December 2022

Consumer Boycotts in the Time of War Crisis: An Efficient Citizenship Strategy or a Temporary Spurt of Solidarity

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CONSUMER BOYCOTTS IN THE TIME OF WAR CRISIS: AN EFFICIENT CITIZENSHIP STRATEGY OR A TEMPORARY SPURT OF SOLIDARITY

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ABSTRACT

By drawing from the theory of consumer citizenship, collective activism, and consumer boycotts, this article strives to understand the nature of the current calls for consumer resistance and the following consumers' actions that resulted from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In particular, by utilizing Friedman's (1991) taxonomy of boycotts, we aimed to identify the character, motives, and tools of ongoing boycotts and thus estimated their actual and probable effectiveness. The main research questions in this paper concern what type of consumer boycotts we currently observe, what the aims and motives are of current boycotting, and whether the noticed boycotting attempts will result in the prospected ends. The seriousness of ethical abuses, their range, and the rising sense of a global war risk also lead us to the question if current boycotts' participants disclose the features of strongly reciprocal consumers (Hahn & Albert, 2017). To meet our goals, we utilized both secondary and primary data sources. First, we reviewed the literature concerning anti-consumption, consumer activism, political consumerism, and consumer boycotts. As focusing on the case of Polish consumers, we also overviewed research reports and press articles addressing and commenting on the current consumer behavior trends. To gather the primary data, we used a qualitative research method, namely netnography. We analyzed content posted by the members of Polish-speaking Facebook groups constituted around the issues of boycotting. The results of our study prove that current boycotts cross the border of media ones and achieve the form of market boycotts. Consumers participating in boycotts use both communicational (like unfavorable comments posted on social media of boycotted brands) and real actions (like protesting in front of boycotting shops). Also, the data indicated that the most significant triggers of boycotting behavior displayed by Polish consumers are moral outrage and a sense of compassion. When it comes to identifying the possibility of achieving a durable change for the sake of creating a more sustainable civil society, our results deliver cautious optimism. Although both the circumstances and the features of individuals engaged in the current boycotts depict that they are strong reciprocators, judging the ultimate consequences of consumer aroused activity and, consequently, the boycotts' efficacy needs a longer time.

Keywords: consumer boycotts, consumer citizenship, collective activism, war crisis, netnography

INTRODUCTION

The war in Ukraine we have witnessed since late February 2022 caused the unprecedented reaction of both governments and societies all over the democratic world. The economic sanctions imposed on the Russian economy let most global brands withdraw from this market. But several brands have resisted this movement and, at least partly, keep their businesses going. It has not escaped public attention and triggered enormous consumer outrage. When utilizing social media and other means of word-of-mouth communication, consumers decided to use "the power of their wallets" and started to call for global consumer boycotts. Although armed conflicts or political tensions already worked as boycott incentives in the past (Chavis & Leslie, 2009; Heilmann, 2016; Trentmann, 2019, Bröckerhoff & Qassoum, 2021), today's scale of boycotting calls and the

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seriousness of their ethical drivers let us state that we are facing a unique situation that may significantly fuel the change toward building more sustainable civil societies.

At the same time that consumers have been involved in supporting Ukraine through collective resistance toward the particular brands and products of Russian origins, their activity has been noticed by journalists and become the topic of media interest. In this way, the discussions on the already known problem of boycott efficacy gained new momentum. Although this topic has inspired researchers to inquire about the possible consequences of international businesses' decisions to operate in the Russian market despite public pressure, there is still a limited number of research directly related to consumer boycott issues. Among the newest publications in economics, we can mostly meet studies on financial market reaction to the companies' decisions to remain in the Russian market (Tosun & Eshraghi, 2022), the consequences of economic sanctions imposed on Russia by Western governments, and international organizations (van Bergeijk, 2022; Welfens, 2022), the overall impact of war for business and society (Lim et al., 2022), and the influence of war on energy and food security (Berkhout et al., 2022; Bergevoet et al., 2022; Finley & Krane, 2022).

> **"Our study is aimed to identify the character, motives, and tools of ongoing boycotts and thus estimate their actual and probable effectiveness."**

Since a search for papers discussing current boycotts from a consumer angle did not reveal satisfying results, we decided to address this gap by investigating the problem in the example of Polish consumers. Our study is aimed to identify the character, motives, and tools of ongoing boycotts and thus estimate their actual and probable effectiveness. In this paper, we pose the following research questions:

1. What type of consumer boycotts do we currently observe?

2. What are the aims and motives of current boycotting?

3. Will the noticed boycotting attempts result in the prospected ends?

Considering the seriousness of ethical abuses, their range, and the rising sense of a global war risk, we also pose the question if current boycotts' participants disclose the features of strongly reciprocal consumers. Meeting the indicated goals, we utilized both secondary and primary data sources. First, we reviewed the literature concerning anti-consumption, consumer activism, political consumerism, and, finally, consumer boycotts. Since focusing on the case of Polish consumers, we also overviewed research reports and press articles addressing and commenting on the current consumer behavior trends in Poland. To conceptualize the research problem, we drew from Friedman's (1991) taxonomy of boycotts and Hahn and Albert's concept of strong reciprocators in consumer boycotts (2017). When gathering the primary data, we used a qualitative research method, namely netnography. The analyses were based on the content posted by the members of Polish-language Facebook groups centered around the issues of boycotting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Along with the development of consumer societies, individuals more and more realized that the simple acts of purchasing may be used not solely for satisfying their consumption needs. Indeed, having these needs met or even over-satisfied (what is identified as hyper-consumption), the acts of buying and, more significantly, resisting buying certain commodities may be used as a manifestation of personal values and opinions. The latter case Cherrier et al. (2011) recognized as intentional non-consumption and distinguished it from incidental (resigning from buying a less preferred product) and ineligible (when legal limitations are imposed

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on market circulation and exclude consumers of certain characteristics from buying the product) ones. Since intentional non-consumption may be driven by different incentives (intentions) it is represented by several behaviors named an anti-consumption. Literally, anti-consumption should be understood as "against consumption", but for clearer conceptualization, we should take a broader approach to this term. According to the early definition introduced by Zavestoski (2002), anti-consumption means "resistance to, distaste of, or even resentment or rejection of consumption." Newer definitions stress the deliberate nature of anti-consumption. For example, Makri et al. (2020) propose to understand anti-consumption as "intentionally and meaningfully excluding or cutting goods from one's consumption routine or reusing once acquired goods with the goal of avoiding consumption." Lee et. al (2011) classify anti-consumption into three overlapping phenomena: reject, restrict, and reclaim. Rejecting means that individuals intentionally and meaningfully exclude particular goods from their consumption. If it is not possible, they may at least restrict (limit) their consumption. In turn, reclaiming relates to both prosumption (self-production) and reusing products or their parts for different ends (upcycling). As a result, Lee (2022) looks at anti-consumption as an umbrella term. Within its realm, this author locates the phenomena ranging from voluntary simplification, minimalism, and downshifting driven by ethical/moral and sustainable consumption, identity construction and symbolic concerns, and consumer resistance, to consumer activism, individual, group, or organizational boycotting and societal or nation-level trade sanctions, and product category and brand avoidance. To properly settle our discussion on consumer boycotts within other anti-consumption phenomena, it is worth taking a closer look at the consumers who decide to take anti-consumption actions. Considering two variables, namely the possible purpose and the possible object of anti-consumption, Iyer and Muncy (2009) distinguish four types of individuals: global impact consumers, simplifiers, anti-loyal consumers, and market activists. The object of anti-consumption

undertaken by global impact consumers is all consumption, and their actions are aimed to benefit society as a whole or the planet. Simplifiers also stand against consumption in general, but they do it for personal concerns (they want to put themselves in contrary to consumerism). Similarly, anti-loyalists care the most about meeting their own needs, but the objects they avoid buying are particular brands or products. The last type - market activists, play a crucial role when concerning consumer boycotts since they strive to use their purchasing power to impact societal issues. Accordingly, they reduce the purchases of chosen brands or products or abound them to gain benefits for society or the environment.

Boycotting is thus deeply rooted in consumer activism which makes authors describe it as a form of activism through the market (Jebe, 2011; Lightfoot, 2019). Curtin et al. (2010) defined activism as "any behavior undertaken with the intention of creating some kind of social improvement". In more detail, activism was described by Klar and Kasser (2009) who stated that it regards "the behavior of advocating some political cause (for instance, protecting the environment, human rights issues, opposing abortion, or preventing wars) via any of a large array of possible means, ranging, for example, from institutionalized acts such as starting a petition to unconventional acts such as civil disobedience." Peattie and Samuel (2018) highlight that however we define activism, it brings a profound and globalized force for change. The change is to improve many different dimensions of social life. It is also visible when we consider the findings of Lang and Gabriel (2005), who followed through the history of consumer activism. Accordingly, the first stage of activism development was related to the emergence of consumer cooperatives in the 19th century for protecting consumer rights. Also the following steps in activism development resulted from a further increase in consumer protection standards. They were related to the occurrence of consumer organizations and led by individual actions taken by activists to break the dominance of big corporations over the consumers. The

peak development of consumer activism dated to the 1990s was pointed out by Lang and Gabriel (2005) as alternative consumerism. Since the main assumption backgrounding this kind of activism is a conviction that consumers are legitimated and obliged to use their purchasing power to achieve environmental and social (ethical) ends it goes along with political consumerism also described as ethical shopping, ethical purchase behavior, ethical consumption, political consumption or critical consumerism (Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007). Indeed, when looking at the literature on political consumerism we can easily recognize the similarities on how the definitions of this phenomena remain the overall concept of consumer activity. For example in one of the very first books on political consumerism Micheletti & Stolle (2004) describe it as "a use of market action as an arena for politics, and consumer choice as an political tool." Echegaray (2015) brings political consumerism even closer to what we know as consumer activism by stating that political consumerism is "the act of influencing producers or choosing products on the basis of their ethical or socio-environmental credentials, to bring about change in power relations or in the distribution of public goods." Likewise Lightfoot (2019) states that consumer activism represents the most common manifestation of political engagement. Consequently, in this article we consider the two phenomena equivalent, and thus assume that political consumerism represents the dominant path in current consumer activism efforts.

The emergence of the political consumerism concept allowed academics to look at consumers from a different angle. Instead of analyzing the behaviors of a market actor whose relations to companies have a solely economic nature, they have introduced the consumer-citizen concept (Parker, 1999; Dobson, 2007; Defila et al., 2018; Hatayama, 2019). Also known as the consumer-citizen binary (Cabrera & Williams, 2014) or hybrid consumer-citizen (Johnston, 2008), this category draws from both consumerism and citizenship as it combines individual self-interest with the collective responsibility for social or environmental common goods. It also establishes an analogy

between purchasing and political voting processes represented by the expression "consumption as voting" (Dickinson & Hollander, 1991; Dickinson & Carsky, 2005; Shaw et al., 2006; Moraes et al., 2011; Zhang, 2015). Although Persky (1993) proved this analogy has its origins already in Frank A. Fetter's book published in 1905, the increase in consumer activity and thus their interest in ethical consumption noticed 90 years later significantly recovered the discussion on this concept. An equation between consumption and the voting process also carries noticeable consequences for understanding consumer sovereignty. No longer can we interpret it according to a neo-classical standpoint, i.e. to assume consumer privilege to choose freely from the market offer deriving from the market mechanism itself and not engaging their consciousness. Korthals (2001) advocates that this passive approach should be replaced by the concept of active or alert consumer sovereignty, which generally goes along with the original interpretation that Hutt (1940) put to the term consumer sovereignty he coined himself in 1936. Labeling this active sovereignty as the responsible one, Sassatelli (2015) stated that it reevaluates the notion of economic utility by involving both collective goods and private happiness (achieved by creative fulfillment of individual as opposed to just acquiring goods). To utilize their purchasing power for achieving common ethical or environmental goals, actively sovereign consumers may either withdraw from the relation with a particular brand or product (leave the market, boycott the brand/product) or start purchasing products of a chosen brand or type (enter the market, participate in buycotts/reverse boycotts/anti-boycotts). Thus the responsible sovereignty notion let them involve one of two mechanisms – punishing producers for improper acts or awarding them for the proper ones. The visibility and efficacy of such consumer behaviors increases if only the behaviors are taken collectively.

The first and thus most commonly manifested form of political consumerism is consumer boycott. Smith (2001) defined a general concept of boycott as "an organized action leading to the withdrawal of as many people as possible from previously established

relationships of a political, social, or economic nature." When analyzing the history of such protests in the USA, Friedman (1985) delivered a definition stating that a consumer boycott is "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace." Thus we can see boycotts as the consumer if only the entity who withdraws from the relationship with company or brand is an individual consumer and the relation is of an economic nature (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997). But participation in a boycott differs from simple consumer decision to stop buying. The boycott has organizers and requires collective efforts (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Sen et al., 2001). Indeed, Smith (2001) admitted that consumer boycotts sometimes result from the spontaneous behavior of individuals, but this may happen only in unique circumstances. In most cases, boycott is initiated by organizers called pressure groups or sponsors, and they are either ad hoc consumer groups or non-profit organizations (Klein et al., 2004).

Boycotts differ according to their purposes. Considering these purposes, Sen et al. (2001) recognized two different types of boycotts. The first one they called the economic or marketing policy boycott and described it as aimed at changing the boycott target's marketing practices. The second they called political or social/ethical control boycott and related to the aim of pressing boycott target to specific ethical or socially responsible actions (or to stop the activities that are unethical or irresponsible ones). In many cases, the party which offended boycotters serves as a target for their action. But it may also happen that boycott participants cannot reach the offending entity, and thus they focus their efforts on the related parties that are expected to be able to press the original one. Noticing this, Friedman (1985) introduced a distinction between direct (non-surrogate) boycotts described in the first case and indirect (surrogate) boycotts in the second case. Complementing Friedman's taxonomy Abosag (2010) proposed the distinction between micro-boycott and macro-boycott. The first takes the direct form since it targets particular brands and companies deemed unethical or injustice. The

second is indirect since it reflects the situation when boycotters target their actions against the policies of the government of the country by breaking off their relations with companies and brands that originate in this country. Although boycotts may vary in time and spatial dimensions, the more significant classification introduced by Friedman (1991) considers the level of development and thus the form of boycotting action. Every boycott appears and grows by achieving the subsequent steps. On the other hand, it may finish at any stage of this process if only the purposes of the pressure group are achieved or the action just loses social support. According to Friedman's examination, four types of consumer boycotts appear:

1. Action-considered boycott – boycott action is announced as considered by a pressure group.
2. Action-requested boycott – sponsors announce their decision to begin the boycott and request consumers' participation.
3. Action-organized boycott – sponsors announce that boycott is organized and keep the prospects informed of what preparations are underway.
4. Action-taken boycott – boycott goes beyond the earlier announcements and organization. Sponsors initiate demonstrations and picket lines that find followers among consumers.

Generally, the first two steps indicate a media-oriented boycott since all the pressure groups do, rely on disseminating information and is limited to getting media interest. All four steps are enclosed in a market-oriented boycott that exceeds communication and engages consumers in real action. This classification of boycotts clearly shows that their organizers may use a vast range of tools to reach the prospects. Among them, Koku (2011) elicits traditionally used means like fliers, newspapers, magazines, TV, radios, and also the new tool, namely the internet. The last one became the primary tool for contemporary pressure groups since it offers quick, easy, and cheap communication with numerous people and breaks down the barrier of their geographical dispersion. Accordingly, the rising number of authors evidence the usage of

social media (mainly Facebook and Twitter) to start and conduct boycotts (Kang, 2012; Makarem & Jae, 2016; Ginder & Kwon, 2020). The type of boycott is also determined by the problem that stirred public anxiety. Within the discussion on the most common boycott reasons, Balabanis (2013) points out the abuses in environmental protection, animal rights or human rights, unfair labor practices, health concerns, and social and political issues.

In the literature on consumer boycotts, most concerns are related to the motives that make individuals join a boycott action and further to boycott efficacy. When analyzing the outcomes of empirical research, Hoffmann (2001) categorized the individual antecedents of boycott participation into three groups: triggers, promoters, and inhibitors. The first category includes all the variables that directly prompt the individual to consider participating in a boycott. They represent negative emotions like anger felt because of the abusive behavior of the target. Promoters encompass the factors encouraging the consumer to join the boycott and may derive from both moral reflections and instrumental calculations regarding the likelihood of boycott success. The inhibitors are threefold. They include the perceived costs resulting from the necessity to limit the consumption of certain products, counter-arguments like the low perceived effectiveness of boycott, and positive opinion on the targeted brand. A majority of the early publications on boycotters' motivation focused on the promoters more than inhibitors or triggers. In particular, the authors investigated the rational relationship between antecedents of boycott participation and the following boycott behaviors, i.e. undertook the cost-benefit approach. The assumption that consumers are willing to participate in a boycott when the personal benefits they perceive exceed the perceived costs of such engagement is, for example, reflected in the publication of Sen et al. (2001), who based their studies on social dilemma theory. Also, John and Klein (2003) drew from psychological achievements to consider utility gain or loss from boycott participation, and Braunsberger and Buckler (2011) aimed their research not only at exploring consumer intent to participate in boycott but also at the perceived costs of boycotting.

A combination of these rational cost-benefit calculations with socio-psychological theories approach led Albrecht et al. (2013) to the conclusion that consumer's intention to participate in a boycott depends on the credibility of a call to join a boycott, consumer involvement in a boycott's underlying cause, and the perceived success likelihood of a boycott fueled by perceived participation of others. As the main inhibitor of boycott participation, they found consumers' brand commitment.

More recent research moves away from these explanations and tends to relate motivation for participating in a boycott to individual consumer features. For example, Fernandes (2020) proved that motivation to withdraw from the market relation with a company or brand varies according to consumers' beliefs about the proper order of society and the ways of its achievement, i.e. political ideology they represent. A valuable contribution to the discussion of motives to participate in the boycott was delivered by Hahn and Albert (2017), who introduced the notion of strong reciprocity. Their approach draws from experimental economics and social psychology to explain the behavioral motives of such consumers who join boycotts even if they perceive their private costs as higher than private benefits. Thus the authors contrast such a strongly reciprocal consumer (the one who is motivated by a desire to reciprocate the unfair behavior of others, even if doing so entails high costs) with a self-regarding consumer, who is driven by the maximization of private utility. Following this, Jang (2020) introduced the distinction between consumers holding indirect reciprocity concerns and these whose reciprocity concerns are the direct ones. Only the first type mirrors the previous findings of Hahn and Albert, since it regards the consumers who are ready to boycott a firm that conducts acts that worsen the life of other people. Consumers with direct reciprocity concerns, similarly to self-regarding ones, will only boycott a firm when it affects their own utility.

On the one hand, the outcomes of many pieces of research proved that effective consumer boycott announcements might cause significant and measurable financial losses to the target entity

(Pruitt & Friedman, 1986; Tomlin, 2019). On the other hand, the history of political consumerism reveals numerous examples of boycott failures. The issue of their effectiveness thus is one of the increasingly discussed themes in the literature on boycotting. When searching for the reasons for consumer boycotts' ineffectiveness, Delacote (2009) points out coordination problems and free riding. The latter consists of not participating in the boycott while hoping for it to succeed, mostly because of high personal costs that the individual does not want to pay, even though they agree with the core idea of the boycott. Other authors indicated additionally the problem of small agent (John & Klein, 2003; Hoffmann & Müller, 2009; Farah & Newman, 2010). It denotes a conviction that the individual potential contribution to the boycott is too small to cause any harm to the target entity. Yuksel et al. (2020) further developed the understanding of this problem by introducing the name "small-agent rationalization" (SAR) and advocating that SAR "is a thought process that occurs when people begin accepting inequity in the world as a common occurrence and that they alone at the "micro-level" are incapable of enacting change within a "macro-level" system". Neureiter and Bhattacharya's (2021) research sheds new light on consumer boycotts' efficacy by relating them to the polarization of the political environment. Taking the pattern of the US society, these authors unveiled that a boycott may be counter-effective if consumers sympathize with different political options and hold different opinions on the problem that is a core of this boycott. If the activity of the company or brand touches on a highly sensitive issue, the resulting controversy elicits a boycott only among these consumers who settle themselves on the other side of the political spectrum. Among the rest of the consumers, there may develop a counter boycott (buycott) that relies on intensifying their purchases to show their support for the company or brand. In this way, the actual efficacy of the initial boycott depends on whether the stance taken by the company is congruent with the political beliefs of the majority of its customers, i.e. whether the boycott rallies more followers than the ensuing

buycott. Regardless of the nature of the mechanism staying behind consumer decision to join the boycott, Lasarov et al. (2021) notice that as the boycott continues, the individual participation declines, which may visibly weaken the boycott results. Their study proved a "heat-up" phase at the beginning of the boycott and a "cool-down" phase which comes along with the time the boycott is continuous. Accordingly, in the beginning, boycott participation is fueled by expressive drivers, i.e. by affects, emotions, and accompanying moral doubts arousing around the core issue of the boycott. As the time passes, the instrumental drivers take the floor. It means that boycotters start to deliberate whether or not the boycott will be successful and what sacrifices they are to make to continue their withstanding with other boycotters. Since most of the factors lowering boycott success emerge when we look at boycott participation through the lenses of cost-benefit calculations, Hahn and Albert (2017) argue that the existence of strongly reciprocal participants (displaying indirect reciprocity concerns) helps to overcome at least part of them. Strong reciprocals contribute to the success of consumer boycotts because they are willing to join a boycott even in unfavorable conditions of the environment. They readily reward cooperation among boycotters and punish free-riding consumers.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we utilized both secondary and primary data sources. Within the empirical part of our research, we analyzed the research reports and press articles commenting on the current boycotting actions upheld in Poland due to the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The findings based on these secondary sources created a background for the crucial phase of our research employing primary data collection. The boycott we analyze still lasts at the moment we present our outcomes. Furthermore, it has been triggered by the still-lasting war, the results, and the length of which no one can be sure. Our research is thus exploratory in nature, and it made us utilize a qualitative research method, namely netnography.

Kozinets (1998) defined netnography as:

…a written account resulting from fieldwork studying the cultures and communities that emerge from on-line, computer mediated, or internet-based communications, where both the field work and the textual account are methodologically informed by the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology.

To follow the rigor of the methodical procedure recommended by Kozinets (2002), we started our inquiry by choosing appropriate online communication platforms. Since the Russian invasion began in late February 2022, Polish consumers have been intensively utilizing social media and especially Facebook, to share information on the war. Thus our choice to research Facebook groups seemed to be a natural decision. Initially, we intended to analyze the content posted in the groups discussing the issues of the war in general. But, after the preliminary recognition, we realized that first they mainly serve as platforms for exchanging offers of help to refugees, and second, most of them include local communities only. Thus we decided to revise our assumptions and analyze the statements posted in smaller groups centering directly around the issues of boycotting. Narrowing the choice only to publicly accessible ones, we ultimately focused on the four of them and conducted a non-participant observation concerning the content posted by their members since the groups have been created, i.e.

from March 2022 to the end of May 2022 (in the case of one group we also analyzed previous posts, uploaded before the first date). This period indicates the time scope of our research.

The chosen groups differ in size, nature, and the date they occurred on Facebook. The first one, named "The boycott of Russian products" (Bojkot produktów rosyjskich), was established already in 2014. It was a time when, in fact, the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine was initiated. The three remaining groups were created in March 2022, so their occurrence was directly inspired by the current events in Ukraine. Unlike the first group, all the other ones regard boycotting companies/brands not withdrawn from the Russian market, although the following sets of international sanctions had been imposed on this country. The name of the second group - "Boycott of the companies supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine" (Bojkot firm wspierających rosyjską inwazję na Ukrainę), shows that it is not focused on any specific company or brand. Adversely, the names of the third and fourth group precisely point out the two brands targeted in current boycotts. The third group has been called "Auchan, Leroy Merlin boycott - solidarity with Ukraine" (Bojkot Auchan, Leroy Merlin - solidarni z Ukrainą), and the fourth one "Leroy Merlin boycott!!!!!" (Bojkot Leroy Merlin!!!!!). Detailed metrics of all researched groups are disclosed in Table 1.

Table 1

The comparison of the researched Facebook groups*

No.	Name	The date of establishing	Participants	Activity	Link
1.	The boycott of Russian products	August 12th, 2014	639 (no changes within the research period)	5 new posts within the last month	https://www.facebook.com/groups/849622861722193
2.	Boycott of the companies supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine	March 14th, 2022	122 (the rise by 1 within the research period)	0 new posts within the last month	https://www.facebook.com/groups/658936752099376/about
3.	Auchan, Leroy Merlin boycott - solidarity with Ukraine	March 31st, 2022	392 (the rise by 20 within the research period)	13 new posts within the last month	https://www.facebook.com/groups/488960282770684
4.	Leroy Merlin boycott!!!!!	March 11th, 2022	616 (the drop by 23 within the research period)	20 new posts within the last month	https://www.facebook.com/groups/757722355209199

*situation as at May 30th, 2022.
Source: Own elaboration based on Facebook statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although the focus of this research paper is on the boycotts announced in Poland, we need to highlight that our research problem has a broader international background. Currently, similar boycotts are held worldwide since they result from the international public outrage in the face of the global threat of Russia's aggression on Ukraine. This consumer activism was brought to life and empowered by both the direct appeals for help issued by the Ukrainian government representatives and economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation by the governments of particular states and international organizations.

The political situation, as well as the social and economic consequences of the invasion, have been currently monitored by institutions and researchers in different fields. Aside from analytical value, this is also one more way public opinion may pressure companies to pull out of Russia. Respectively, since the very beginning of the war, the scientists from Yale School of Management have been tracking the companies' responses to the call to withdraw their operations from the Russian market (Yale School of Management Chief Executive Leadership Institute, 2022, October 13). At the moment of writing this paper, i.e. at the end of May 2022, they counted over 1000 companies that had already announced their departure. Although initially, the research team assumed a simple distinction between the companies that decided to withdraw and remain, the market reality has complicated to such an extent that today, we have five lists representing five different attitudes towards the boycott appeals. They are additionally graded for the completeness of withdrawal by using a school-style letter grade scale (ranging from A to F). Among these five categories, the researchers recognized: withdrawal (e.g. exit Russian market, sell Russian assets to local management and exit completely, remove products from Russia), suspension (e.g. suspend operations in Russia, suspend purchases in Russia, suspend shipment to Russia), scaling back (e.g. limiting production in Russia, suspend operations in Russia except essentials, suspend consulting service but not core business), buying time (e.g. freeze

new business in Russia, stopped new investments, stopped advertising/new clinical trials in Russia), and digging in (e.g. uninterrupted operating in Russia, still cooperating with dealers in Russia, business as usual, still supporting Russian partners). Of course, the highest public disapproval rises to the last category, and the companies on this list, known as the list of shame, are the most obvious targets for consumer boycotts.

When it comes to public discussion on current boycotting behaviors of Polish consumers, there is little objective information indicating the scale and thus the effectiveness of ongoing boycotts. Moreover, the scarce research conducted on this topic delivers inconsistent outcomes. On the 23rd of March, PKO Research, the analytical unit of the largest Polish bank PKO BP, unveiled on Twitter information that proves the high efficacy of consumer boycotts (PKO Research, 2022, March 23). Based on the data drawn from PKO BP card payments (the bank issued approximately 7.5 million debit cards) between the 9th of January and the 20th of March of the current year, they showed that retail networks that remained active in Russia despite the war had lower turnover growth in sales dynamics than competitors. Although the analysts did not reveal the particular brands they investigated, public opinion had no trouble recognizing the French chains Auchan and Leroy Merlin. Other research was conducted among Polish consumers between March 18th and 21st by Havas Media Group (Wirtualne Media, 2022, April 6) with the use of a survey method. It revealed that although 87% of Poles have heard about the current boycotts, as many as 57% declared not to participate. On the other hand, 16% of Poles admitted that they resigned from earlier planned purchases of the boycotted brands, and 20% stated not to plan to purchase boycotted brands in the future. In turn, the report issued by the analytical-research platform UCE Research on the 14th of April disclosed that Poles did not boycott the retail chains as much as they had announced (UCE GROUP LTD., 2022, April 20). In collaboration with tech company Proxi.cloud, UCE Research used the geofencing method to measure customer traffic in different retail chains. They monitored 481200 consumers and 1980 shops located all over Poland.

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The comparisons included the data achieved in two periods. The first one lasted from the 24th of January to the 23rd of February, and the second from the 24th of February to the 26th of March, 2022. Among the three French brands operating in the Russian market at that time, namely Auchan, Decathlon, and Leroy Merlin, only the latter noted evidently lower customer traffic when compared to the competitive brands after the war in Ukraine began. In both remaining chains, Auchan and Decathlon, researchers denoted rising customer traffic, and this rise was higher than in the case of competitors. Of course, these outcomes may have been biased by the fact that many Polish consumers increased their purchases of grocery and touristic products offered by Auchan and Decathlon to help Ukrainians. Also, measuring customer traffic tells nothing about sales volume in the researched chains. The report YouGov BrandIndex recently issued by research agency Inquiry (Wirtualne Media, 2022, May 25) indicates the severe crisis of a brand image concerning Auchan, Leroy Merlin, and Decathlon in Poland. Since the Russian aggression in Ukraine began, they have been facing a significant increase in negative online reviews about themselves. Most strongly, consumers responded to the call for a boycott of Leroy Merlin. In the case of Decathlon, the number of unfavorable comments posted on the internet significantly decreased in reaction to the brand's decision to withdraw from the Russian market taken at the end of March. What is more, according to YouGov BrandIndex, the boycotted brands also lost a lot when considering their employer image. This worsening general image influenced consumers' declarations not to buy boycotted brands.

To understand further the essence and nature of ongoing boycotts, we need to immerse ourselves in the netnography results. First of all, every group we observed works as a platform for sharing and updating information on decisions and actions concerning actual and prospective boycott targets, as well as the boycotting tools and events that participants may join. Behind this first impression, we can find the comments highlighting boycotts' nature, goals and motives, and predictions regarding their efficiency.

Irrespective of the character of the group – boycotting particular brands, boycotting all products branded by companies still operating in Russia, or boycotting products of Russian origin, participants persuade consumers to undertake all these activities and give examples of their anti-consumption behaviors by uploading links to audio-video relations on YouTube (e.g. group 3, posted on May 5th). Their posts include both the intentions to stop buying boycotted brands *"Neither I nor any of my family members and friends will never buy anything in Leroy Merlin, Decathlon or Auchan"* (group 1, posted on March 15th); *"I have been buying at Leroy Merlin a lot in the time, but after February 24th, I will never shop there anymore or at any other chain that has not stopped a mass killer of children."* (group 4, posted on April 21st), and the declarations of already taken activities *"Just a few weeks ago I thought that shopping somewhere else than Auchan was impossible because there was a wide choice, because it was eco-friendly, etc... I have been avoiding Auchan for over a month now, and I cannot tell the difference!!!"* (group 4, posted on March 29th). The latter includes not only stopping purchases but also withdrawing from the loyalty programs offered by targeted chains **"I just threw their PRO card into the trash bin for plastic recyclings at Leroy Merlin. And I do not give a damn about their points, freebies, etc."** (group 3, posted on April 6th). Although some participants mentioned difficulties connected with their decision to stop buying certain brands, they could easily legitimate such sacrifices *"Instead of Auchan, I now go to small neighborhood stores. Maybe more expensive, but they do not support Russia."* (group 3, posted on April 5th); *"Too bad, I did my main shopping there for years! Now my foot will not stand there until they stop supporting the murderer-Putin."* (group 4, posted on April 5th). Interestingly, among all researched posts, we found only one suggestion to supplement ongoing boycotts with buycotts of these brands which took withdrawal decisions with no doubts and delays *"We need to boycott the more greedy companies and appreciate the more ethical ones - give the incentive that it pays more to be ethical...."* (group 1, posted on April 1st).

When analyzing different posts in light of boycotters' motivations, we notice an enormous emotional charge accompanying the uploaded statements. Among the one-word comments, we found statements like *"the baseness"*, *"bastardry and cynicism"*, and *"shame!"*. The longer posts revealed even more emotional engagement of their authors: *"This is outrageous! Any honest person who has not yet lost sensitivity to the tragedy has a MORAL OBLIGATION to oppose this by boycotting this treacherous network. People are dying in the war unleashed by the Russians, children are being killed, and they are planning their expansion into the Russian market. SCANDAL and complete bestiality!!!!!!"* (group 1, posted on March 12th); *"WE DO NOT GIVE UP! COOPERATION WITH MURDERERS MEANS CO-RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COMMITTED CRIMES"* (group 3, posted on April 6th); *"… everyone can choose to BE HUMAN, or the other...!!!"* (group 4, posted on May 3rd). Importantly, the level of emotional stir did not lower in time. We found emotional posts both at the beginning and at the end of the researched period. Except for these triggers, we also met more rational motives called promoters: *"Not all politicians know how much transport they have continued to let through* [the borders], *and therefore how ineffective the sanctions to date have been. It is worth making Europe aware of this. The more grassroots signals (consumer pressure, social media campaigns, press articles, protests, and blockades), the greater the chance that MEPs will take further steps."* (group 3, posted on April 5th); *"… The decision of some stores to stay in Russia is both a financial and image enhancement of Putin's criminal regime."* (group 3, posted on April 18th); *"Your purchases… support the operations of Leroy Marlin in Russia, which uses the tax revenue generated in this way to finance Russian war machine. If Ukraine collapses in two years, Russia will use this money to finance an attack on Poland."* (group 4, posted on April 13th). The members of researched communities find their motivation also in the fact that ongoing boycotts are held internationally: *"Our boycott action is not Polish and not Ukrainian - it is Polish-Ukrainian. Among both participants and organizers of our events, there are about half people from Poland and half from Ukraine. In large part, this is due to the people of Euromaidan-Warszawa and the many local Ukrainian groups that organize boycott demonstrations throughout Poland."* (group 1, content posted on April 24th).

When discussing the issue of boycott efficacy, the participants revealed both their beliefs that boycotts will make a difference, and their fears that the collective grassroots efforts will not succeed. The first approach we could see in the statements: *"Today, there are far fewer customers in the Auchan market in Poznan. The parking lot is empty, and the Ukrainian or Russian language cannot be heard. Ukrainians are setting an example, they went shopping somewhere else. At last, something is starting to happen ... Let's keep it up."* (group 4, posted on March 24th). *"Every protest counts, both the loud one and the personal one of each of us."* (group 3, posted on April 10th); *"Geolocation data proves that Polish largest Auchan, Leroy Merlin, and Decathlon outlets have finally felt the effects of the consumer boycott."* (group 3, posted on April 14th). The participants also find out the effects of their activity indirectly, when recognizing that targeted companies started hiding the origin of the commodities on stock: *"Leroy Merlin reacted to our information that they still sell Russian products! They solved the problem by changing the description of country of origin from Russia to Poland."* (group 3, posted on May 22nd). The doubts concerning boycotts' effectiveness were related to organizational problems: *"It is very difficult to assemble activists, and without formalized action beyond the common movement, it will be difficult to be highly effective in the longer perspective."* (group 4, posted on March 22nd); *"There are still a lot of people who do not know there is a boycott at all, and those who want to do something end up in one group or the other - communication between the groups so far is non-existent."* (group 3, posted on April 28th), or the range of undertaken activities *"…this movement has a chance to do something really good only if we put pressure on the whole network [sales chain], not just the Polish branch."* (group 4, posted on May 27th). Other boycott inhibitors were listed indirectly

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in posts uploaded to brief other participants on how to respond to the most common doubts. They included the statements like *"I have no interest in politics"; "And who will help us when Putin invades Poland?"; "I feel sorry for Ukrainians, but I got used to Leroy Merlin, and I will continue to buy here."* The next type of inhibitor emerges when considering the disadvantages of communication through the internet or just the internet hazards. One of the activists posted a warning about Russian propaganda trolling that may be easily used as the source of arguments against protesting (group 1, posted on April 24th). According to the author of this post, there were three waves of disrupting comments issued by false online profiles since the Russian aggression started in Ukraine. The first wave included statements like: *"If you have not protested on all the other issues you could protest on, then you must not protest now."* The second wave was based on the false rationale: *"If you do not do things that you physically cannot do, then you must not do things that are physically possible for you"* (e.g. resigning from purchasing other Russian products when it is impossible to give up buying Russian gas). The third wave suggested that most customers and employees of the boycotted store chains are Ukrainians, and they do not care about the boycott as much as Poles.

As we found out within the researched groups, average consumers who want to show their solidarity with Ukraine by boycott participation have a limited range of tools at their disposal. Namely, they may share information about boycotts with friends and relatives and stop buying boycotted products or brands. The set of tools for use by activists is much richer. It encompasses: arranging picket lines outside or inside the store, marking products placed on the shop shelves to inform other consumers about their country of origin, swapping product labels for these comprising anti-war statements to remind customers that by buying in a particular shop, they support Russian aggression, attaching the information on the war to product labels, distributing leaflets, chatting with consumers entering the shop to make them change their decision to buy there, designing and disseminating printed and electronic posters or other visual content, uploading posts on social media and other internet platforms, or originating catchy buzzword that encourages consumers to join the boycott.

CONCLUSIONS

The first general thought we draw from this research is the unprecedented engagement of Polish consumers in current boycotting activities. Although it mainly concerns boycotting the brands still operating on the Russian market despite the sanctions and fewer Russian-origin products, this scale of solidarity and consumer activism we could not have observed since 1989 when communism collapsed in Poland. The findings of both secondary and primary research prove that current boycotts have become a salient problem discussed by Poles. Moreover, they resign from buying targeted brands even if they are not active in encouraging others to do the same.

Answering our first research question, we can classify the currently held boycotts according to different criteria. First, recognizing that their general aim is to stop unethical actions of the targeted entities - in particular, to stop companies from doing business with Russia, and to stop Russian companies' development, thus pushing the Russian government to stop the war in Ukraine, they should be called as social/ethical control boycotts. Considering Friedman's taxonomies of boycotts (1991), today we deal with market-oriented boycotts surprisingly differentiated in their character. On the one hand, the ones directed to punish Russian companies i.e. manifested in refraining from buying their products, should be classified as surrogate boycotts (macro-boycotts when following the names proposed by Abosag, 2010). On the other hand, we witness boycotts that simultaneously may be described as direct (micro-boycotts) – since they are focused on particular brands to change their business behaviors, and indirect ones (macro-boycotts)- since the long-lasting aim of the withdrawal of mentioned brands from the Russian market is to stop the war which was induced by Russian aggression.

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Considering the second research question, we argue that the general purpose of the analyzed boycotts is to stop the war in Ukraine. Today's political activism is to achieve it in two ways. First, by enhancing the effects of economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation. Second, by putting moral pressure on the Russian government. In the case of Poles, participating in the boycotts is triggered emotionally by a high moral outrage and a sense of compassion. But considering the length of boycott actions and the unpredictable time and result of the war in Ukraine, it is probable that we are slowly approaching the "cool-down" phase of the boycotts. Thus the motives called rational promoters and inhibitors might emerge in a greater number and rise in their significance. At this point, we need to highlight the risks of interrupting the further development of boycotts. Except for organizational threats that may incentivize the free-riding problem, our study also revealed serious communication risks. The common internet phenomena of trolling already observed by boycott activists utilize small agent rationalization, which, if disseminated broader to the regular consumers, can seriously diminish boycott effectiveness.

The results of our inquiry gave us a legitimation to identify the participants of the researched Facebook groups as strongly reciprocals (manifesting indirect reciprocity concerns). They show strong emotions when discussing the ethical background of boycotts, and in several posts, we can even see a kind of "call to revenge" on the boycotts' targets. The participants also believe their efforts make a deep meaning to the others. For example, one of the participants responded to the doubt that only activists stand for the boycotts (small agent rationalization) by the statement: *"Lots of my friends have joined the boycott although they are not members of this group"* (group 1, posted April 4th). Furthermore, the review of the boycott tools, ideas, and experiences shared between the groups' members signify their high creativity, as well as the high private costs they are ready to pay for the engagement. In consequence, there is a chance to overcome the small agent and free-riding problems and thus achieve high efficacy of the ongoing boycotts. But to answer the third research question, we need to dampen our enthusiasm a bit. It should more resemble cautioned optimist since judging the ultimate consequences of current boycotts requires a longer time.

This study meets some obvious limitations deriving from its exploratory nature and a limited number of research methods. Repeating the research after the boycotts/war finished and employing quantitative research methods to estimate the scale of boycotts would increase the value of our results. Despite mentioned disadvantages, the managerial implications of the findings may be utilized by both pressure groups and brands that have not entirely withdrawn from the Russian market. The first may learn the main boycott inhibitors and how to overcome them, and the second may realize the strength of today's boycotts and thus their long-term consequences for their own market reputation.

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JoVSA • Volume 6, Issue 2 • Fall 2022

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