

On Boycotts Organized Through the Internet

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The study examines the suitability of the Internet as the primary tool for organizing boycotts. Unlike previous studies that treated boycotts as homogeneous events, this study followed Friedman's (1999) taxonomy of boycotts and examined the different classes of boycotts. It extends Friedman's five boycott groups to 7 using Garrett's (1987) definition of boycotts, and using theories of economics and social contracts and reputation develops a number of propositions regarding the suitability of the Internet as primary tool for organizing different classes of boycotts.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the Internet as the new medium for organizing boycotts. Unlike previous papers that focused on consumer boycotts (Friedman 1991, Friedman 1971) and their effectiveness (Garrett 1987, Koku et al. 1997), this paper takes a broader view of boycott actions and focuses on the medium that is primarily used to organize the boycott. The study goes beyond consumer boycotts which call on consumers to withhold their purchase of a product or their patronage from an establishment and includes such other activities as protest movements or political demonstrations. The study recognizes boycott as a form of a social movement that draws on human emotions. Thus, it uses economic theories of utility maximization and transaction cost analyses, social contracts and reputation to analyze boycotts. On the basis of these analyses, the paper predicts when calls for boycotts made primarily through the Internet might be heeded, and when they might not be heeded, and concludes by developing a number of propositions.

A boycott is an instrument that is wielded by a seemingly powerless group against the powerful in order to induce one form of change or the other (Etzioni 1969). Boycotts have been studied extensively by scholars (see for example Klein et al 2004, Klein et al 2003, Sen et al. 2001, Koku et al. 1997, Garrett 1987, Friedman 1991, 1971, Frank et al 1982, Hyman 1980, Mahoney 1976, DeCrespigny and McKinnell 1960, Laidler 1930 Laidler 1913) and have been analyzed from several different viewpoints. They have, for example, been analyzed from the viewpoint of labor history (Friedman 1985) as an instrument that empowers consumers (Friedman, 1971), from the viewpoint of market forces (Koku et al. 1971), and from view point of protest groups such as the equal rights movement in the United States (Morris 1984). Not many studies, however, have analyzed the means through which boycotts are organized. Studying the means through which boycotts are organized is important since it is pivotal to the success of a boycott action. In this study, I focus on the Internet a new communication medium that has revolutionized the way people interact and the way many business communications are currently conducted.

Friedman (1999) provides a comprehensive historical overview and analysis of boycotts. This overview covers the mundane such as the genesis of the word "boycott" to the substantive such as the

different classifications of boycotts. In his previous studies, Friedman (1985) defined boycotts as “an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace (Friedman 1985, p. 97). Garrett (1987), however, defined boycotts as “concerted, but non-mandatory, refusal by a group of actors (the agents) to conduct marketing transactions with one or more other actors (the target) for the purpose of communicating displeasure with certain target policies and attempting to coerce the target to modify those policies” (Garrett, 1987, p. 47).

The difference between the two definitions, though subtle is noteworthy. While Friedman’s (1985) definition focuses on consumer boycotts, Garrett’s (1987) definition is more expansive and includes any group (agents) and any other “actors” (targets) which could be a political regime, a government, or a country. On the basis of Garrett’s (1987) definition, I treat protest movements also as a form boycott in my analysis. From their simple origins in the United Kingdom over a century ago (see Friedman 1999), boycotts or, at least, calls for boycotts have been occurring world-wide with increasing frequency during the last five decades (see Smith 1990, Sava 1989, Friedman 1991).

As a social phenomenon that requires a significant and concerted group effort for success, and yet has no mandatory participation requirement, boycotts are unique and interesting, and have attracted a significant research effort over the years. As a “group tool” whose aim is to mobilize people who may not necessarily be at the same place (i.e., people who are geographically dispersed), communication is essential, if not the key to the success of boycotts. Boycott organizers have used whatever means of mass communication that was available to them to reach group “members”, sympathizers, and supporters (collectively referred to in this paper as outsiders). To communicate effectively with group members and the relevant publics can be challenging as the different stakeholders could be geographically dispersed and live in different time zones.

Boycott organizers have traditionally used means such as posting and distributing fliers (leafleting), Newspapers, magazines, TV, and radios as the primary means to reach their target audience. However, to reach the target audiences became more and more difficult as the scope of boycotts broaden. The Internet (a modern invention) now makes communicating with a large number of people over a wide geographically dispersed region quick, easy, and cheap (Sen, Gurhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001), therefore seems to be the solution. But is it? The Internet as a communication and marketing tool is increasingly being used by business organizations and individuals to network, and now by boycott and protest movement organizers as the primary means to organize as evidenced in recent developments in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East (Halliso 2011, Kirkpatrick 2011).

The Internet has given birth to the ubiquitous social media such as Hi5, Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. These media are generally used to network and create friendships, however, they are also used by irate individuals who feel abused, wronged, or taken advantage of by the powerful (generally business organizations) to try to “even the scores”. These irate individuals use these new media in several different ways to including creating websites to spread negative things about the company or to call on others to join in retaliatory actions or a boycott against a target (the wrong-doer) (Hunt 1991). The social media are also used by individuals who wish to champion a cause against a country. For example calls are made to consumers to take a stand against child labor and boycott goods made in China (a target country in which child labor is allegedly prevalent) (see <http://hub.webring.org/bannedinchina> for a list of websites dedicated to calls to boycott goods made in China).

The usefulness of the social media in attracting new customers and generating new business opportunities have been espoused by experts and by business consultants. However, because the social media convey news in ways similar to the traditional media, but at a much faster pace, many have assumed that they are also equally effective in organizing protest movements and boycotts. But is this really the case?

The answer to this question is important to boycott organizers who, of course, want boycotts to be effective and their efforts to yield results. They are also important to senior business executives who have to deal with boycotts and who, according to a study by Sentry Insurance, perceive boycotts to be one of the effective labor techniques against management (Sentry Insurance Co. 1977). To answer this question,

we examine boycotts, protest movements and the related economic and social theories such as theories of utility maximization and transaction cost, social contracts, and reputation.

Boycotts and Protest Movements

Boycotts evolved to be the more preferred tool by labor movements when negotiations with management reach an impasse. Boycotts are preferred to strike actions because they are less expensive. Furthermore, they do result in no or fewer employees being dismissed for protesting. Boycotts as opposed to strike actions can more easily win the sympathy and support of “outsiders”.

Even though protest movements and boycotts look similar, particularly given the fact that both actions call for the involvement of the masses, boycotts call for a withdrawal of patronage or financial support from a targeted entity (business or a country). Protest movements, on the other hand, generally call for a change in the ways of “doing things”. The targets of both boycott and protest movements could also significantly differ. While protest movements are directed at regimes/governments or government agencies, boycotts are directed at products/business entities or countries. I argue that these differences are critical and determine whether the Internet is equally effective as a tool for organizing boycotts and protest movements.

Previous Studies and the Related Literature

Boycotts have been traditionally viewed as an instrument of last resort in the hands of labor groups. They are used by the “powerless” to persuade the powerful to refrain from an act that is perceived to be detrimental to the powerless. They have also been used to persuade the “powerful” to take actions that are perceived to advance the interest of the “powerless”, or perceived to be fair or equitable.

As a protest or a negotiating technique, the need to evaluate a boycott’s effectiveness became a matter of academic concern. Garrett (1987) proposed three areas in which the goals of a boycott could be assessed. These are: (i) economic pressure (boycotts could exert economic pressure on targeted a firm), ii) image pressure (boycotts could be used to create negative image for the targeted firm), and (iii) policy commitment (boycotts could be used to persuade the target firm to change some policies). The economic pressure assesses the economic pressure that boycott exerts on the targeted firm. The image pressure assesses negative image that boycott succeeds in creating for the targeted firm, and policy commitment assess the extent to which the boycott induces the firm to change a policy course.

Friedman (1991) also provides a conceptual framework for evaluating the effectiveness of boycotts. His framework includes four elements which were referred to as (i) media-oriented boycotts – boycotts that are concerned with publicity (ii) marketplace-oriented boycotts – boycotts that are intended to inflict financial damage on the target, (iii) instrumental boycotts – boycotts that intended to induce a change in policy, procedure etc, and (vi) expressive boycotts – boycotts that are intended to convey dissatisfaction etc to the target. The fact that the criteria proposed by Friedman (1991) are similar to those proposed four years earlier by Garrett (1987) is indicative of their usefulness.

The contemporary use of boycotts also includes tactics by anti-consumption groups whose objective is to persuade other people not to patronize targeted firms (Fuches, Markley and Davis 2008). Because boycott actions are often aimed at the “powerful”, one could consider them as a tool to make the powerful see things through the eyes of the “ordinary”. However, Fuches, Markley and Davis (2008) offered an alternative explanation which is a claim “to save others from the same fate” that an individual has experienced. In a sense this gives a boycott that is initiated by anti-consumption groups an altruistic angle.

The issue of who will participate in a boycott or who will support a boycott is critical to the success of a boycott and relevant to the success dimensions proposed by Garret (1987) and Friedman (1991). An experimental study, based on the theories of social dilemma and reference group, conducted by Sen, Gurhan-Canli, and Morwitz (2001) is useful and consistent with the principles of economics. The study found tha the availability of close substitutes influences the cost of a boycott and therefore influences the likelihood of people answering the call for a boycott.

Similar to Sen, Gurhan-Canli, and Morwitz (2001), Klein, Smith and John (2004) examined why people participate in boycotts and came up with four factors that predict the likelihood that an individual

will take part in a boycott. The researchers labeled these factors as: (i) an individual's desire to make a difference, (ii) an individual's scope for self-enhancement (ii) counterargument that inhibit boycotting, and (iv) the cost of constrained consumption faced by the individual.

The Klein, Smith and John (2004) study is useful in that it extends Kozinets and Handelman (1998) by generalizing it. Instead of studying netographers to see why they participate in boycotts Klein et al. (2004) studied the rest of us (society in general) to determine why we participate in boycotts. The study, however, did not examine the different means through which boycotts are organized. I use the fourth factor in Klein et (2004) study i.e., the cost of constrained consumption faced by the individual together with such other factors as reputation in analyzing the likelihood of an individual participating in boycotts organized through Internet.

The use of the Internet in organizing boycotts and discussions on the role of the Internet in organizing boycotts are now common. However, academic inquiry on the role of the Internet in boycott actions is rather sparse. Kozinets and Handelman (1998) is one of the few exceptions. The authors conducted 14 cyber interviews and analyzed 68 Usenet postings, not to determine the effectiveness of the Internet in organizing boycotts, but rather to find out what motives the Internet users to respond to boycott calls posted on the Internet.

The findings of the Kozinets and Handelman (1998) are illuminating. They suggest that those who respond to boycotts calls on the Internet do so for reasons of self- realization, or to express their individuality. These findings are interesting because they show a different element for boycotts in addition to those proposed by Garrett (1987) and Friedman (1991). They also show that frequent computer users or technically savvy individuals might be "wired" differently from non-technically savvy individuals in terms of how they respond to boycott calls.

Ward and Ostrom (2006) also conducted another study of boycotts that used the Internet as a medium. The authors analyzed how calls for boycotts on the Internet are framed so as to elicit the desired response or evoke the sympathy from readers. The results showed that calls for boycotts that are posted on web sites more often use rhetorical tactics in framing their message. While the power of rhetoric is not new in mobilizing public sympathy, its effectiveness in eliciting the desired response to boycott calls has never been examined.

Boycott Taxonomy

Even though most observers do not distinguish between boycotts, a close observation reveals that all boycotts are not the same. While the primary tenor, that is the "powerless" trying to get the "powerful" to do something "good" that the powerful does not willingly want to do remains the same, boycotts differ in their objectives or in the people (outsiders) they seek to attract. Friedman (1999), to the best of my knowledge, is the first researcher to differentiate between boycotts to create groups. He argues that there could be as many as five main groups of boycotts. These are labor boycotts, consumer boycotts, minority boycotts, ecological boycotts, and religious boycotts.

The labor boycotts are used by unions in place of strike actions. They are often media-oriented and designed to draw outsiders' attention and sympathy to the cause of the labor union. The objective of labor boycotts, in most cases, is to make the significant stakeholders get tired of the negative press coverage that is associated with the boycott so that they would bring pressure to bear on management to negotiate with the union or accommodate union's demand.

Consumer boycotts seem to be the most prevalent currently (see Klein et al. 2004). These boycotts can be organized by a wide range of entities; from an individual or groups of individuals to concerned citizens or organizations. They are intended to get a significant amount of consumers to withhold their patronage from the target organization, or to refrain from purchasing a targeted good. Thus, it seems the object of consumer boycotts is to inflict an economic damage on the target.

Minority boycotts are generally organized by "minority groups" to protest their unfair treatment by a "majority group". These boycotts appeal to the better judgment of outsiders for empathy, and for support to address an existing problem. They can be media-oriented in which they make their case to the public. They are sometimes economic in orientation in which they seek to inflict an economic damage on the

target in order to get its attention and make it willing to negotiate. For example, the bus boycotts in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in the U.S. in the early 1950s, and in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955 were designed to attain the two objectives, (1) to draw the world's attention to the indignities meted out to Blacks in the United States, and draw outsiders' support for their cause, and (2) to inflict financial damage on the targets to make them willing to negotiate. Even though minority boycotts were more prevalent in the United States, they are not by any means limited to the U.S.

Ecological boycotts, unlike the typical labor or consumer boycotts, are organized by "outsiders" who are concerned either about the treatment of animals or the degradation of the natural environment. For example, PETA (People Concerned about Ethical Treatment of Animals) often target cosmetic manufacturers for their treatment of animals, while other concerned citizens target oil and gas producers such as Shell and Exxon over their alleged poor record on damaging the environment. These boycotts tend to be both media-oriented as well economic oriented. They seek to draw negative attention to the target and shame others into refusing to patronize the targets.

Religious boycotts are organized by religious groups or churches and target an organization that the religious group perceives as engaging in a conduct that is not consistent with Christian principles. These boycotts are also often media-oriented as they are designed to "shame" the target and make it reconsider the "offending" practice. For example, The NCC (the National Council of Churches) in 2004 backed the boycott of Taco Bell and Mt. Olive Pickles for practices it said harmed farm workers (Chang 2003).

Economic Theories and Boycott

The existence of the different classes of boycotts makes way for the argument that the different classes of boycotts have different objectives, thus it is difficult to come up with a common metric to measure the effectiveness of these boycotts. Nevertheless, to the extent that all boycotts either directly or indirectly seek to attract others (outsiders) to a cause means that all boycotts have something in common. I argue that the common threads that bind all the different boycotts are: (1) the sacrifice on the part of outsiders, (2) the reputation of boycott organizers, and (3) the credibility of boycott organizers.

Utility Maximization

As indicated earlier in reference to the study of Sen, Gurhan-Canli, and Morwitz (2001) and Klein, Smith and John (2004), economic theory suggests that, as consumers, we try to maximize our utility (our level of satisfaction) from consuming a set of goods (commodities) given our budget (see for example Jensen and Meckling 1994). Occasionally, on the same budget, we engage in trade-offs while maintaining the same level of satisfaction (we move along the same indifference curve).

A consumer is however worse off, if a trade-off results in a decrease in his/her level of satisfaction. A consumer is faced with a decision to engage in a trade-off by participating in a boycott. A boycott that calls on a consumer to refrain from purchasing a product brand, or goods manufactured/sold by a target company or country means that the consumer has to engage in a trade-off that could lower his/her level of satisfaction. The availability of a close substitute means that the consumer will more likely maintain the same level of satisfaction otherwise s/he will be worse off.

Consumers generally make rational choices in their consumption decisions. While these choices can be complex, they have been distilled into simple axioms such as consumers will generally "want more rather than less for the same price", or consumers will generally "balance costs against benefits". These axioms suggest that boycott calls that mean that the consumer should pay "more for less" or "more for the same" will less likely be heeded by consumers. Furthermore, consumers as "rational beings" will weigh the costs that they will incur against the benefits that they perceive as resulting from the boycott. Consumers will most likely participate in a boycott action should the perceived benefits outweigh the associated costs. It should be noted though that consumers are not always rational as they sometimes allow their choices/actions to be driven by emotions instead of logic.

The costs associated with boycotts may come from direct and indirect sources and may therefore be obvious or less obvious. For the example, the cost of the substitute product that the consumer has to purchase is obvious and therefore the difference in cost is obvious. However, less obvious is the cost

borne by the consumer in either searching for the substitute or for information on the substitute. Thus, it may not be possible for the consumer to evaluate the complete cost borne when participating in a boycott. However, approximations of the perceived cost are enough to drive the decision to participate, or not to participate.

Reputation, Credibility and Social Contract

The reputation of boycott organizers is important to galvanizing outsiders' support. The reputation of boycott organizers creates credibility for the boycott's cause and this fact is known to boycott organizers. For this reason Rev. J.J. Jemison a "well-connected" and educated black man with two degrees was invited to lead the June 1953 Baton Rouge bus boycott (Friedman, 1999). Similarly, because of reasons of credibility Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King though not initially involved in the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott was invited to lead the boycott.

I argue that "outsiders" who consider participating in a boycott are often required to make a decision in the face of incomplete information. In such situations many "outsiders" will use the reputation of boycott organizers to assess the force behind the boycott, the truth in its claims, and likelihood of the boycott's success to determine whether or not they should participate. The reputation of boycott organizers is shaped by factors such as the societal and behavioral norms, collective perception and how these perceptions compare with referent groups (see Zinko et al 2007). The higher the organizers' reputation the more credible their claims will be perceived. The more credible their claims the more likely it is for "outsiders" to be convinced of the "legitimacy" of their cause.

The theory of Social Contracts which provides a framework through which society can be analyzed has preoccupied philosophers such as Locke, Kant, Hume, and Rawls. It has undergone several revisions nonetheless its core theme has persisted. It suggests that people come together through a process of mutual consent to form a society that agrees to abide by certain norms (see Rawls 1971, Scalon 1998). The resulting society affords its members many advantages that the members could not otherwise have by living as individuals. One of the advantages of living in a society is the implicit agreement that it will defend members and protect them from aggression and violence from others.

In viewing boycotts through the lens of Social Contracts, I argue that those ("outsiders") who participate in boycotts see themselves as a part of the society that is being "attacked" and therefore pull together to defend its members. However, self-interest and society's interest may not necessarily be the same. These interests do come into conflict with a decision to participate in a boycott. For example, a consumer has to pit enjoying the same level of utility at a higher price or lower his/her level of utility when he/she decides to participate in a consumer boycott that targets a consumer product whose substitute can only be gotten at a higher cost against participating in the boycott. These kinds of decisions give rise to possible free-rider problems where an individual though sympathetic to the boycott's cause will not participate, but hope that others do participate in sufficient numbers to bring about the desired result.

Propositions

I developed a number of propositions that flow from the above discussions. They show that not all boycotts are the same as such the Internet may not be an effective medium to primarily for organizing all the different classes of them. However, the Internet is an effective medium for organizing social movements.

As discussed above, one of the objectives of labor boycotts is to attract "outsiders" attention to the labor-management impasse and create a negative publicity for the organization. Thus a maximum exposure would be desired by the boycott organizers. However, to get a maximum exposure entails creating active "talking points" or conversation pieces within the larger public. More importantly, creating negative publicity for the targeted firm requires the boycott organizers to actively plead their cause in public. In pleading their cause through news reporters for newspapers, radio and television, boycott leaders also allow the fairness of the cause and their credibility on the matter to be evaluated. These types of "vetting" by the public are not possible if the boycott organizers simply issued their calls for boycott through a web site on the Internet. Thus,

P1: Labor boycotts organized primarily through the Internet (Social Media) will more likely not be heeded by outsiders.

Consumer boycotts are interesting because they are generally organized by an “outside” group e.g. housewives protesting rising food prices in the 70s (see Friedman 1995). These boycotts are primarily intended to inflict a financial damage on the target in order to persuade it to negotiate with the boycotters. To achieve this objective, boycott organizers appeal to other patrons of the product/producer to refrain from either buying the product or from the target supplier/producer. However, the cost to consumer for heeding the boycott calls is determined by availability/unavailability of similarly priced close substitutes.

Those who use the product more heavily are in the position to most affect the target by withholding their purchase. Unfortunately they also bear a heavier cost by joining the boycott hence they are more likely to free-ride. However, light users of the product will think that their impact is less important and would count on the heavy users to inflict the economic damage by their withdrawal so they will also free-ride. In the end, not many people will participate in the boycott, thus

P2: Consumer boycotts organized primarily through the Internet (Social Media) will most likely not be effective.

Even though minority boycotts are generally organized by “minority” groups to protest their unfair treatment by a “majority” group, I reclassify this type of boycott as justice or fairness-seeking boycotts. These boycotts are sometimes not necessarily organized by “minority” groups, but rather by members of other groups who perceive injustice in the way in which a group of people are being treated because of their ethnicity. The organizers need not belong to the group that is being treated unfairly. For example, people who were not necessarily Black, African, or South Africans who were concerned about the unfairness of the apartheid regime in the 1980s organized boycotts in the United Kingdom against Barclays Bank for its dealings with the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

Similarly, movements on several university campuses in the United States in the 1980s appealed to people’s conscience and their sense of fairness, and called for disinvestment in the apartheid regime in South Africa. They also called on people to refrain from dealing with companies that, at the time, had significant financial investments in South Africa under apartheid regime. As discussed above, these boycotts take a two-pronged approach; while they seek to inflict financial harm on targets, they also seek to draw negative attention to the conduct of the target.

I argue that the social contract theory explains why people from other races or other ethnicities support the race/fairness/justice boycotts. Because people who heed the calls for this type of boycott come together to the defense of others in the human race, the objective of choosing a primary means to convey the boycott message will be to reach as many people as possible. Thus, what matters is that people must be aware that the boycott is being organized, hence

P3: Minority boycotts organized primarily through the Internet will most likely be effective.

Ecological boycotts are interesting in several respects. First, those who seem to be truly committed to ecological issues and about ethical treatment of animals are relatively small compared to the rest of the population. However, a significant number of people must withdraw their financial support from the target firms in order for the boycott to make an impact. Secondly, web sites, blogs, etc on the Internet are rather passive ways of disseminating information that is supposed to rouse people to action, particularly actions that have cost implications for them. This type information is more effective when given in person, for instance at rallies, on radios and TVs when voice inflexions and body language could be used to emphasize points.

Furthermore, because the population at large stands to benefit from the objectives of the ecological boycotts, but only a few seem to be truly concerned about these objectives, to the point that they are

willing to pay the price that the boycott entails, thus there is a large free-rider problem with ecological boycotts. Therefore,

P4: Ecological boycotts primarily organized through the Internet will most likely not be successful.

Religious boycotts are somewhat different though. They are organized by people who do not necessarily stand to benefit directly from the boycotts. Rather these boycotts are mostly for the benefit of others. For example, the National Council of Churches (NCC) in the United States organized a boycott for the benefit of farm laborers who were allegedly being exploited (Presbyterian 2004). However, some of the religious boycotts were rather controversial. For example, the conservative Christian group called the American Family Association (AFA) mounted a series of boycotts that targeted such companies as Ford Motors and Walt Disney over the years because the AFA claimed that these companies had gay and lesbian friendly policies (see Brown 2005). Because these boycotts are designed to “shame” the target companies into negotiating, a passive presence on the Internet is an inexpensive way to get to a large audience. Hence,

P5: Religious boycotts organized primarily through the Internet by religious leaders will most likely be effective.

Political boycotts fit Garrett’s (1987) definition of a boycott which I provided earlier at the beginning of this paper. Political boycotts are generally organized to attain a political objective. These boycotts not only try to inflict financial damage on the target but they also seek to draw international to the situation and embarrass the target. For example, Gandhi organized a boycott against British salt and cloth to bring pressure to bear on the British government to grant India independence (see Klein et al. 2004, Smith 1990). Similarly, several universities in the United Kingdom in the 1980s organized boycotts against South Africa’s Apartheid regime (Lisson 2000). These boycotts take several years since it takes time to persuade people to acknowledge the wrongful in the ways of the target (country or regime) which in some cases might be an ally.

In their attempt to draw international attention to the target, political boycotts also try to educate and inform, as such the Internet is an appropriate medium to inexpensively and efficiently reach people around the world, thus

P6: Political boycotts organized primarily through the Internet will most likely be successful.

I consider social protests also to be boycotts using Garret’s (1987) definition of boycotts, and refer to them as social policy boycotts. These boycotts are unique in the sense that they are initiated by people regarded as relatively young compared organizers of other types of boycotts. The goal of these boycotts is to effect a change in social policies. Because they are organized by individuals who are relatively young, they also tend to be technology savvy. Furthermore, as pointed out in the findings of Kozinets and Handelman (1998), people in this group participate in boycotts as a means of self-expressing or as “going for the ride”.

Even though it is true that participating in a social protest could be dangerous to one’s safety, as evidenced in several instances of police brutality visited on protestors in the recent Arab Spring, many people still do take part in protests movements. It seems that participants in protest movements have the mindset that the “bad things” would happen to someone else, and not “me”. With this kind of mind set, many people will ignore the apparent dangers associated with protest movement. Some people also regard protest movements as history making events and do not want to be “left out”. Thus,

P7: Social policy boycotts primarily organized through the Internet will most likely be successful.

CONCLUSION

The discussions above, amongst other things, show that all boycotts are not the same and therefore should not be organized primarily through the same means in order to achieve the boycott's objectives. The study extends Friedman's 1999 study in which he developed a taxonomy of five boycott types. I have added two additional boycott groups- political boycotts and social policy boycotts, and focus on which types of boycotts could be successfully organized through the Internet.

The Internet, one of the modern inventions that has made communication inexpensive and widely used by business organizations and individuals, has now been embraced by boycott organizers also. However no study, to the best of my knowledge has examined the appropriateness of this new medium to organizing the different forms of boycotts. Such knowledge is not only useful to boycott organizers but also to corporate executives, and other policy makers who strategize to defend themselves and their organization or countries against boycotts, given the fact all boycotts are not the same as evidenced from the taxonomy. This study attempts to bridge that gap.

Further studies that use this study as a basis to develop hypotheses that can be empirically tested would be a valuable extension. Furthermore, investigation into the appropriate metric for measuring the effectiveness of boycotts organized through the Internet would be invaluable.

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