cultural beliefs, and/or media; Ajzen, 2006; Kim et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024). Despite criticism regarding the non-significant link between subjective norms and behavioral intentions (e.g., Elhoushy & Jang, 2021), numerous studies have found that subjective norms play a critical role in fostering positive attitude formation (Briliana & Mursito, 2017), encouraging voluntary participation behaviors (Sutha, 2024), and influencing decision-making processes in innovation adoption (Al-Adwan et al., 2024).

Early investigators have emphasized the direct influence of subjective norms on boycott intention (Delistavrou, 2022; Hamzah & Mustafa, 2019) or behavior (Kim et al., 2023; Lavorata, 2014). Their potential impact on consumers' affective/cognitive evaluations toward countries and brands, however, remains unexplored. Therefore, this study is novel in theorizing the boundary condition of subjective norms on boycotts for the indirect effect of consumer boycotts on brand strength, while focusing on its interaction effect with consumer boycotts on country affinity, drawing on the theory of planned behavior.

Specifically, we predict a negative interaction effect between consumer boycotts and subjective norms on country affinity for several reasons. For consumers actively participating in boycott campaigns, subjective norms on boycotts may no longer exert negative social pressures. Instead, they will increase self-enhancement (Klein et al., 2004) and the perceived possibility of success in a boycott campaign (Roswinanto & Suwanda, 2023), leading individuals to believe that their behaviors are socially correct or desirable. Additionally, previous research (e.g., religion, Abosag & Farah, 2014; economic sanctions, Kim, Yan, et al., 2022) implies that when consumers' motivation for boycotts is coupled with strong negative feelings of animosity, these consumers may partly mitigate or offset the positive feelings of country affinity, ultimately decreasing the brand strength of global products. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis.

H3. Subjective norms strengthen the negative indirect effect of consumer boycotts on the brand strength of global products through decreased country affinity.

3. Methods

3.1. Research context

We investigate a real-world case of consumer boycotts of Japanese products in South Korea. The boycott began in July 2019 following the Japanese government's implementation of economic sanctions in the form of export restrictions in South Korea. These sanctions were imposed in response to a decision by the Supreme Court of South Korea, which ruled that Nippon Steel Corp., a

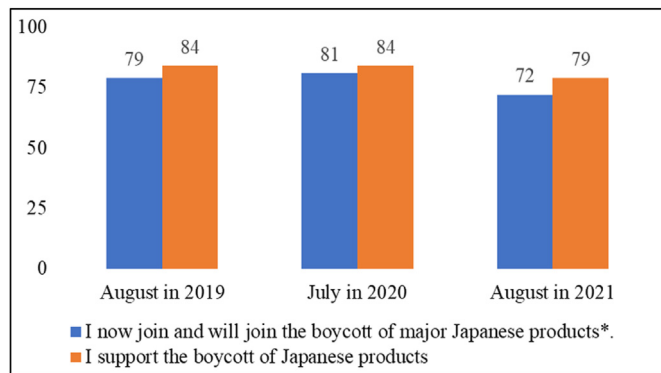


Fig. 2. South Korean boycott of Japanese products (%)

Note: The major product categories include cars, food, appliances, travel, household goods, music, character merchandise, and movie and animation.

Japanese corporation, must compensate individuals who were forced to work without pay during the Japanese colonial period, with 100 million won (approximately US\$87,758). Owing to Nippon Steel Corp.'s defiance, the Supreme Court ordered the seizure of the company's assets in South Korea, thereby restricting its business operations.

As Fig. 2 shows, the South Korean boycott is a rare case of a country boycott actively conducted for two to nearly three years since the start of the international dispute in July 2019, which encouraged participation in boycotts nationwide. As reported by [Hankook Research \(2021\)](#), while boycott participation over major Japanese products amounted to 79% in July 2019, a significant proportion of South Korean respondents (81%) chose to boycott major Japanese products in July 2020. In addition, 72% of South Korean respondents still boycotted major Japanese products at the time of the survey in August 2021, approximately two years after the start of the boycott, and 79% did support the boycotts.

Additionally, this case is significant for investigating how consumer boycotts and subsequent impacts to businesses evolve over time. For example, the boycott had a severe impact on Japanese beer imports, which, despite their popularity, could not be sold online in South Korea. The import value of Japanese beer decreased from US\$78.30 million in the year preceding the boycott in 2018 to US\$39.76 million in 2019, drastically plummeting to US\$5.66 million in 2020. However, it slightly rebounded to US\$6.87 million in 2021 and further surpassed US\$14.00 million in 2022 ([Daejeon Ilbo, 2023](#)). Based on this secondary data, we can infer that Japanese beer companies suffered significant losses, particularly in the initial year of the boycott when there was notable overall participation.

3.2. Sample and data collection

Generalizing findings on actual boycott behaviors in the boycott literature is problematic because of the challenges in studying ongoing boycotts over extended periods, which warrants empirical investigation ([Cuadras-Morató & Raya, 2016](#); [Kim et al., 2023](#)). Nevertheless, South Korean boycotts, which have persisted for over two years, provide an excellent opportunity to test hypotheses using quantitative methods. This allows us to generalize arguments regarding consumer boycott-brand relationships in terms of country affinity and subjective norms. To achieve this objective, we adopted a quota sampling approach ([Chang et al., 2023](#)) based on gender and age to identify and analyze specific segments within a broader population. The questionnaire survey was distributed to general consumers with diverse occupations (e.g., white-collar,

student, professionals, civil servant, housewives) three times over a span of three years by an online market research company, Macromill Embrain, which has high credibility in South Korea.

In our study of the “No Japan” campaign, we explored the effects of country boycotts, where consumers reject all products from a specific country due to conflicts or tensions with their own country ([Ltifi, 2021](#)), as opposed to company boycotts targeting specific companies for their misconduct ([Dekhil et al., 2017](#)). To observe country boycott trends, the respondents were not provided with a list of specific brands or companies from the target country. Instead, we focused on typical daily products from all companies in the target country (e.g., food, drinks, and clothing) by asking respondents to recall frequently used products or brands. We assessed whether and how overall boycott participation in Japanese products is related to the brand strength of those products. The first survey ($n = 571$) was completed in August 2020, a year after the boycott start in July 2019. The second survey was conducted in August 2021 ($n = 528$), two years after the boycott. The third survey was conducted in August 2022 ($n = 547$), three years after the boycott. [Table 2](#) presents descriptions of the sample.

3.3. Measurement

[Table 3](#) lists the scale items used in this study. First, building on insights from prior studies on boycott behavior ([Cossío-Silva et al., 2019](#); [Cuadras-Morató & Raya, 2016](#)), we captured a proxy measure of consumer boycotts by focusing on three representative items of consumption behavior: a decline in purchase frequency, number of items purchased, and purchase amount during the actual boycott. Given the active and overall participation of South Koreans in the boycott of Japanese products for more than two years, as previously stated in [Section 3.1](#), we considered it challenging to comprehensively identify and highlight the actual trend of boycott campaigns in terms of changes in consumer consumption behavior ([Kim et al., 2023](#)).

We used a five-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = strongly decrease, 5 = strongly increase) with three items reversed, to measure consumer boycotts by asking respondents about the boycott campaign against Japanese products explicitly and under this situation, how their actual consumption behavior toward Japanese products has changed over the past year compared to their average purchasing habits in the year preceding the start of the boycott in July 2019. Our datasets from three years in [Fig. 3](#) show the trend of decreases in respondents' consumption over Japanese products during the boycott, which is largely consistent with the results of [Hankook Research \(2021\)](#) in [Fig. 2](#). Therefore, given the definition of boycotts that emphasizes *deliberate abstention from purchasing a specific target* ([Kim, Kim, & Nakami, 2022](#)), in contrast to prior studies that focus on whether to boycott, this study is novel and challenging as it considers the decreased consumption behavior during the boycott campaign to assess participation and its activity in boycotts.

Second, adopting [Papadopoulos et al.'s \(2017\)](#) approach, we assessed country affinity using seven items. Third, we used five items to measure the brand strength of Japanese products that respondents frequently bought ([Wang & Zhang, 2018](#)). Fourth, following [Maher and Mady \(2010\)](#), we used four items to measure subjective norms. A five-point Likert scale was used to assess these three constructs (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Finally, to obtain unbiased estimates of our conceptual model, we controlled for potential variability among respondents. This study included four representative variables: gender (i.e., women = 0, men = 1), age (i.e., exact number), education (i.e., high school and lower = 0, undergraduate degree and above = 1), and annual income (i.e., below 40 million = 0, above 40 million = 1).

Table 2
Sample profile for the years analyzed (%).

		Phase 1 (2020)	Phase 2 (2021)	Phase 3 (2022)
Gender	Men	49.9	50.0	50.1
	Women	50.1	50.0	49.9
Age (years)	Under 19	15.9	16.5	16.1
	20–29	17.2	16.9	16.8
	30–39	16.6	16.7	16.6
	40–49	17.0	16.7	17.0
	50–59	16.8	16.7	16.8
	Above 60	16.5	16.7	16.6
Education	High school or below	30.1	26.3	28.0
	College/university	59.4	64.2	62.7
	Postgraduate	10.5	9.5	9.3
Annual income ^a (in million)	Under ₩20	21.5	22.0	19.6
	Above ₩20–₩40	34.2	34.5	30.9
	Above ₩40–₩60	23.6	21.6	26.1
	Above ₩60–₩80	13.8	12.3	13.5
	Above ₩80–₩100	3.9	6.3	6.0
	Above ₩100	3.0	3.4	3.8

Note: Sample size of the data from 2020, 2021, 2022 includes 571, 528, and 547 observations, respectively; ^aThe average annual income in 2019 was approximately 37.4 million won (US\$35,154 on December 31, 2019) based on Statistics Korea.

Table 3
Construct and measurements.

Constructs and scale items	Phase 1 (2020)		Phase 2 (2021)		Phase 3 (2022)	
	Estimate ^a	AVE	Estimate ^a	AVE	Estimate ^a	AVE
Consumer boycotts*		0.94		0.94		0.94
<i>Given the boycott campaign against Japanese products, how have the following items changed over the past year compared with your average purchasing habits in the year preceding the start of the boycott in July 2019?</i>						
The frequency of purchasing Japanese products	0.94		0.96		0.96	
The number of Japanese products purchased	0.99		0.97		0.97	
The amount of money spent on Japanese products	0.96		0.96		0.97	
Country affinity		0.52		0.50		0.51
Japanese people are friendly	0.57		0.60		0.60	
I have heard good things about Japan	0.70		0.71		0.71	
I would like to travel to Japan	0.81		0.80		0.80	
Japanese culture is very interesting	0.77		0.74		0.81	
Japanese culture is similar to South Korean culture	0.54		0.54		0.52	
I feel pleasant when I think of Japan	0.78		0.75		0.73	
I have a sense of attachment to Japan	0.75		0.69		0.69	
Brand strength		0.65		0.64		0.70
The brand of the product/company has a good reputation	0.82		0.80		0.82	
I trust the brand	0.93		0.94		0.92	
I feel positive about the brand	0.90		0.91		0.93	
I know the brand very well	0.56		0.55		0.67	
The brand is clear on what it stands for	0.65		0.64		0.71	
Subjective norms		0.60		0.60		0.63
People close to me think I should boycott Japanese products	0.81		0.83		0.81	
People who are important to me would not approve of the purchase of Japanese products	0.74		0.71		0.76	
People close to me think I should not buy Japanese products	0.94		0.93		0.93	
People close to me will look down on me if I buy Japanese products	0.65		0.66		0.69	

Note: ^aStandardized factor loading; AVE = average variance extracted; *Scale items imply a decrease in purchase behavior before and after the boycott.

Additionally, we controlled for three other variables affecting our prediction of the conceptual model: visit experience to Japan (yes = 1, no = 0), consumption expenditure during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., participants were asked about changes in their expenditures on daily products before and after the COVID-19 pandemic; 1 = strongly decrease, 5 = strongly increase), and foreign policy for Japan (i.e., participants were asked whether they supported the government's recent tough and hawkish foreign policy for Japan; 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

3.4. Common method bias

We examined marker variables to address potential common method bias issues. Harman's single-factor test was employed to

evaluate the presence of common method bias, as outlined by Podsakoff et al. (2003). The results revealed that one factor contributed to 41.91% in 2020, 38.99% in 2021, and 42.02% in 2022 of the total variances in each dataset (i.e., 71.00% in 2020, 69.91% in 2021, and 71.81% in 2022), falling short of the suggested 50% threshold. Furthermore, following the marker variable technique of Lindell and Whitney (2001), we employed a conceptually non-related item (i.e., Japan does not care what South Korea thinks about economic sanctions) as a covariate ($|r|_{2020} = 0.05-0.23$; $|r|_{2021} = 0.09-0.33$; $|r|_{2022} = 0.11-0.18$). The results indicated that there are no noteworthy distinctions between observed and adjusted correlations ($\Delta|r|_{2020} = 0.00-0.01$; $\Delta|r|_{2021} = 0.00-0.03$; $\Delta|r|_{2022} = 0.00-0.02$), suggesting that the common method bias is not a major concern.

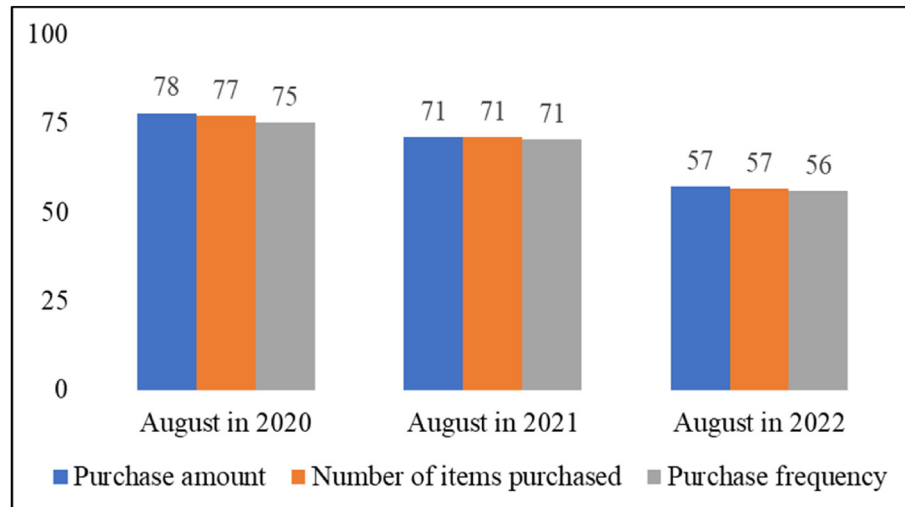


Fig. 3. The decreases in South Koreans' consumption of Japanese products (%).

4. Analysis and results

4.1. Construct validity

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to validate the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The measurement model fit proved satisfactory in our data ($\chi^2_{2020} (143) = 325.98, p < 0.001$, CMIN/DF = 2.28, GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.05, IFI = 0.98; $\chi^2_{2021} (143) = 286.85, p < 0.001$, CMIN/DF = 2.01, GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.04, IFI = 0.98; $\chi^2_{2022} (143) = 354.90, p < 0.001$, CMIN/DF = 2.48, GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.05, IFI = 0.97).

Initially, to ensure convergent validity, we assessed the average variance extracted (AVE) (Table 3). The AVE values for each of the four constructs in each dataset were deemed acceptable, surpassing the 0.5 threshold (AVE₂₀₂₀ = 0.52–0.94; AVE₂₀₂₁ = 0.50–0.94; AVE₂₀₂₂ = 0.51–0.94). Additionally, we evaluated discriminant validity by examining the AVE values for each pair of constructs with shared variances (r^2). Our analysis revealed that none of the shared variances ($r^2_{2020} = 0.05–0.42$; $r^2_{2021} = 0.04–0.36$; $r^2_{2022} = 0.04–0.42$) exceeded the AVE values (AVE₂₀₂₀ = 0.52–0.94; AVE₂₀₂₁ = 0.50–0.94; AVE₂₀₂₂ = 0.51–0.94) for either dataset. Finally, descriptive statistics, correlation matrix, and square roots of the AVE values are presented in Table 4.

4.2. Measurement invariance

A multigroup CFA was conducted to assess measurement invariance in our longitudinal study (Lee et al., 2017; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Specifically, we compared the configural invariance model (i.e., an unconstrained model) with the full metric invariance model (where all factor loadings of each item were equal) using a chi-square (χ^2) difference test. The outcomes presented in Table 5 indicate no significant difference between the two models ($\Delta\chi^2(30) = 27.54, p = 0.595$). This implies that, for the purposes of our investigation, measurement invariance issues between datasets are not a significant concern.

4.3. Results of hypotheses testing

We evaluated our hypotheses employing Hayes' PROCESS macro (i.e., Model 7; independent variable = consumer boycotts,

mediator = country affinity, moderator = subjective norms, dependent variable = brand strength) following a moderated mediation approach (Hayes, 2018). Before generating an interaction term, all predictors were mean-centered to prevent multicollinearity. The percentile bootstrapping method was employed using a bootstrapped dataset comprising 5000 samples. Table 6 presents the results.

First, regarding H1, the results suggest that consumer boycotts directly lead to a decrease in brand strength of global products only in the data for 2020 and 2022 ($b_{2020} = -0.19, p < 0.001$; $b_{2021} = -0.07, p = 0.105$; $b_{2022} = -0.11, p = 0.004$). Therefore, H1 is partially supported. Second, with respect to H2, we observe that the negative indirect effect of consumer boycotts on brand strength through decreased country affinity is significant for all three datasets obtained in 2020 (H2₂₀₂₀: $b = -0.15$, 95% confidence interval [CI] = $[-0.20, -0.09]$), 2021 (H2₂₀₂₁: $b = -0.20$, 95% CI = $[-0.26, -0.14]$), and 2022 (H2₂₀₂₂: $b = -0.19$, 95% CI = $[-0.26, -0.12]$), as expected. Hence, H2 is supported. Additionally, while the direct relationship between consumer boycotts and country affinity ($b_{2020} = -0.26, p < 0.001$; $b_{2021} = -0.32, p < 0.001$; $b_{2022} = -0.31, p < 0.001$) is significant, we confirm a significant direct relationship between country affinity and brand strength ($b_{2020} = 0.58, p < 0.001$; $b_{2021} = 0.64, p < 0.001$; $b_{2022} = 0.60, p < 0.001$).

Third, H3 proposed a moderated mediation effect of subjective norms. In contrast to our prediction, while the findings reveal that subjective norms strengthen the negative indirect link of consumer boycotts to brand strength via decreased country affinity in the 2020 data ($b = -0.04$, 95% CI = $[-0.09, -0.01]$), we failed to find significant moderated mediation effect in the data for 2021 ($b = -0.01$, 95% CI = $[-0.05, 0.04]$) and 2022 ($b = -0.01$, 95% CI = $[-0.04, 0.04]$). Thus, H3 is partially supported.

Finally, regarding H3, we conducted post-hoc analyses using Model 59 to investigate the possible interaction effects of subjective norms in our conceptual model. Our results, presented in Table 6, reveal no significant interaction effects between subjective norms and consumer boycotts ($b_{2020} = 0.01, p = 0.765$; $b_{2021} = 0.06, p = 0.147$; $b_{2022} = 0.05, p = 0.205$) or between subjective norms and country affinity ($b_{2020} = 0.05, p = 0.231$; $b_{2021} = 0.09, p = 0.052$; $b_{2022} = 0.06, p = 0.199$) on brand strength. Although the results of several control variables are significant, we confirm that the presence or absence of these variables did not affect our findings.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix.

Constructs	Mean	SD	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10
Phase 1 (2020)												
X1 Consumer boycotts	4.16	0.83	0.97									
X2 Brand strength	2.75	0.80	0.45*	0.81								
X3 Country affinity	2.49	0.75	−0.49*	0.65*	0.72							
X4 Subjective norms	3.32	0.88	0.42*	−0.23*	−0.34*	0.77						
X5 Age	40.00	16.53	0.14*	0.12*	−0.02	0.23*	n/a					
X6 Gender ^a	0.50	0.50	−0.15*	0.05	0.14*	0.05	0.02	n/a				
X7 Education ^a	0.70	0.46	0.09*	−0.08*	−0.06	0.09*	0.21*	0.05	n/a			
X8 Income ^a	0.44	0.50	0.08	0.04	0.03	0.16*	0.15*	0.15*	0.16*	n/a		
X9 Visit experience ^a	0.57	0.49	0.05	0.10*	0.14*	0.13*	0.20*	−0.03	0.22*	0.11*	n/a	
X10 Consumption expenditure	2.10	0.90	−0.44*	0.21*	0.23*	−0.15*	−0.13*	−0.11*	−0.04	0.02	−0.11*	n/a
X11 Foreign policy	3.79	1.14	0.50*	−0.38*	−0.47*	0.44*	0.04	−0.08	0.09*	0.06	0.04	−0.21*
Phase 2 (2021)												
X1 Consumer boycotts	4.06	0.89	0.97									
X2 Brand strength	2.82	0.80	−0.32*	0.80								
X3 Country affinity	2.58	0.73	−0.48*	0.60*	0.71							
X4 Subjective norms	3.18	0.89	0.35*	−0.21*	−0.32*	0.77						
X5 Age	39.80	16.28	0.31*	−0.03	−0.22*	0.32*	n/a					
X6 Gender ^a	0.50	0.50	−0.10*	0.09*	0.16*	0.04	0.02	n/a				
X7 Education ^a	0.74	0.44	0.18*	−0.02	−0.01	0.11*	0.21*	0.14*	n/a			
X8 Income ^a	0.44	0.50	0.11*	0.08	−0.04	0.16*	0.19*	0.15*	0.16*	n/a		
X9 Visit experience ^a	0.56	0.50	0.09*	0.16*	0.22*	0.01	0.16*	0.03	0.26*	0.18*	n/a	
X10 Consumption expenditure	2.30	0.95	−0.47*	0.08	0.15*	−0.18*	−0.20*	0.06	−0.14*	0.02	−0.09*	n/a
X11 Foreign policy	3.65	1.14	0.43*	−0.27*	−0.39*	0.37*	0.11*	−0.07	0.07	0.03	−0.04	−0.20*
Phase 3 (2022)												
X1 Consumer boycotts	3.79	0.92	0.97									
X2 Brand strength	3.01	0.81	−0.45*	0.84								
X3 Country affinity	2.75	0.73	−0.52*	0.65*	0.71							
X4 Subjective norms	2.98	0.88	0.35*	−0.20*	−0.29*	0.79						
X5 Age	39.61	16.03	0.28*	−0.08	−0.19*	0.31*	n/a					
X6 Gender ^a	0.50	0.50	−0.04	0.07	0.10*	0.11*	0.02	n/a				
X7 Education ^a	0.72	0.45	0.10*	−0.11*	−0.06	0.08	0.23*	0.01	n/a			
X8 Income ^a	0.50	0.50	0.05	−0.04	−0.07	0.13*	0.12*	0.14*	0.17*	n/a		
X9 Visit experience ^a	0.51	0.50	0.03	0.15*	0.17*	0.02	0.22*	−0.04	0.29*	0.13*	n/a	
X10 Consumption expenditure	2.49	0.88	−0.56*	0.31*	0.32*	−0.20*	−0.18*	0.02	−0.09*	−0.04	−0.05	n/a
X11 Foreign policy	3.39	1.05	0.38*	−0.28*	−0.32*	0.33*	0.25*	0.02	0.08	0.09*	0.03	−0.15*

Note: ^aDummy variable; Numbers in italics in the diagonal row are square roots of the AVE values; n/a = not applicable; *p < 0.05.

Table 5
Measurement invariance test.

Model	χ^2/df	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	$\Delta\chi^2$ (p-value)
Model 1: Configural invariance ^a	967.73/429	0.028	0.977	0.977	—
Model 2: Full metric invariance ^b	995.27/459	0.027	0.977	0.977	27.54 (0.595)

Note: ^aModel unconstrained; ^bModel constrained by all factor loadings.

5. Discussion and implications

To advance our knowledge of the adverse effects of consumer boycotts, this study conducted a longitudinal data analysis spanning from 2020 to 2022, investigating the direct link between consumer boycotts and brand strength of global products. Considering the mediating effect of country affinity, we theorized the moderated mediation effect of subjective norms. Our key findings reveal that subjective norms intensify a negative indirect effect of consumer boycotts on brand strength via the diminished country affinity. This moderated mediation effect of subjective norms is particularly significant in 2020, when consumer perceptions of boycotts in South Korea were most intense. The results of this study have important implications.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Our findings contribute to literature in two ways. First, this study addressed gaps in the international marketing literature on consumer boycotts by exploring previously underexamined

psychological mechanisms—specifically, the role of positive cross-cultural emotions—in influencing the brand strength of global products. While prior studies have primarily explored negative emotions such as animosity (Xie et al., 2023), few studies have examined the effect of affinity by demonstrating its interaction effect with animosity on boycott attitudes (Kim, Yan, et al., 2022). By contrast, we advanced the understanding of country affinity that mediates actual consumer boycotts and brand strength. Specifically, applying the principles of cognitive dissonance theory and the consumer affinity model, our three-year study verified that actual boycott behavior significantly and negatively impacts brand strength, both directly and indirectly. Notably, during the second phase of 2021, we observed that country affinity fully mediates the relationship between consumer boycotts and brand strength.

Our findings are significant because prior research has primarily focused on either the direct impact of boycott decisions on brand evaluations (Abosag & Farah, 2014; Dekhil et al., 2017) or the reverse relationship that examined brand impact on consumer boycotts (Cossio-Silva et al., 2019; Hong & Li, 2021; Kim, Kim, & Nakami, 2022). However, the comprehensive psychological

Table 6
Results of hypotheses testing.

	Phase 1 (2020)			Phase 2 (2021)			Phase 3 (2022)		
	b	95% CI		b	95% CI		b	95% CI	
		Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper
Model 1 (DV = Country affinity, CA)									
Consumer boycotts (CB)	−0.26***			−0.32***			−0.31***		
Subjective norms (SN)	−0.12***			−0.09**			−0.08*		
CB × SN	−0.08*			−0.01			−0.01		
Age	0.00			−0.00**			−0.00		
Gender dummy	0.13*			0.16**			0.17**		
Education dummy	−0.09			0.02			−0.08		
Income dummy	0.10			−0.01			−0.08		
Visit experience dummy	0.28***			0.37***			0.32***		
Consumption expenditure	0.04			−0.07*			0.05		
Foreign policy	−0.17***			−0.11***			−0.08**		
Model 2 (DV = Brand strength, BS)									
H1. Consumer boycotts (CB)	−0.19***			−0.07			−0.11**		
Country affinity (CA)	0.58***			0.64***			0.60***		
Age	0.01***			0.01**			0.00**		
Gender dummy	−0.10			−0.03			0.02		
Education dummy	−0.13*			−0.08			−0.17**		
Income dummy	0.05			0.16**			0.02		
Visit experience dummy	0.03			0.01			0.11*		
Consumption expenditure	0.02			−0.03			0.06		
Foreign policy	−0.02			−0.02			−0.06*		
Conditional indirect association at different values of SN									
−1 SD below mean value	−0.12	−0.17	−0.05	−0.20	−0.27	−0.12	−0.18	−0.25	−0.12
H2. Mean value	−0.15	−0.20	−0.09	−0.20	−0.26	−0.14	−0.19	−0.25	−0.13
+1 SD above mean value	−0.18	−0.25	−0.12	−0.21	−0.28	−0.14	−0.19	−0.26	−0.12
H3. Index of moderated mediation	−0.04	−0.09	−0.01	−0.01	−0.05	0.04	−0.01	−0.04	0.04

Note: DV = dependent variable; SD = standard deviation; b = unstandardized coefficients; 95% CI = lower/upper limit of 95% percentile bootstrap confidence interval with a dataset of 5000; Additionally, we also examined the results of an indirect effect in H2 with Model 4 that excluded the effect of subjective norms in the conceptual model. The results reveal that the indirect effect in data obtained in 2020 (H2₂₀₂₀: b = −0.17, 95% CI = [−0.22, −0.11]), 2021 (H2₂₀₂₁: b = −0.21, 95% CI = [−0.28, −0.16]), and 2022 (H2₂₀₂₂: b = −0.20, 95% CI = [−0.26, −0.14]) are all significant; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, and ***p < 0.001.

mechanisms that explain why and how global brands' strength deteriorates in the context of international conflicts remain underexplored. Specifically, in cases of country boycotts—where consumers reject all products from companies associated with a targeted nation due to political or economic tensions with their home country (Ltifi, 2021)—our study offered theoretical insights by empirically examining the psychological mechanisms through which declining favorable sentiments toward a boycotted country translate into negative evaluations of its associated brands. Thus, this study contributes to the global marketing literature by emphasizing the role of positive cross-cultural emotions, such as country affinity, in managing brand crises during international conflicts.

Second, this study introduced a novel perspective on subjective norms as a moderating factor in boycott literature. Drawing upon the core principles of the theory of planned behavior, previous studies have consistently underscored subjective norms as a predictive variable directly influencing consumers' boycott intentions across diverse national contexts (Farah & Newman, 2010; Kim et al., 2023; Lavorata, 2014). The fear of encountering the opposite groups can motivate individuals to conform the social norms from close relationships (Yang et al., 2024). Therefore, if where people are already participating in a boycott, the perceived social pressure to support the boycott acts as an amplifying factor, further reducing individuals' affinity toward the boycotted country. Consequently, we extended the existing literature by suggesting a negative effect of subjective norms' interaction with consumer boycotts on country affinity, ultimately weakening the brand strength of global products.

Moreover, this study addressed recent literature on boycotts (e.g., Kim & Kinoshita, 2023) by employing a longitudinal approach that spans three years from the onset of the boycott, allowing us to

observe changes in boycott intensity over time in relation to consumer-brand relationships. Surprisingly, we found a significant moderated mediation effect of subjective norms on boycotts only in the 2020 dataset, underscoring that this effect is particularly pronounced when consumer engagement in the boycott is at its peak.

The rationale for these findings is as follows. Building on prior research on the multi-stage theory of differential effects (Lasarov et al., 2023; Mai et al., 2021), other-oriented motives facilitate consumers' decisions to participate in specific consumption during the initial phases (i.e., participation). However, as consumption progresses to later phases (i.e., expenditure), such as purchasing related products, only self-oriented motives emerge as drivers of sustained consumption (Mai et al., 2021). Notably, a recent survey revealed that over 70% of consumers across 17 countries expressed a willingness to cease boycotting and resume purchasing products from a brand if that brand implements specific actions for improvement (YouGov, 2024). Similarly, Lasarov et al. (2023) integrated multi-stage theory with the hot/cool cognition system to experimentally explore factors that encourage or discourage boycott participation across consumption contexts. Their findings suggest that individuals prioritize practical considerations more strongly during the cool-down phase than the initial, more emotionally charged heat-up phase.

By applying these insights in our research context, during the initial phases following the onset of the boycott campaign, it is plausible that consumers' evaluation of the target country and brand may have been influenced by opinions from close acquaintances and the heightened social atmosphere surrounding the boycott (Kim et al., 2023). However, as time progresses, consumers may increasingly focus on self-oriented goals and outcomes derived from their own assessments, rather than external pressures such as subjective norms associated with boycotts—especially in

contexts where overall participation in boycotts has gradually diminished or disappeared. In conclusion, our longitudinal data investigation contributed to consumer boycott research and the theory of planned behavior by empirically exploring the effect of subjective norms on the psychological mechanisms involving boycott behavior, country affinity, and brand strength.

5.2. Managerial implications

This study offered important implications for managerial decision-making and policy development. First, global companies should look beyond the immediate financial and operational impacts of consumer boycotts; instead, they should proactively develop strategies that incorporate positive cross-cultural emotions to counteract the adverse effects of boycotts. Our findings indicate that individuals' affinity for a country's ethnicity, culture, image, and other aspects can enhance brand resilience. In other words, favorable perceptions of a country can spill over into positive evaluations of brands from that nation. Therefore, we recommend that prominent global brands representing their countries invest in market research and consumer sentiment analysis to strengthen favorable feelings of their brands' countries of origin. This could include forming cultural partnerships or engaging in corporate social responsibility initiatives that align with local values.

Second, global brands should manage consumers' subjective norms in response to international conflicts. It is crucial for them to comprehend the moderating role of these norms in the relationship between consumer boycotts and brand strength. Our findings indicated that the interaction between subjective norms regarding boycotts and consumer boycott behavior had the most pronounced effect on country affinity at the onset of a boycott, with this influence diminishing over time. For instance, in the South Korean market, Uniqlo faced a significant decline in sales for approximately three years following the boycott that began in 2019. However, the company rebounded in fiscal year 2022, reporting a 31% increase in sales compared to the previous year, largely due to the significantly weakened yen and the prevailing high inflation rates in South Korea (Fashion Insight, 2024). This example illustrated the necessity for global brands to carefully assess and manage the influence of subjective norms on individuals' boycott decision-making, as these norms are subject to fluctuations based on the level of boycott activation and various economic and environmental factors. Specifically, global brands should prioritize understanding whether consumers in countries experiencing conflict place a high value on subjective norms. Subsequently, they can collaborate with opinion leaders and influencers to positively shape these norms. Flexibility in communication strategies is essential, particularly during periods of international conflict or political tension.

Finally, providing cross-cultural training to employees and establishing partnerships with local organizations, cultural institutions, or influencers in key markets can enable global brands to effectively manage long-term crises and build resilience during boycotts. These marketing efforts are essential for fostering positive relationships between brands and consumers, and also for enhancing global consumers' affinity toward the brands' countries of origin. Investments in cultural competence can serve as a robust foundation for global companies to mitigate non-financial losses and navigate challenging situations in country boycott contexts, where the motivations and causes of consumer boycotts are not directly linked to the companies themselves. This approach can assist companies in effectively maneuvering through international conflicts while maintaining their reputations as trusted brands.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Our study has limitations that warrant further examination in subsequent investigations. First, while this study demonstrated how the significance of each hypothesized pathway differs across three years of data, it did not follow the same respondents through a longitudinal analysis involving data collection at the three points after the start of the boycott. Therefore, the research is limited by the lack of a multivariate analysis to evaluate the significance of changes in each hypothesized pathway over time. As noted by Kim and Kinoshita (2023), future studies should implement a multivariate analysis to ascertain whether the strength of each proposed pathway significantly differs across the three years of collected data. The inclusion of such an analysis would enhance statistical rigor and offer more detailed insights, leading to a more thorough and methodical interpretation of our results. In addition, considering the changes in boycott impetus over time (Lasarov et al., 2023), this approach could reveal meaningful variations in how homogeneous consumer groups perceive an unfavorable target nation and brand as time progresses.

Second, country boycotts are closely linked to animosity and hostility toward a target country involved in conflict with the home nation, resulting in a widespread rejection of products from all companies within the target country (Lee et al., 2017; Ltifi, 2021). Given these attributes of country boycotts, participants were prompted to recall companies or brands known to offer daily goods that they frequently use or purchase, to measure brand strength. Consequently, the brands recalled during the survey may differ among participants, reflecting variations in factors such as brand size, preference, and market reputation. Considering that consumers are heterogeneous entities with different perceived values and preferences for a product (Huang et al., 2022), future research should target a specific company or brand for evaluation. This approach would allow for a more precise assessment of the negative ripple effects of consumer boycotts on brand strength, thereby enhancing the accuracy and generalizability of the findings.

Future research could unfold as follows. As Delistavrou (2022) suggested, social norms are influenced by external factors such as social atmosphere, political control, and peer pressure. We failed to comprehensively consider the exogenous variables that affect changes in social norms related to boycotts. Therefore, future research should incorporate external factors, such as social environments and media influences, into our conceptual model to enhance its explanatory power and yield more robust findings. Furthermore, prior studies have consistently emphasized that individuals' perceived behavioral control is also considered key predictors of boycott decisions (Delistavrou, 2022; Hamzah & Mustafa, 2019). When consumers believe that they can regulate their consumption behavior, they exhibit greater motivation to participate in that behavior. To further develop our conceptual model, we propose that future research examine the moderating effect of perceived behavioral control. This concept pertains to individuals' ability to self-regulate their boycott behavior independently of external pressures. Such exploration could provide valuable insights for a comprehensive understanding of boycott literature within the framework of the theory of planned behavior.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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