ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

CONSUMERS' SELF-IDENTITY PERSPECTIVES ON BRAND PREFERENCES AND BOYCOTT BEHAVIOUR: AN APPLICATION OF A BLIND TASTE TEST

TÜKETİCİLERİN ÖZ-KİMLİK GÖRÜŞLERİNİN MARKA TERCİHLERİ ÜZERİNDEKİ ROLÜ VE BOYKOT DAVRANIŞI ÜZERİNE BİR KÖR TADIM TESTİ UYGULAMASI

Mustafa ŞEHİRLİ *

"If you can feel pain, you are alive. If you can feel the pain of others, you are human." (Tolstoy, L.N., 2016; 25)

Abstract

This research aims to reveal the relationship between the self-identity of modern individuals, who seek to find themselves by consuming in a consumer society, and their consumption preferences and behaviours through boycott behaviour. For this purpose, a study was conducted in 2024 with 322 university students in Istanbul, utilizing a blind taste test involving two products (cola and coffee) from one global and one local brand (Pepsi/ Cola Turka and Starbucks/Kahve Dünyası) regarding the boycott against brands supporting Israel. According to the research findings, the participation rate in the boycott is 57%. Regardless of participation in the boycott, no statistically significant difference was found in brand preferences during the blind test among all participants. However, it was revealed that the preferences for products related to Starbucks significantly decreased among participants who supported the boycott. Although not statistically significant, a decrease was also observed for Pepsi. The primary reasons affecting participation in the boycott are emotional factors, such as a reaction to crimes against humanity and support for the oppressed. Those who did not participate in the boycott expressed their belief that the boycott or their participation would have no impact. No significant relationship was identified between the phenomenon of self-identity, which is the research's main subject, consumer preferences (participation in the boycott), and indirectly, brand preferences. The self-identity preferences of participants and non-participants in the boycott were similar, with the most commonly expressed identity definition being "human."

Keywords: Self-Identity, Customer Preferences, Perception, Blind Test, Boycott.

* University of Health Sciences, Hamidiye SHMYO, mustafa.sehirli@sbu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-4800-0283. The survey in this article was approved by the decision number 2024/1 taken at the meeting of Hamidiye Scientific Research Ethics Committee of the Health Sciences University on 19/01/2024 and numbered 1/13.

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı tüketim toplumunda kaybettiği kimliğini tüketerek bulmaya çalışan modern insanın sahip olduğu öz benlikle, tüketim tercih ve davranışları arasındaki ilişkiyi boykot davranışı üzerinden ortaya koymaktır. Bu amaçla İstanbul'da 322 üniversite öğrencisiyle; biri küresel diğeri yerli ikişer markalı (Pepsi/ Cola Turka ile Starbucks/Kahve Dünyası) iki ürünlü (kola ve kahve) kör tadım testi uygulamasıyla 2024 yılı içinde İsrail'i destekleyen markalara karşı başlatılan boykot konusunda bir araştırma yürütülmüştür. Araştırma bulgularına göre boykota katılım oranı %57'dir. Boykota katılımdan bağımsız olarak tüm katılımcılar için kör testte marka tercihleri arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir fark bulunamamıştır. Buna karşılık boykotu destekleyen katılımcıların sadece Starbucks ile ilgili ürün beğenilerinin anlamlı şekilde azaldığı ortaya konulmuştur. İstatistiksel olarak anlamlı olmasa da Pepsi için de bir azalış görülmektedir. Genel olarak boykota katılımı etkileyen nedenler işlenen insanlık suçuna karşı tepki, mazlumlara destek gibi duygusal faktörlerdir. Boykota katılmayanlar ise bu davranışlarının gerekçesi olarak boykotun veya kendi katılımlarının etkisi olmayacağına olan inançlarını dile getirmişlerdir. Araştırmanın ana konusu olan öz-kimlik olgusuyla tüketici tercihleri (boykota katılım) ve dolaylı olarak marka beğenileri arasında anlamlı bir ilişki tespit edilmemiştir. Boykota katılanlarla katılmayanların öz-kimlik tercihleri oldukça benzer olup her iki grupta da en çok ifade edilen kimlik tanımı "insan" olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öz-Kimlik, Müşteri Tercihleri, Müşteri Algısı, Kör Test, Boykot.

1. Introduction

When making consumption-related decisions, individuals are influenced by their subconscious. The revelation of the subconscious facilitates the discovery of one's true self, allowing individuals to escape from being mere objects and regain their subjectivity (Fromm, E., 1996: 27-28).

For modern individuals, consumption is considered a form of existence and a means of self-expression. Understanding and managing consumer behaviours in this consumption-oriented age has become a key focus for brands in the competitive capitalist landscape. At the same time, consumers are evolving, and concepts like liberation and individualization are transforming sociological structures. Technology contributes to this process, mainly through social media and artificial intelligence. Consequently, marketing research aimed at understanding and managing consumers is evolving in quantitative and qualitative dimensions, leading to diverse methods. Correspondingly, academic research has also diversified. As a result of a multidisciplinary approach, studies in marketing are increasingly incorporating insights from psychology, neurology, and information technology. However, the quantity and quality of these studies still need to be improved, and they are open to further development. This research addresses this need by examining the influence of a psychological concept, self-identity, on consumer behaviours through a political and sociological event like a boycott. Given its specificity and timeliness, similar studies have yet to be identified in various research platforms summarized below.

The independent variable of the research is the concept of consumer identity, which is tested in relation to consumption and consumer behaviours. The effect of self-identity on individual behaviours

is a significant area within psychology, and its influence on consumer behaviours merits exploration. However, this approach is relatively new in the marketing field. The study first addresses the concept of identity, particularly emphasizing the relationships between identity and consumption behaviours in contemporary society.

In addition to the fundamental transformations guiding society and consumer behaviours, contextual variables are also influential factors. Boycotting products from specific countries or companies fall within this category. The global boycott initiated in 2023 against multinational corporations supporting the oppression imposed by the state of Israel serves as the dependent variable of this research. This choice enhances the relevance and importance of the study in terms of social awareness. Indeed, the findings provide significant insights into understanding society.

The research's uniqueness is enhanced by measuring the effect of a psychological variable on a social/political event using a technique like a blind product test, which evaluates consumer behaviour and perceptions without manipulation. Additionally, well-known, taste-testing suitable products from global and local brands were utilized explicitly for this research.

The extensive literature surrounding self-identity and consumption concepts is briefly discussed, followed by an examination of previous studies on the relatively under-researched topic of boycott behaviour.

2. Literature

2.1. The Concepts of Self-Identity and Consumption

The self is the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings that represent them (Rosenberg, 1979: 7). According to Balıkçıoğlu (2016: 540), referencing William James (1890: 371), the self can be divided into two parts: one as the "knowing self" and the other as the "known self." The knowing self refers to the individual's answer to the question "Who am I?" while the known self pertains to how others perceive the individual. According to Rogers (1951), the self has two dimensions: actual and ideal. The authentic self answers the "Who am I?" and manifests in real life. In this sense, the self-concept has been characterized as "real self, true self, actual self, or simply self" (Sirgy, 1982, p. 288). The ideal self, on the other hand, relates to the personality that an individual wishes to achieve. There is also the "social self," which pertains to how individuals present themselves to others. Indeed, individuals undergo a self-development process influenced by their environment (family, peers) while also affecting that environment (Balıkçıoğlu, 2016, p. 541). According to Wallace and Wolf (2004), as quoted from Cooley (1902), people evaluate how they appear and how others see them. In other words, an individual is engaged in a symbolic interaction with themselves and others.

The concept of identity used in this research is closely related to the self-concept. According to Horowitz (2012), identity is a conscious or intuitive sense of sameness that develops over time and

expresses how the individual is perceived socially. Stryker and Burke (2000: 285) identify two distinct usages of the concept of identity. The first refers to society's culture, while the second pertains to collective identification with a community, thereby revealing the social dimension of identity. Through social identity theory, Tajfel and Wilkes (1963) demonstrated how the distinctions of "us and them" alter how people perceive themselves and each other. Like social identity, group identity defines what it means to be a group member and determines context-appropriate attitudes, feelings, and behaviours (Hornsey, 2008: 209). According to Demir (2020), identity can generally be viewed as the individual's development of attachment to various aspects of the self to define and make sense of themselves. Thus, the more positions an individual occupies in society, the more selves they possess. At this point, the concept of identity accompanies the overall self. In this approach, the concepts of self and identity are used synonymously within the scope of this research.

Social identity emerges when an individual feels emotionally attached to a specific social group and its values and behaves accordingly (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Thorbjornsen et al., 2007). Therefore, social identity significantly influences consumer behaviours (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). According to Binay (2020), referencing Callero (2003), in the postmodern era, the self is no longer a holistic self; thus, a fragmented individual questions how they perceive themselves and believes they can reproduce their identity. In this regard, a brand's meaning and value express the self and facilitate the formation of consumers' identities. Consumers prefer brands with an image close to their own (McCracken, 1986). Kuenzel and Halliday (2008) revealed that brands meet consumers' needs for belonging, reflect a sense of identity, and add meaning to their lives. For example, Josiassen (2011) found in a study on second-generation (Turkish) immigrants in the Netherlands that ethnic identification significantly influenced consumer ethnocentrism and the consumers' disidentification with Dutch brands.

According to Firat and Venkatesh (1995), individuals have become fragmented, multi-self entities as postmodern consumers and, therefore, do not feel the need to create an integrated experience by reconciling their identity conflicts. Campbell (1994) posited that if consumption expresses the self, the self is also constructed through consumption. In this case, even if consumers satisfy their exact needs, it becomes understandable why they prefer different brands (Balıkçıoğlu, 2016, p. 538). As previously mentioned, there is a connection between the self and product image (Sirgy, 1982). Campbell's approach provides clues to answer one of marketing's fundamental questions: "Why do consumers prefer different brands even when satisfying the same functional need?" Initially, it was attempted to be explained by personality differences (Evans, 1959), but this question has also been related to the self-product image (Sirgy, 1982). At this point, it is beneficial to discuss consumer society and consumer identity briefly.

2.2. Consumer Society and Consumer Identity

In the early periods of modernization, individuals expressed themselves not according to consumption relationships but based on their positions in the production process and their professions

(e.g., farmer, teacher, worker). These occupational definitions granted individuals social recognition, i.e., identity (Bocock, 2005, p. 56). In contrast to the needs-based consumption that characterizes the modern era, a postmodern society has emerged, where individuals prove their existence through the amount of consumption, transforming consumption into a display and image battle (Sarı, 2019, p. 555). In other words, consumption has become a hedonistic character and a tool for individuals to construct identity and status. Products (goods), loaded with symbolic value, products (goods) have become means for individuals to make their identities meaningful and complete (satisfy) themselves. However, each satisfaction gives rise to a new need for satisfaction, leading to an endless cycle of consumption needs. The primary tools fueling this need and sustaining capitalism are media and mass communication channels. According to Baudrillard (2008), postmodernism is an age governed by cybernetics, characterized by information and signs.

According to Balıkçıoğlu (2016: 544), quoting Birdwell (1968), Rogers's (1951) personality theory is the most contributing theory to the fields of marketing and consumer behaviour concerning the self. According to this theory, the self is a value for the individual and represents a cognitive stage; the individual exhibits behaviours to protect and enhance this value, thus making the consumption of objects a way to preserve or increase personal value. Thus, if an object aligns with the consumer's goals and feelings, the purchase decision can be made quickly and without much thought (Levy, 1959). An external object under an individual's control can also become a part of themselves, similar to a limb controlled by the individual (McClelland, 1951). Sirgy (1982) refers to the alignment of the product image, which is how society perceives a product, with the individual's self-image as self-image.

Consumption can lead to the revelation of repressed desires, creating a foundation for individuals to recognize and realize themselves (Robins, 1999, pp. 198-199). On the other hand, because the consumption function is not seen as productive, traditional consumer identity has been viewed as more compatible with the passive perception of traditional women than with the warrior identity associated with the dominant male perception (Bocock, 2005, p. 100). New consumers focus on forgetting rather than learning, on selfishness rather than loyalty and sacrifice, and on the present and immediate gratification (Firat & Shultz, 1997: 186; Bauman, 2006: 94). Consumers lacking the production knowledge of previous generations tend to focus on narrating the product and thinking like a producer; they prioritize the dreams evoked by the product rather than the product itself (Sennett, 2009, pp. 102-105). Baudrillard states that individuals defined by consumer identity become functional while simultaneously surrendering to their desires, moving away from rationality (Baudrillard, 2010, p. 225).

At this point, two differing viewpoints emerge. The first view this surrender as proof that individuals have lost their freedom by objectifying themselves. The second viewpoint asserts that the consumption process offers numerous choices, and the consumer selects what they desire, claiming that this right to choose liberates the consumer (Yanıklar, 2006, p. 216). However, proponents of the first view argue that while consumers think they are making their own choices, they are actually under

a delusion. What they believe they have chosen is, in fact, something imposed upon them (Baudrillard, 2010, p. 173; Elliott, 1997: 286).

The new consumer serves the economic system not through labour but through consumption. The new consumer, who internalizes consumer culture, is expected to assume different personality types based on the consumption patterns presented to them (Baudrillard, 2003: 83; Firat & Shultz, 1997: 199-200). According to Hall, this situation results from the self-being fragmented, decentralized, and incomplete (Hall, 2006, p. 109). Bocock (2009: 85) assesses the postmodern period as one in which identity is constructed and preserved, where consumption has become central to human life, and consequently, the demand for consumption has become central to production. According to the author, all the old and fixed values that helped people determine their sense of self have changed in this period.

2.3. Consumer Society and Critical Identity

While such beliefs may be considered utopian, many thinkers who have not lost hope in humanity still exist. According to Adorno, the self that consumer culture has not yet fully captured can still change itself and society. Those who do not lose their critical identities can create small differences within the whole, as "hope arises from the existence of difference" (Adorno, 2009, pp. 148-149). Habermas argues that for the continuity of the hope for liberation, "communicative reason" based on interpersonal dialogue should be prioritized over instrumental reason. Communicative reason helps individuals become aware of their common interests and question mass consumption, preventing them from being reduced solely to their consumer identity (Atiker, 1998: 84, 168).

In this context, social boycott actions play a significant role. Individuals who realize their lives are slipping away target the consumer society, developing a longing for a natural life in harmony with needs and a traditional consumer identity that despises overconsumption (Altuntuğ, 2010, p. 117). The dialectical law dictates that every phenomenon contains its opposite. Chaotic processes allow for the coexistence of different viewpoints. In this context, neither consumer culture nor the new consumer identity is entirely negative, nor can the consumption phenomenon completely alienate people from their selves. Everything can be both good and bad, depending on the chosen alternatives.

What is crucial here is the existence of individuals who gain a critical identity, develop awareness, and reveal their subconscious. These individuals can activate communicative reason based on interpersonal dialogue instead of instrumental reason, paving the way for the moderation of excesses in production and consumption relationships and achieving balance (Altuntuğ, 2010, p. 117). A boycott encompassing the entire society and carrying an element of human responsibility can make consumers aware of their selves or social identities. Therefore, boycotts may represent a significant opportunity for society and the world. In this regard, it would be beneficial to briefly discuss the concept of virtuous behaviour that supports participation in boycotts.

2.4. Virtue Ethics and Boycott

Virtue ethics is a perspective that emphasizes the necessity of virtuous behaviour, originating from Aristotle, focusing more on the actor rather than the action itself. This approach requires asking, "What kind of person should I be?" instead of "What should I do?" (Buğday & Babaoğul, 2016, p. 198). According to this definition, virtue ethics is directly related to a person's identity and how they define themselves. Authors like Barnet et al. (2005) suggest that ethical behaviour encompasses activities beyond purchasing, including relationships with sellers and providers and lobbying efforts to influence government decisions. They argue that ethical consumption cannot be accepted solely individually; it must also be embraced and practised collectively. In this sense, boycotts can be seen as a reflection of ethical consumption practices.

According to Viriyavidhayavongs and Yothmontree (2002), ethical behaviour is demonstrated by individuals making conscious purchasing decisions based on moral judgments. This allows individuals to choose products or brands that align with their values and beliefs or to avoid those that do not. Thus, boycotting creates a suitable foundation for such behaviour (Smith, 1988; Klein et al., 2002).

2.5. Boycott and Its Motivations

A boycott is an initiative to prevent consumers from engaging in a specific consumption behaviour to achieve particular objectives (Friedman, 1985, p. 97). There has been limited research on the reasons for boycotting and the factors influencing boycott motivation (Klein et al., 2004). Participation in boycotts is generally voluntary and often initiated by civil society organizations. Factors influencing an individual's decision to participate in a boycott include the perceived misconduct of the targeted firm (Klein et al., 2004), subjective norms, hostility, social pressure, and the likelihood of success (Braunsberger & Buckler, 2011; Asmat-Nizam et al., 2016; Abosag & Farah, 2014).

Ishak, Khalid, and Sulaiman (2018) examined the impact of ethical values on participation in boycotts against Israel through a qualitative study involving eight individuals. They identified reasons for not participating in boycotts, such as product usability, brand reputation, potential job losses in the country due to the boycott, and perceived effectiveness. Reasons for participation included belief in the boycott's success, religious commitment, and a sense of belonging to the Muslim community (group membership). According to the authors, people are moral beings capable of empathizing with the suffering of others, but their actions may vary. Al-Hyari et al. (2012) noted that while boycotts against U.S. products tend to be short-lived, those with religious references tend to last longer, indicating the need for marketers to understand this factor well.

3. Method

The research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research model

Accordingly, the study examines the effect of individuals' self-identity on their participation in boycotts and the lack of significant impact of boycott participation on brand/product preferences. Additionally, the origins of boycott participation have been explored.

In one of the most famous marketing applications, adult subjects with typical brain structures preferred Pepsi Cola in blind taste tests; however, in tests that included brand information, they shifted their preference to Coca-Cola (Koenigs & Tranel, 2008). A similar application to this blind taste test was used in the study. The hypotheses of the research are as follows:

H1: There is a significant difference between participants' preferences in the blind test and those in the branded test for the cola product.

H2: There is a significant difference between participants' preferences in the blind test and those in the branded test for the coffee product.

H3: There is a significant difference between the brand preferences of participants who support the boycott and those who do not support the cola product.

H4: There is a significant difference between the brand preferences of participants who support the boycott and those who do not support the coffee product.

H5: There is a significant difference between participants' preferences for boycott participation and identity preferences.

3.1. Sample Selection

Participants were determined using a simple random method without any selection criteria at the University of Health Sciences and two separate student dormitories in Istanbul.

3.2. Population and Sample Size of the Research

The research population comprises young consumers in Turkey, while the main sample comprises university students in Istanbul. According to data from the Istanbul Governorate's website, the total number of students enrolled in higher education in Istanbul in 2023 is 1 million 1,834.

According to Keskin (2020), citing Coblick (1998), conducting a power analysis can be beneficial for the researcher to reveal the true effect on the population and to work with a sufficient sample size. The author states that the required sample size can be easily determined based on the statistical methods applied in the studies (using Cohen's tables and the G*Power program). This allows for the effects believed to exist to be demonstrated with the necessary statistical power while minimizing costs

(time, effort, budget). Research conducted with either excessively weak or extreme statistical power, such as studies with very low or very high sample sizes, is inappropriate. According to Ellis (2010), "more samples are better" is incorrect.

Given this information, the research will employ a related sample chi-square test at a power level of 95% and an effect size of 0.3. The required sample size is calculated to be 220 participants using the G*Power program (Figure 2). Additionally, Figure 3 provides different sample sizes to increase the effect size.
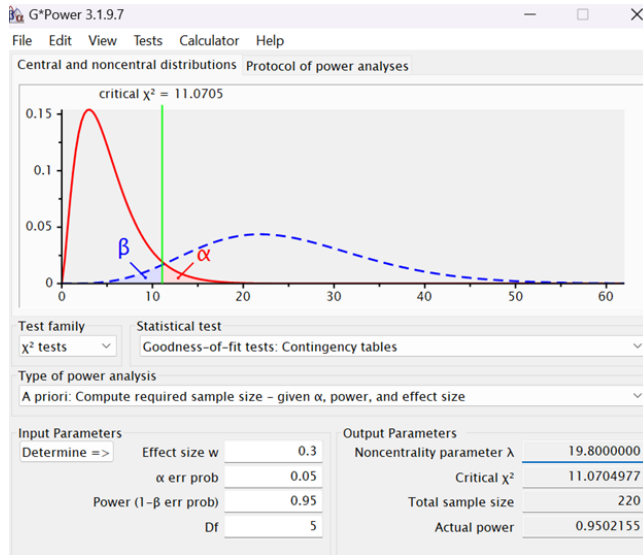

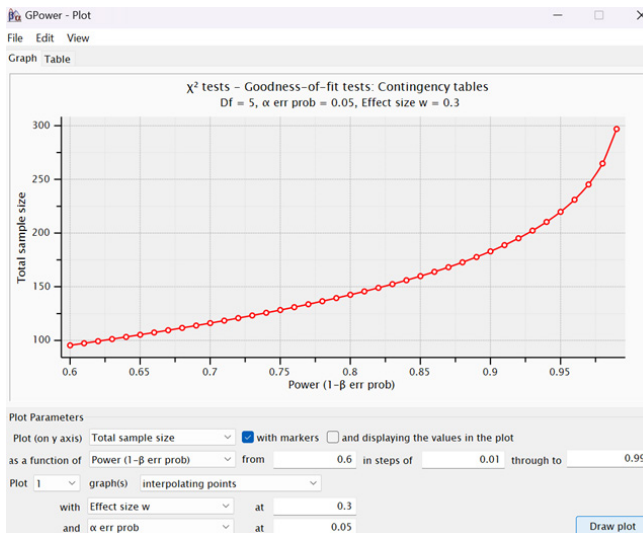**Figure 2.** Sample size calculated with the G*Power Program

Figure 3. Sample sizes at different power levels according to the G*Power Program

3.3. Sample Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In the sample selection, the inclusion criteria were determined as being a university student residing in Istanbul between 18-25. The exclusion criteria were that participants must not have any allergies to the food products being tested and must not recognize that the products were the same during the tasting.

Data Collection Tool

The method used was a test and interview. Participants were asked to choose one of the two products they tasted and answer other open-ended questions. As part of the research, undergraduate students studying at the Health Sciences University formed teams of three (a total of five teams) to conduct tastings with other university students (subjects) for two different beverage categories (coffee and cola). One brand was global, and the other was local for each category. The global brands were Pepsi and Starbucks, while the local brands were Cola Turka and Kahve Dünyası. An example image of the materials used in the study can be found in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Research materials

Steps Followed in the Research:

☐ Participants were informed that a taste test would be conducted as part of a market research study at the university. Those who accepted were given information about the study and asked to sign consent forms.

☐ Initially, participants were given a small cup of water and instructed to drink it and cleanse their palates between taste tests to avoid flavour mixing.

☐ In the first step, a taste test was conducted without revealing the brands of the products, and the preferred beverage brands were noted without the participants' awareness.

☐ Next, a similar tasting was conducted, this time informing the participants of the brands, and notes were taken. The products' order varied to prevent participants from relying on memorization. For instance, if Cola Turka was tasted first in the unbranded experience, Pepsi was served first in the second round, followed by Cola Turka.

☐ After the tasting trials, participants were sequentially asked the following questions:

Table 1. Questions Asked to Participants After the Taste Test

Boycott Participation	Are you participating in the boycott against brands that support Israel?
Opinion on the Boycott	What do you think about this boycott? Why do you think that?
Identity	How would you answer the question, "Who am I?" Why do you think that?
Continuity of Boycott (for those participating in the boycott)	How long do you plan to continue the boycott?
Gender	
School-Department	
The city where your family lives	

4. Analysis and Findings

Both statistical analyses (McNemar test, chi-square test) and qualitative content analyses were conducted in the study. The McNemar test is a two-group dependent sample test used to measure the significance of changes. It is employed to understand whether there is consistency between the binary responses of a group of experimental units in a particular trial and their responses in a repeated trial after a specific time (Önder, 2024). When you have matched or repeated measurement designs (e.g., pre-test/post-test), the classical chi-square test cannot be used; therefore, the McNemar test is necessary. Consequently, the research data were analyzed using the McNemar method for the first four hypotheses. Additionally, simple percentage analyses were performed using Microsoft Excel.

Content analysis is quite systematic for qualitative research (Karakullukçu, 2020, pp. 142-143). The researcher read the content three times at different times to code it. Themes were determined from the codes, and concepts were categorically identified. To ensure the internal validity of the research, another expert also conducted the reading, coding, and theme determination processes, and the two interpretations were consolidated with statistical percentages. Only Microsoft Excel was used for the qualitative data analysis, and the processes were conducted through observation by the researcher without using any special software.

Among the 322 participants, 233 (%72) were women, and 89 (%27.6) were men. Of the participants, 183 (%57) stated they participated in the boycott, 125 (%39) stated they did not, and 14 (%4) remained undecided. After excluding the undecided, 63% of the participating women and 49% of the men supported the boycott.

Of those supporting the boycott, 157 (%85) indicated they would support it until the end, while only 4 stated they did not intend to continue, and 3 mentioned they would continue for a while. No information could be obtained from 16 individuals. Among those considering continuing the boycott, 36 (%23) stated they would continue until the war's end. In contrast, the remaining (%77) viewed the boycott as a lifestyle and expressed determination to continue until the end or until death. Of all participants (322 people), 121 (%38) evaluated the boycott as a permanent lifestyle.

The results of the hypothesis tests are as follows:

Initially, no significant difference was found between branded and unbranded preferences in the cola category. Therefore, since P=0.931>0.05 in Table 2 and the values in Table 3, Hypothesis 1 has been rejected.

Table 2. Crosstabulation of Blind and Branded Cola

			Branded Cola		
			Pepsi	Cola Turca	Total
Blind Taste-Cola	Pepsi	Count	117	67	184
		% within Blind Cola	63.6%	36.4%	100.0%
		% within Branded Cola	63.9%	48.2%	57.1%
	Cola Turca	Count	66	72	138
		% within Blind Cola	47.8%	52.2%	100.0%
		% within Branded Cola	36.1%	51.8%	42.9%
Total		Count	183	139	322
		% within Blind Cola	56.8%	43.2%	100.0%
		% within Branded Cola	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As seen in Table 2, 57.1% of participants preferred the Pepsi brand in the blind test, while 56.8% preferred it in the branded test. In contrast, 42.9% chose Cola Turka in the blind test, and 43.2% did so in the branded test.

Table 3. Chi-Square Test Results for Cola

	Value	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
McNemar Test		1.000a
N of Valid Cases	322	

a. Binomial distribution used.

H1: REJECTED. There is no significant difference between participants' preferences in the blind test and the branded test for the cola product.

The analysis results for the blind and branded coffee tests are presented in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4. Crosstabulation of Blind and Branded Coffee Tasting

			With Brand (WB) Coffee		
			Starbucks	Kahve Dunyasi	Total
BlindTest Coffee	Starbucks	Count	60	77	137
		% within Blind	43.8%	56.2%	100%
		% within Branded	49.6%	38.3%	42,5%
	Kahve Dunyasi	Count	61	124	185
		% within Blind	33.0%	67.0%	100%
		% within Branded	50.4%	61.7%	57,5%
Total		Count	121	201	322
		% within Blind	37.6%	62.4%	100%
		% within Branded	100.0%	100.0%	100%

According to Table 4, 42.5% of participants liked Starbucks in the blind test, while 37.6% preferred it in the branded test. In contrast, 57.5% chose Kahve Dünyası in the blind test, and 62.4% did so in the branded test.

Table 5. Chi-Square Test for Coffee

	Value	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
McNemar Test		.201[a]
N of Valid Cases	322	

a. Binomial distribution used.

There is no significant difference between branded and unbranded preferences in the coffee category. Therefore, since P=0.201>0.05, the hypothesis is rejected.

H2: REJECTED. There is no significant difference between participants' preferences in the blind and branded test for the coffee product.

The same analyses were conducted only for participants who supported the boycott. The results are presented in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 6. Cola Tasting Test Results for Boycotting Participants

			Branded Cola T.		
			Pepsi	Cola Turca	Total
Blind Cola T.	Pepsi	Count	43	52	95
		% within Blind	45.3%	54.7%	100.0%
		% within Branded	55.1%	49.5%	51.9%
	Cola Turca	Count	35	53	88
		% within Blind	39.8%	60.2%	100.0%
		% within Branded	44.9%	50.5%	48.1%
Total		Count	78	105	183
		% within Blind	42.6%	57.4%	100.0%
		% within Branded	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As seen in Table 6, 51.9% of participants who supported the boycott (95 people) liked Pepsi in the blind test, while this rate dropped to 42.6% (78 people) in the branded test. In contrast, 48.1% of participants preferred Cola Turka in the blind test (88 people), while 57.4% (105 people) chose it in the branded test. However, in the test results in Table 7, since P=0.086>0.05, H3 is also rejected.

Table 7. Chi-Square Test Results for Cola for Participants Supporting the Boycott

	Value	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
McNemar Test		.086[a]
N of Valid Cases	183	

H3: REJECTED. There is no significant difference between the brand preferences of participants supporting the boycott and those who do not for the cola product.

Tables 8 and 9 present the evaluations of participants who supported the boycott regarding the coffee tests.

Table 8. Coffee Tasting Test Results for Participants Supporting the Boycott

			Branded Coffee		
			Starbucks	Kahve Dunyasi	Total
Blind Taste	Starbucks	Count	27	48	75
		% within Blind	36.0%	64.0%	%100
		% within Branded	55.1%	35.8%	%41
	Kahve Dunyasi	Count	22	86	108
		% within Blind	20.4%	79.6%	%100
		% within Branded	44.9%	64.2%	%59
Total		Count	49	134	183
		% within Blind	26.8%	73.2%	%100
		% within Branded	100.0%	100.0%	%100

As seen in Table 8, among the 183 participants supporting the boycott, 75 (41%) liked Starbucks in the blind test, while this rate dropped to 26.8% (49 people) in the branded test. In contrast, 59% of participants preferred Kahve Dünyası in the blind test (108 people), while 73.2% (134 people) chose it in the branded test. Therefore, in the test results in Table 9, since P=0.003<0.05, H4 is accepted.

Table 9. Chi-Square Test Results for Coffee for Participants Supporting the Boycott

	Value	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
McNemar Test		.003[a]
N of Valid Cases	183	

H4: ACCEPTED. There is a significant difference between the brand preferences of participants supporting the boycott and those who do not for the coffee product.

Findings Related to Reasons for Boycott Participation

The results regarding participation in the boycott or non-participation were evaluated using content analysis. First, Table 10 presents the reasons for those who participated in the boycott.

Table 10. Reasons for Boycott Participation

Justification	Quantity	Percentage
Uncertain	53	29
Support for the oppressed/innocent, compassion	33	18
Opposition to war	30	16
To be active	22	12
Crime against humanity, genocide	14	8
By faith and identity	12	7
Moral responsibility	12	7
Truthfulness	6	3
Use of local products	1	1
Total Sum	183	100

As seen, a large majority of participants (%29) hesitated to provide a reason for participating in the boycott. The most frequently expressed reason among participants was compassion for the oppressed, especially for children (%18). Many participants also articulated this as anti-war sentiment (%16). Additionally, some participants supported the boycott due to their religious beliefs (being Muslim) or their desire for economic independence. Some comments from participants include:

"I advocate for everyone who has compassion to support the boycott" (Participant 2K17).

"I am against the killing of children and will definitely continue to express my protest" (2K18).

"I cannot use brands that are involved in war while Muslims are oppressed" (6K8).

"At first, I thought of it as a war between two states and did not take sides, but after Israel bombed hospitals and tents with civilians, I began to see it as genocide rather than warfare" (SAKK25).

"I support it because we cannot do much for Palestine. At least by doing this, we can reduce the sales of Israeli products in our country and encourage more local products" (2K26).

The reasons for those who did not participate in the boycott are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Reasons for Not Participating in the Boycott

Justification	Quantity	Percentage
Thinking it is ineffective	39	31,2
Uncertain	38	30,4
Habit and brand loyalty, quality concern	15	12
Indifference	12	9,6
Finding it illogical/silly	9	7,2
No benefit to us/our country	7	5,6
Harmful to the economy	2	1,6
Excessive propaganda	1	0,8
Not knowing how to participate	1	0,8
Not acting with the community	1	0,8
TOTAL	125	100

The most frequently expressed reason for not participating in the boycott is the belief that the boycott is ineffective (%31.2). The proportion of those who did not provide a reason is also relatively high (%30.4). Another significant reason is the inability to give up habits and the quality of boycotting products. Some statements from participants include:

"*My support will not change anything*" (G12).

"*I do not think we can stop these brands with a boycott*" (SAKK27).

"*I would like to, but I cannot give up my habits*" (SK4).

"*I think one person cannot make a difference, and these are very large companies that will not be affected*" (2K13).

"*I do not care; I am not interested*" (ZK7).

"*I find it silly and think they exaggerate the support; this is a free country; those who want to support will do so*" (SAKK34).

"*My friend's father was fired because of the boycott; some people's lives are saved, while others are put in a difficult situation*" (2K10).

Findings Related to Identity

The responses to the questions regarding the identities of the 322 participants were diverse, leading to a content analysis conducted by two researchers. After reviewing the data three times, they identified 12 different themes. These themes and their frequencies are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Themes Related to Identity

Theme	Quantity	Percentage
Object/Phenomenon	69	21
Adjective	57	18
"Human"	34	11
"Student"	32	10
Profession	31	10
Animal	24	7
Nationality/Hometown	19	6
Individual/Gender	18	6
Kinship (Father, Sister, etc.)	15	5
Belief	11	3
Character	8	2
Uncertain	4	1
Total	322	100

As seen in Table 12, participants primarily identified themselves with an object or a trait. This may be attributed to their misunderstanding of the question and a need for habitual evaluation of

their identity. The most frequently mentioned word as an object or phenomenon was "water" (5 people). Additionally, traits such as "determined," "warrior," and "optimistic" were mentioned three times each.

Notably, the concept most frequently articulated as their identity was "human" (34 people), which could stand alone as a theme. This was followed by "student" (32 people). While there was no significant concentration in professions, the concept of "cat" was mentioned eight times. Furthermore, 19 participants identified themselves with an ethnic identity or hometown (13 Turks, 1 Kurd, and 5 from different cities).

To conduct a more in-depth analysis, the identity themes of participants who supported the boycott were separated from those who did not. Table 13 presents the identity preferences of the 183 participants who supported the boycott.

Table 13. Identity Themes of Boycotting Participants

Theme	Quantity	Percentage
Adjective	35	19
Object/Phenomenon	32	17
Human	21	11
Student	21	11
Profession	16	9
Animal	13	7
Individual/Gender	12	7
Nationality/Hometown	10	5
Belief	9	5
Kinship (Father, Sister, etc.)	8	4
Uncertain	3	2
Character	3	2
Grand Total	183	100

Table 14. Identity Themes of Participants Not Supporting the Boycott

Theme	Quantity	Percentage
Object/Phenomenon	30	24
Adjective	17	14
Profession	14	11
Human	12	10
Animal	11	9
Student	11	9
Nationality/Hometown	9	7
Kinship (Father, Sister, etc.)	7	6
Individual/Gender	6	5
Character	5	4
Belief	2	2
Uncertain	1	1
Grand Total	125	100

When examining Tables 13 and 14, there is no significant difference between the identity themes of participants who supported the boycott and those who did not. The theme percentages are very close to each other. A chi-square test was applied to determine whether there is a significant relationship between these two categorical variables ("boycott participation" and "identity theme"). The results showed that $X^2(22, N=322)=24.2$, $p=0.333$. Since $p>0.05$, Hypothesis 5 is rejected.

H5: REJECTED. There is no significant difference between participants' boycott participation preferences and their identity preferences.

5. Conclusion

The research yielded significant findings regarding the participation rate in boycotts, reasons for participation, the effect of brand awareness on preferences, the relationship between approaches to boycott participation and brand preferences, and the connection between participants' self-identity perceptions and boycott behaviours.

A notable finding is that 57% of participants reported engaging in boycotts, with 77% viewing it not as a temporary action but as a lasting commitment. This suggests that consumption culture has yet to dominate society fully and that those who maintain critical identities can create even small differences. In this context, the results support Adorno's (2009) views on the potential for hope.

Another significant finding regarding the reasons for boycott participation is the high percentage of individuals who did not provide justifications. Among those supporting the boycott, 29% and among those opposing it, 30.4% hesitated to give reasons. This may be due to the possibility of interpreting participation in the boycott as a political choice and the discrepancy between non-supporters intentions and their actual behaviours. The high percentage of those who see boycotts as ineffective suggests that a lack of a valid justification may be at play. Additionally, 12% of participants stated they did not engage in the boycott due to habits or quality-related reasons.

These results align with the views of Baudrillard (2010) and Elliott (1997), who argue that consumers who see themselves as making free choices in a consumer society are, in fact, not free; instead, they are often led to believe they are choosing when, in reality, those choices are imposed upon them.

As expected, the reasons for participating in boycotts are primarily emotional. Only one participant (1%) cited a logical reason for their involvement. Similarly, the reasons given by non-participants are also based on emotional factors. Among the reasons mentioned, only three can be considered logical: finding the boycott irrational, believing it has no benefit for the country, and thinking it harms the economy. The total percentage of these reasons is only 14.4%.

Another significant finding is that women's participation rate in boycotts is higher than men's. This result is not surprising because emotional factors are believed to influence boycott participation.

The main reason given by those who do not support the boycott is the belief that it is ineffective and that individual participation will not yield results. This outcome may reflect a sense of learned helplessness, particularly among young people. Notably, many young individuals hold this perspective in an era where concepts such as individuality, freedom, and sharing are increasingly discussed on social media.

These results are consistent with previous research in the literature. The emotional reasons identified in this study, such as support for victims or opposition to "crimes against humanity," align with findings from studies by Klein et al. (2004), Braunsberger and Buckler (2011), Asmat-Nizam et al. (2016), and Abosag and Farah (2014). However, the reasons for not participating in boycotts do not align with Ishak, Khalid, and Sulaiman's (2018) study, where quality concerns were the primary factor, ranking third in this research at only 12%.

The study also investigated the well-known marketing method of blind taste testing. Results showed no significant difference in consumer preferences between blind and branded taste tests across the sample. However, within the participating subgroup, a significant difference emerged for coffee, while no significant difference was found for cola. The choice of Pepsi over Coca-Cola influenced this outcome. Additionally, although not statistically significant, the number of participants who preferred Pepsi in the blind test decreased from 95 to 88 (an 18% drop) after brand disclosure, indicating that the preference for the boycott affected brand/product liking significantly. This effect was even more pronounced for Starbucks, showing a 35% change (from 75 to 49 participants) after brand disclosure. This suggests heightened sensitivity toward the Starbucks brand, evident for all participants, with a 13% change against Starbucks after the brands were revealed.

There may be qualitative differences between the two brands, which may affect participants' reactions. Coffee is a more traditional and local product, while cola is an American cultural product. Therefore, a Turkish brand may need more appreciation.

Finally, it is essential to interpret the relationship between participants' self-identity approaches and their preferences for boycott participation. A significant portion of participants defined their identities primarily through descriptive labels, which can be understood in two ways: either the identity question needed to be clearly understood, or the participants had not thought about it before. This could be viewed as a negative aspect.

Assuming that participants defined concepts similarly, there was no significant difference between the identity definitions of those who participated in the boycott and those who did not. For example, the concept of "human" was preferred at similar rates by both groups (11% and 10%). Furthermore, while the theme of "belief" was shallow for both groups (2%), all eight participants identifying as "Muslim" supported the boycott. In contrast, those identifying as "atheist" or "deist" indicated they did not participate. This suggests a strong connection between religious belief and boycott participation.

These findings align with Rogers' (1951) personality theory, which states that identity holds value for individuals, leading them to consume in ways that maintain this identity, and with Levy's (1959) assertion that individuals purchase products that resonate with their goals and emotions. However, this is different for the study as a whole. The similarity in identity between those who chose to participate in the boycott and those who did not—primarily identifying as "human"—indicates that the relationship between consumption preferences and identity is not valid in the specific context of boycott behaviour.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

Among the study's limitations is evaluating only two brands in each product category, which is a significant factor. Including a globally impactful brand like Coca-Cola or lesser-known brands like Crown Cola and Kurukahveci Mehmet could yield different results. Additionally, conducting research with various participant groups, rather than being limited to university students, could provide more comprehensive insights into boycott behaviour and the concept of identity.

Given the historical dimension of boycotts, repeating the study in the future could offer a broader perspective for better understanding this behaviour.

An exciting follow-up study could involve changing the sequence of the research stages. By placing the question of boycott participation at the beginning of the taste tests, a new study could explore the susceptibility of consumer preferences to manipulation in marketing research and test for "consistency bias" behaviours.

Ethics Committee Permission

The fieldwork of this article was approved by the Ethics Committee Permission with the dated 19/01/2024 and order number 23/701, which was obtained at the meeting of the Hamidiye Scientific Research Ethics Committee of the Health Sciences University, numbered: 1/13.

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