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Religious Animosity, Ideological Incompatibility, and Rumour as Drivers of Brand Hate and Boycott Intention

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ABSTRACT

Boycott intention is an interesting domain of research and an exciting area to explore. The study is conducted to investigate the relationship between religious animosity (RG), ideological incompatibility (II), rumour (RM), brand hate (BH), boycott intention (BI), country of origin (CO), and market uncertainty (MU). Current research collected data in two time-waves over a period of three months and seventeen days, starting in February 2024. A convenience sampling method was employed to gather the data, and 307 final responses were analyzed. The results supported all hypotheses. It is noted that the positive effect of ideological incompatibility on brand hate is observed. Additionally, there are positive impacts of rumour on brand hate. It is also observed that brand hate has an impact on boycott intention. The results have also supported the partial mediation of brand hate. Moderation of country of origin and market uncertainty has also been supported. The current research makes a significant contribution to a valuable understanding of negative consumer-brand relationships (CBRs) by examining the antecedents of brand hate and its moderators, including boycott intention. The current study also contributes to the body of knowledge by providing an in-depth explanation of the entire model based on social identity theory (SIT).

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1. Introduction

Marketing researchers have considerably examined the role of constructive behaviour, such as brand passion, brand engagement, and brand love, in the context of customer-brand associations (Batra et al., 2012). However, neuroscience and psychological research reveal that negative behavior significantly impact customers' choices more than positive ones (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Zeki & Romaya, 2008). As a result, research has emerged on studying the negative views of customer-brand relationships, with boycott intention, a fundamental negative form of emotion, receiving increasing attention in this era (Kang et al., 2021; Klein et al., 2004; Nguyen et al., 2022). Customers increasingly express negative feelings about the services and products they use through online comments and feedback (Filieri et al., 2018), sharing their negative experiences with a large number of other customers (Sameeni, Ahmad, & Qadeer, 2024). These posts, reviews, and tweets lead to non-purchase behaviors (Curina et al., 2020). Moreover, the propagation of social media enables customers' negative sentiments to reach an extreme level (Brandão & Popoli, 2022), negatively impacting a brand's reputation. Hence, research on customers' negative brand relationships is vital in handling a brand's sales, particularly in the digital era (Filieri et al., 2018; Kucuk, 2019). Consequently, the current study used most of the negative behaviors.

The intention is an intriguing subject and an exciting area for research. Boycott intention breeds deep roots in the minds of consumers. Boycott intentions have a range of devastating effects on specific brands (Klein et al., 2004), as consumers in this state seek substitute brands (Sen et al., 2001) and develop feelings of association with them (Mirza et al., 2020). As a result, brands can face long-lasting harmful effects (Mirza et al., 2020), including a reduction in sales (Mangi & Bilgic, 2024). Moreover, retaining customers like these will be a challenge for brands. In developing economies, various factors play a crucial role in shaping boycott intentions towards specific products or services, including economic, relational, social, ethical, religious, ideological, and political factors (Abosag & Farah, 2014; Pandey et al., 2021; Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009). A boycott intention arises from specific economic and political issues. Boycott has a long history, dating back to Gandhi's boycott of English products (Pandey et al., 2021). The studies that investigate religion-based boycotts in Indonesia and Malaysia (e.g., Kamaludeen, 2016; Ramadhani, 2025; Syarif & Herman, 2024) and the studies that focus on politically motivated brand avoidance and emotional reaction during conflicts in the region (e.g., El-Menawy et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2020) examine the topic of religion-based boycotts. Moreover, we have included the evidence of the Western and multicultural society, such as Crockett and Wallendorf (2004), Klein et al. (2004), and Moorman (2020), that show the impact of political ideology, ethical issues, and corporate activism on boycott behavior and brand hate in secular markets. Additionally, the recent research on the topic of global consumer resistance and identity-based consumption (e.g., King et al., 2023; Newman & Bartels, 2011; Vredenburg et al., 2020) has emphasized that the transformations in consumer-brand relationships in various institutional settings are influenced by partisan and cultural identities. Hence, it is concluded that religiously based boycotts observed in countries dominated by Muslims and also those based on ideology and value resistance in western societies are also observed. Despite the facts about the boycott, the current study is carried out for the following reasons.

Firstly, political boycotts have a long history; however, boycotts based on religion are an emerging area of research (Salma & Aji, 2023). Boycott intentions of Israeli products exist in Muslim communities around the globe due to the recent Israel-Palestine clash (PH et al., 2023). Consumers are more likely to engage in anti-consumption behaviors and resistance by stopping the purchase of specific products/brands, which is often observed in Muslim societies (Dekhil et al., 2017). Boycotts regarding US products have been observed in Muslim countries for over a decade (Muhamad et al., 2019). Moreover, Muslim countries are also involved in boycotting French brands all over the world based on religious issues (Salma & Aji, 2023). Consumers in Muslim countries are engaging in boycotts of various products, including soft drinks (e.g., Pepsi, Coca-Cola), different types of food items (e.g., KFC, McDonald's), and products from Unilever (Puji & Jazil, 2024). Different campaigns are still underway for boycotting products of Israeli-based companies. As a result, the food and construction Industries of Israeli companies are suffering heavy losses, and around 70% revenue of these companies drops after the Israel-Palestine clash (Sentosa & Sitepu, 2024). The net income of Coca-Cola dropped 61%, and its sales were reduced by up to 22.9% in Pakistan. Additionally, 62% of Pakistani consumers claimed that they

are boycotting Israeli brands (Gallup & Gilani Pakistan, 2024). Similarly, a significant decrease in the sales volume of McDonald's and KFC has also been seen due to the Gaza clash (Mangi & Bilgic, 2024). Conversely, local cola companies have experienced a substantial increase in sales, with their market share rising from 2.5% to 12% (Attarwala, 2024). Hence, religious issues provide a potentially solid ground for an effective boycott. However, the essentially religious stimulus in elevating a religion-based boycott is not well investigated (Muhamad et al., 2019), and this phenomenon is still unexplored. Only a few researchers have investigated this phenomenon (Muhamad et al., 2019; Pargament & Hahn, 1986). That is why current research is designed to explore the phenomenon of brand boycotts in Muslim consumers of Pakistan in this context.

Secondly, the brand boycott is a serious issue. It reduces sales (Dekhil et al., 2017) and the profitability of organizations (Cossío-Silva et al., 2019; Lasarov et al., 2023). Boycott intention also damages the brand image or reputation (Abosag & Farah, 2014; Cossío-Silva et al., 2019). If this situation persists, companies may relocate their offices and plants from boycotting countries to other countries, which can result in bankruptcy (Hoffman, 2013; Palacios-Florencio et al., 2021).

Thirdly, several research studies have been conducted on political, economic, relational, social, and ethical factors. However, factors related to the boycotting behavior of Muslim consumers (religious basis) still require further attention (Faza et al., 2022). Accordingly, the present study examines consumer boycotts in conjunction with additional variables—namely brand hate, religious animosity, ideological incompatibility, rumours, market uncertainty, and country of origin—through direct, intervening, and moderating pathways. Fourthly, very few researchers have addressed the issue of boycott intention based on religious factors. Mirza et al. (2020) conducted their research regarding the boycotting of French products. In Pakistan, the sales of popular brands such as KFC, McDonald's, Pepsi, Coke, Nestle, and Unilever have decreased by up to 20-30%, and Pakistani consumers are shifting towards local brands (Attarwala, 2024; Mangi & Bilgic, 2024). In developing economies, various factors play a crucial role in influencing the boycott of specific products or services, including the significant roles of political and religious factors (Abdullah et al., 2024). It is also estimated that some franchises of international brands may close in the next six months due to brand boycotts; there is a need to research brand boycott in the Pakistani cultural context.

In summary, boycott intention is a significant factor that has a devastating impact on the sales of specific brands/products. This phenomenon negatively impacts the sales of brands/products. This research differs from previous research for the following reasons. The prominent uniqueness of current research lies in studying the boycott movement in Muslim communities in the light of conflict in the Middle East, particularly the Israel-Palestine war. This study is unique in that it investigates the relationships among religious animosity (RA), ideological incompatibility (II), rumour (RM), brand hate (BH), boycott intention (BI), market uncertainty (MU), and country of origin (CO) through direct, intervening, and moderating pathways in the context of the Palestine–Israel conflict. This research offers theoretical novelty by presenting an entire research model based on Social Identity Theory (SIT). Similarly, current research contributes to the body of literature by empirically examining the impact of RG and BH. Current research is also an initial effort to examine the mediating role of BH in the relationships between RB, II, and RM and BI, respectively. Finally, this research also contributes to the body of literature by examining the moderating role of CO and MU in the relationship between BH and BI.

2. Literature Review

2-1. Theoretical Framework

In contemporary social reality, diverse socio-cultural and religious viewpoints affect stakeholders of society in positive or negative ways. In the realm of religion, individuals are firmly attached to their religious beliefs, which direct their behavior. Consumer brand relationships are critical for the organization, and negative emotions about brands are gaining much attention from scholars in the current era. Social identity theory mainly explains the customer's emotions (positive or negative).

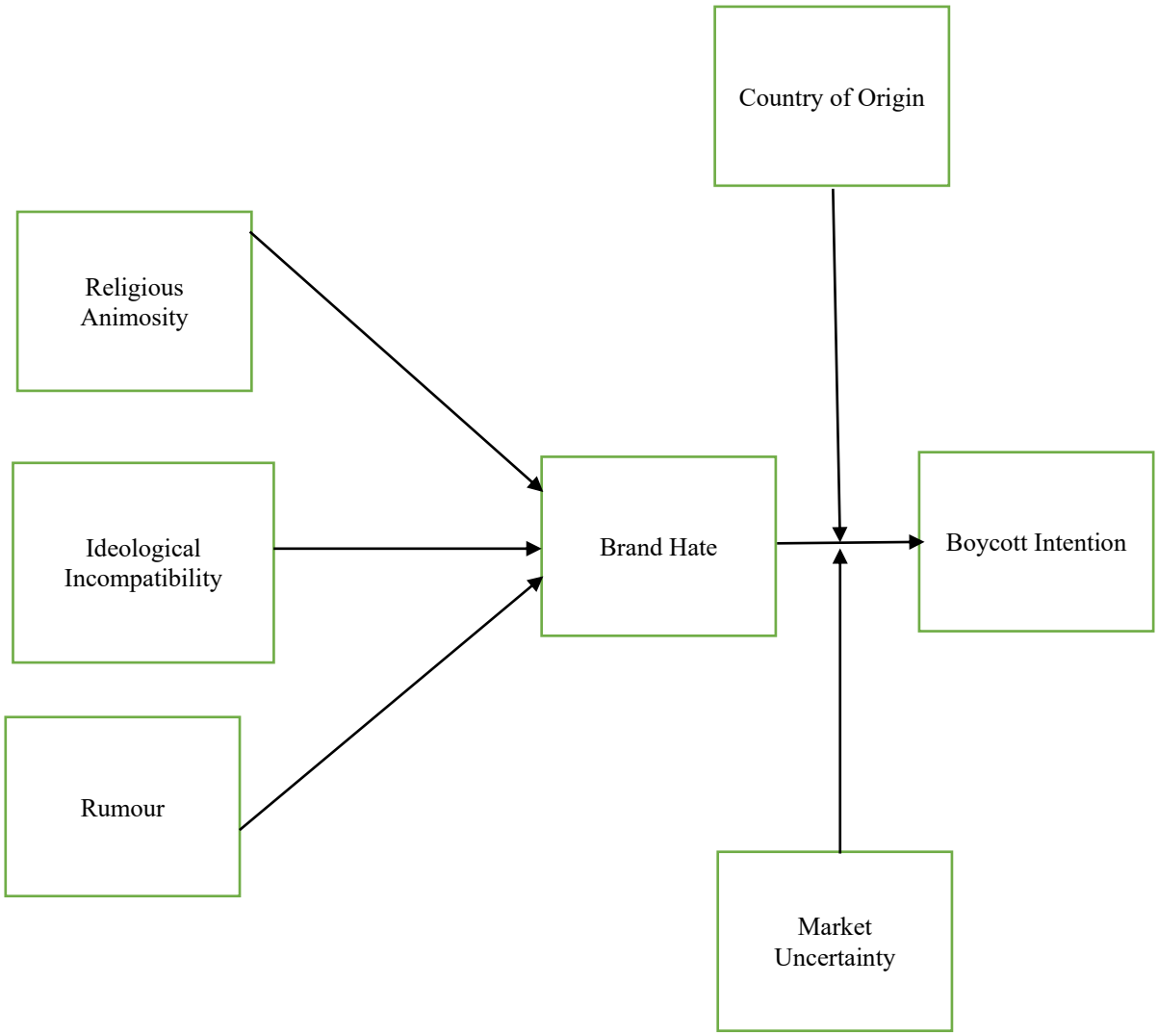


Fig. 1. Hypothesized Research Model

The social identity theory, initially formulated by Tajfel (1978) and subsequently extended by Tajfel and Turner (1979), states that people identify themselves with social groups (e.g., religious, cultural, national) and derive self-esteem from these groups. SIT states that individuals are driven by the desire to have a positive social identity, and whenever their ingroup is threatened, they express themselves emotionally and behaviorally (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This theory posits that individuals categorize others into out-groups and in-groups based on identity and specific characteristics (Aziz & Rahman, 2022). People protect their ingroup against perceived out-groups, particularly those that threaten their core values or beliefs (Brewer, 1999). Within consumer behavior, brands can hold symbolic significance for social groups, and brand conflicts become identity-relevant on a fundamental level (Aaker, 1997; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). This theory contributes to this study in multiple ways. First, it helps in understanding the boycott intentions of consumers based in developing countries. Secondly, this theory is rarely applied in the context of influencer marketing and social media marketing (Farivar & Wang, 2022), but it has been rarely utilized in the context of boycott intentions in developing countries. Thirdly, the rise of boycott trends in developing countries, especially in Muslim societies, has made it imperative to study brand hate and its impact on boycott intention. Fourth, brand hate, due to religious and ideological incompatibility, is significant for brands to explore, but it has been insufficiently investigated.

According to the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), cognitive dissonance occurs when behaviors, values, and beliefs are not consistent. Within the framework of the given research, any Muslim consumer with a strong sense of religion and moral principles can have a feeling of

dissonance when buying or promoting brands that apparently relate to ideologically conflicting organizations or religions. To alleviate this inconvenience, consumers can resort to avoidance responses, negative attitudes, and morally right reasons to justify boycotts. As a result, the fear of religious hostility, lack of ideological compatibility, and exposure to rumors have the potential to increase dissonance, thereby advancing brand hate and increasing the intentions to boycott. The attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1985) provides a further explanation of the interpretation and evaluation of the brand related contravention in the mind of consumers. In this view, individuals aim to play the role of imposing blame on negative occurrences or ethical transgression. Whenever consumers project an otherwise dubious political stance, unethical behavior, or symbolic association to a brand, they tend to believe that such behavior is deliberate and manageable. These attributions of negativity amplify the betrayal, injustice, and moral outrage, which, in turn, result in brand hate and encourage joint resistance through boycotts.

Combined with the SIT, these views offer a more detailed explanation of negative consumer-brand relationships. Although social identity theory (SIT) describes how perceived threats to the identity of religious and ideological groups evoke collective emotional and behavioral reactions, cognitive dissonance theory emphasizes the psychological tension within individuals, and attribution theory reveals how such threats are cognitively constructed. Combined, these theories demonstrate the interaction of the individual-level psychological processes with group-based identity processes to influence the brand hate and boycott intention in politically and religiously controversial situations.

The use of social media and digital networks in the modern boycotts is critical for spreading rumours (Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009). Emotionally charged narratives and symbolic brand-ideology links thus reduce the barriers to participation, making boycotting behaviors a norm due to online networks (Kucuk, 2019). From a social-psychological perspective, SIT clarifies how customers link with boycott involvement in groups based on moral and religious egotism (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT also explains why repeated exposure to boycott messages on digital platforms leads to increased compliance, even in the absence of intense personal animosity (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Furthermore, the theory of emotional contagion helps to understand how moral outrage, anger, rumours, and empathy spread through online networks, increasing shared responses and changing digital discourse in synchronized customer actions (Hatfield et al., 1994). These viewpoints describe online boycotts as not only based on attitudinal verdicts but also as socially created behavior formed by rumour dispersion, peer support, and collective moral emotion.

Relationship of Religious Animosity, Ideological Incompatibility, and Rumour with Brand Hate

Recently, research on brand hate (BH) has garnered significant attention in academic literature (Zhang & Laroche, 2020). Consumers often weigh more negative emotions, leading to a negative consumer bias (Hegner et al., 2017; Kanouse & Hanson, 1972). More religious commitments can, in turn, trigger more BH. Moreover, consumers show animosity towards certain brands due to various factors, from ideological incompatibility (II) with certain brands to BH. Religious animosity (RG) is a common factor in nearly all major religions worldwide. Where there is religion, there is the possibility of animosity. On the contrary, religion may play a constructive role in fostering cooperation among people from different religions. The idea of animosity, derived from sociology, is defined as "the strong emotions of antagonism and enmity that people can have based on beliefs of past and ongoing events of hostility between nations or people" (Averill, 1982). It is often observed that political or military activities worldwide can generate animosity towards specific brands originating from a particular country—a phenomenon that has prompted considerable scholarly interest in consumer animosity and its influence on purchasing decisions (Leong et al., 2008). However, further causes, such as religious sentiments, may also be considered the root cause of customer animosity (Abosag & Farah, 2014). In this manner, religious affiliation is a significant factor that impacts the lives of people and helps shape attitudes, lifestyle, and relationships with others (Qureshi et al., 2023). RG is a manifestation of a threat to the religious ingroup of the consumers. SIT states that the threats to the core identity dimensions, like religion, would result in powerful negative emotions and protective responses (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Whenever a brand appears to offend religious norms or values, consumers view the brand as an out-group aggressor, leadings to increased brand hatred (Hegner et al., 2017). The threat of religious identity fosters the level of negative emotional responses, which can

trigger the level of brand hate (Brewer, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Abosag and Farah (2014) found that RG is positively associated with consumer boycott. Moreover, Sandıkcı and Ekici (2009) examined qualitatively that religion positively affects the sentiments of brand rejection. Building on this work, Kumar et al. (2023) proposed that religiosity is an important predictor of brand hate. Based on these facts, the current study hypothesis is:

H1: RG is positively related to BH.

2-2. Ideological Incompatibility with Brand Hate

Ideological incompatibility (II) with a brand is similar to the connection between a brand's ideology and consumers' values regarding political, religious, societal, and morally unethical behavior. Ideological incompatibility "involves a more contextual and often societal or moral focus that extends beyond the needs of the individual consumers' self-image or the basic product or service performance" (Hegner et al., 2017). According to Shepherd et al. (2015), the strength of brands depends on the ideological context. More precisely, brands can display customers' aversion to a specific country. For example, customers with low satisfaction with America may respond diversely to American brands such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola, exhibiting a low level of purchase intention (Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004).

II occurs when a brand conveys political, cultural, or social values that are antagonistic to the ingroup ideology of the consumer. According to SIT, contradictory ideologies establish symbolic lines between ingroups and out-groups, making people reject and distance themselves from the out-group (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Thus, brands associated with conflicting ideologies evoke anger rooted in identity, which in turn causes BH (Johnson et al., 2011). According to Abrams and Hogg (1990), ideological incompatibility has an impact on out-group classification, which will increase the level of BH. There is substantial evidence that political/religious beliefs affect customers' relationships with brands. Moreover, Rodrigues et al. (2021) and Hegner et al. (2017) examine that II positively affects brand hate. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: II is positively related to BH.

2-3. Rumour with Brand Hate

RM is defined as "unverified information disseminated to influence others" (Rosnow & Kimmel, 2000), and it has a substantial impact on public opinion. Researchers agree that negative rumours have a higher acceptance rate and recognition than positive news (Kimmel & Audrain-Pontevia, 2010). Current studies have confirmed the significant impact of incorrect or misleading information on various aspects of brand perceptions, including attitude, trust, word-of-mouth communication, and product purchase (Visentin et al., 2019). Perceived identity threats are enhanced by rumours that position a brand as being detrimental to the ingroup. According to SIT, negative information associated with a group activates group-protective responses, regardless of its truthfulness (Ellemers et al., 2002). RM is quick to enhance the perception of an out-group threat, provoking intense brand hatred in culturally or religiously sensitive contexts (Hegner et al., 2017). Although there is plenty of evidence about the harmful effects of rumours, evidence in the literature about the relationship between rumour and brand hate is insufficient. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, Hashim and Kasana (2019) have examined the substantial impact of RM on BH. Based on these facts, it is hypothesized that:

H3: RM has a positive effect on BH.

2-4. Relationship of Brand Hate with Boycott Intention

The origin of the boycott dates back to the 19th century, when some small traders decided not to purchase products from Charles (Soule, 2009). Boycott reflects the power of consumers and serves as a social mechanism that exerts significant control over businesses. The researchers examine the negative emotions of brand hate, which result in different behavioral outcomes regarding the brand (Fetscherin, 2019; Husnain et al., 2021; Romani et al., 2012; Zhang & Laroche, 2020). The negative feelings among consumers often lead to BI, which is due to negative consumer-brand relationships,

such as BH (Fetscherin, 2019). Kucuk (2016, 2019) establishes a link between BH and collective boycotts. Muhamad et al. (2019) examine boycott behavior at the individual level and find that inherent motivations, such as a desire for self-enhancement and an adverse brand attitude, are the causes of BI. According to SIT, one reason people unite to protect their ingroup is the threat to it (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Brand hate, arising from religious or ideological threats, prompts consumers to join the ingroup through boycotts—symbolic acts of group defence (Poieser & Van Zomeren, 2018). Moreover, BH harms BI (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Sameeni, Ahmad, & Qadeer, 2024; Sameeni, Qadeer et al., 2024). Therefore, the study hypothesis is that:

H4: BH is positively related to BI.

2-5. Brand Hate as Mediator

BH was used as a mediator in previous research in different work setting and with various combinations of variables (e.g., Abid & Khattak, 2017; Husnain et al., 2021, 2023; Kurtoğlu et al., 2025; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Pinto & Brandão, 2021; Platania et al., 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2021). RG has a positive impact on boycotts (Abosag & Farah, 2014; Al-Hyari et al., 2012). Moreover, II has a positive impact on BI (Faza et al., 2022; Ghinai et al., 2013). Similarly, RM has an impact on boycotts (Wang et al., 2021; Shehata, 2020).

Sandıkcı and Ekici (2009) examined how religion positively affects brand rejection. Kumar et al. (2023) proposed that RG is an important predictor of BH. Abosag and Farah (2014) found that RG is positively associated with consumer boycott. Similarly, RM has a positive impact on BH (Hashim & Kasana, 2019). Additionally, Kapferer (2013) and Turner (1992) proposed that RM also harms BI. Rodrigues et al. (2021) and Hegner et al. (2017) found that II is positively related to BH. Similarly, II also triggers the sentiments of BI. BH harms BI (Muhamad et al., 2019; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Sameeni, Ahmad, & Qadeer, 2024; Sameeni, Qadeer et al., 2024). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no previous research has examined the mediating effect of BH for the relationship between RG and BI. Additionally, no previous research has examined the mediating role of BH in the relationship between II and BI. Similarly, the mediating role of BH in the relationship between II and BI remains unexplored. Based on these facts, we can propose the following research hypothesis.

H5: BH mediates the relationship of (a) RG, (b) II, and (c) RM with BHS.

2-6. Moderation of Country of Origin and Market Uncertainty

The country of origin (CO) significantly impacts consumer purchasing decisions because it is recognized as a visible indicator to assess products during the purchasing process (Hamzaoui-Essoussi et al., 2011). The CO is defined as the consumer's perception of goods from a particular nation, based on their observation of the benefits and drawbacks of products (Roth & Romeo, 1992). CO is the basis for the consumer's product assessment (Nasution & Rossanty, 2018; Rezvani et al., 2012). It is noted that the country of origin is also a factor in the boycott intention of the brands (Klein et al., 1998; Yener, 2023). In China, a Samsung product is experiencing brand hate, as South Korea has criticized the Chinese regime (Kumar et al., 2023). These studies found that nearly 20% of brand hate arises from country-of-origin-based factors. We can argue that the CO affects BH. Moreover, the CO has been affected by BI. This phenomenon is very prominent in different countries (Yener, 2023). Abosag and Farah (2014) have also examined that brands from other European countries suffer boycotts in Muslim countries. The CO typically indicates the brand's cultural, political, or national identity. Identity threats are heightened when the brand is derived from what is perceived to be an out-group country (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). According to SIT, out-group cues elicit emotional reactions and increase the likelihood of boycotting behavior (Brewer, 1999). Based on these facts, the study hypothesizes that:

H6: CO positively moderates the relationship between BH and BI.

Market uncertainty (MU) refers to the ambiguity of economic and market conditions that may impact the performance of firms, consumer purchasing power, and the reliability of supply chains. Macroeconomic volatility indices are commonly computed from industry-specific uncertainty indices or consumer surveys. Uncertainty triggers the threat-detection system in the consumer, who then

attempts to gather further information, reaffirms defensive behavior, and, upon perceiving a brand threat, resorts to defensive collective action such as brand avoidance (Mulyono et al., 2025). Brand avoidance is an extreme adversarial attitude to a brand, which may occur as a result of the perceptions of injustice, betrayal or unfulfilled promises, underlying BI (Reimann et al., 2018). However, the extent to which BH is converted into actual boycott behavior does not occur in all situations. MU is one of the contextual variables that change this relationship (Verdu et al., 2012). When consumers perceive a greater level of MU, they tend to perceive negative brand signals as threats, mobilize in groups, and make boycott commitments. On the other hand, in stable markets, brand dislike can be absorbed as individual dislike without spilling over into collective action.

MU is linked to BH (Sabog et al., 2023). The uncertainty existing in the market reduces consumer confidence, making consumers feeling vulnerable. Sensitive consumers are increasingly more critical of brands and require greater transparency and value. Hence, uncertain market conditions trigger BH. Similarly, uncertain market conditions increase the level of BI (Mulyono & Rolando, 2025). High MU leads to an increase in consumers' sensitivity to price changes, product failures, or a lack of consistency in communicating with them. This heightened uncertain condition may turn dissatisfaction into a deep BH. Yu et al. (2020) examined whether a MU marketing environment impacts BI. During periods of uncertainty, ingroup norms play a greater role in providing psychological security to consumers (Hogg, 2007). According to SIT, identity bonds become strong when there is social or economic instability. In this way, in cases where MU is high, the conversion of BH to boycott behavior is more potent. Based on these facts, the current study proposes the following hypothesis.

H7: MU positively moderates the relationship between BH and BI.

3. Methodology

3-1. Population, Sample, and Data Collection

The current study collected data from respondents living in the city of Lahore, Pakistan. This is because Lahore is the second-largest city in Pakistan. Lahore is recognized as the “cultural heart of Pakistan” because people from almost all areas of Pakistan reside in Lahore (Rana & Bhatti, 2018). We can say that Lahore is the mini-Pakistan. As Lahore is the provincial capital of Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan, it offers multidimensional opportunities to Pakistanis, including public offices, educational institutions, industry, and transport. Therefore, data collected from Lahore reflect a picture of the most populous province of Pakistan, which represents half of the country's population. Hence, our sample is representative of various areas of Pakistan.

The entire questionnaire consisted of the following questions: 1) Introductory paragraph, 2) demographic questions, and 2) questions about the variables. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was employed to gather the data. This is a non-probability sampling method in which respondents are selected based on ease of access. This technique offers several benefits, including no need for a list of the target population, reduced time consumption, cost-effectiveness, ease of data collection, and simplicity in operation (Golzar et al., 2022). This method is very easy (Stratton, 2021) and also used when it is not possible to access the entire target population (Saunders et al., 2019). Although it enables efficient data collection (Bryman, 2016). However, there are problems of generalizability and selection bias which can limit the applicability of results to a specific context, despite being drawn from a broader population (Bryman, 2016). Similarly, problems of non-coverage (Golzar et al., 2022) may arise, and outliers may also exist in the sample (Etikan et al., 2016). Before engaging the respondents in the research, they were asked the following screening question: "Please indicate whether you have experienced an intention to boycott or to hate a brand that originated in Israel." Only those respondents who answered "yes" were engaged.

Additionally, the inclusion criteria of respondents are only those consumers who suffer from the feeling of boycott against Israeli brands, and they were asked to name the brand/brands they disliked or hated. Item response theory was used to collect the data. There are several benefits of item response theory, including the formation of computer-based assessments, inclusive analyses, reduction of measurement mistakes, expressive scaling of latent constructs, estimation of test and item biases, impartial adjustment and equating, assessment of person and model fit, and better precision in the estimation of change due to therapeutic intervention (Thomas, 2011).

According to this theory, the minimum sample size is 290 respondents (29 × 10 = 290). The current study examined the boycott campaign of Israeli Products in Pakistan; the conflict began on October 7, 2023, and is ongoing. Data were collected from respondents in Lahore, Pakistan, between February 2024 and mid-May 2024.

3-2. Scale and Measurement

The boycott intention is measured using the four-item scale developed by Muhamad et al. (2019). The reliability of this scale was 0.87. Brand hate is measured using the six-item scale developed by Hegner et al. (2017), with a reliability of 0.83. The country of origin is measured using Nasution and Rossanty's (2018) scale, which consists of five items and has a reliability of 0.83. Market uncertainty is assessed using Jaworski and Kohli's (1993) scale, consisting of two items, with a reliability of 0.76. Ideological incompatibility, as estimated with Lee et al. (2009), comprised four items with a reliability of 0.898. Religious animosity was measured using the four-item scale developed by Klein et al. (1998); its reliability was 0.86 (Abosag & Farah, 2014). Rumour was measured with four items, with a reliability coefficient of 0.85. All items on the scales were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

4. Data Analysis

4-1. Demographics

A total of 307 individuals were inquired about. Table 1 describes the demographic information. The results show that male respondents comprise more than 69.38%, while females comprise 30.62%. With regard to age, 44.95% of respondents fell between 21 and 30 years, 40.06% belonged to the 31–40 age group, and 12.05% were between 41 and 50 years; whereas 12.5% were above 50 years. As Muslims are mainly divided into the Sunni and Shi'a sects, these sects were also included as a variable in this research. Results indicated that 65.47% of respondents belong to the Sunni sect, and 34.53% belong to the Shi'a sect. With regard to education, 48.53% of respondents held a bachelor's degree, 28.01% held an Intermediate qualification, 12.70% held a Matriculation qualification, and 10.76% held a master's degree or higher. Regarding marital status, 38.11% were married, and 49.84% were unmarried, while 8.79% were divorced and 3.26% were widowed. With regard to income, 54.01% of respondents earned more than 55,000 Pakistani rupees, 23.78% earned between 46,000 and 55,000 rupees, 13.68% earned between 26,000 and 35,000 rupees, and 1.69% earned 25,000 rupees or less. The demographic information is given below.

Table 1. Demographics Findings

Criteria	Category	Frequency ($N = 307$)	Percentage
Gender	Male	213	69.38
	Female	94	30.62
Age	21 - 30	138	44.95
	31 - 40	123	40.06
	41 – 50	37	12.05
	Above 50	09	2.94
Sect	Sunni	201	65.47
	Shi'a	106	34.53
Education	Matriculation	39	12.70
	Intermediate	86	28.01
	Bachelor	149	48.53
	Master and above	33	10.76
Marital Status	Married	117	38.11
	Unmarried	153	49.84
	Divorced	27	8.79
	Widow	10	3.26
Income	25,000 and below	5	1.69
	26,000 – 36,000	21	6.84
	36,000 – 45,000	42	13.68
	46,000 – 55,000	73	23.78
	More than 55,000	166	54.01

4-2. Common Method Bias

Current research gathered data in two intervals over a period of 17 days, starting in February 2024. Podsakoff et al. (2003) argued that the issue of CMV may exist when a researcher gathers data at a single time point. To overcome this problem, researchers gathered the data in two-time waves, separated by a one-month interval. Respondents were requested to complete their surveys regarding four aspects of religious animosity, ideological incompatibility, rumours, and market uncertainty at T1. After 30 days, respondents were contacted again and asked to complete their surveys at T2 regarding boycott intention, country of origin, and brand hate. This time gap is recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003), and the process of this kind of data collection has been used by some researchers in their studies (e.g., Abid et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2021; Maan et al., 2020). The survey questionnaires were distributed to 382 respondents at T1, of which 354 were returned and 351 were completed.

Additionally, 348 questionnaires were provided at T2, of which 307 complete questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 88.70% at T2. Harman's single-factor analysis and full collinearity test were used (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Harman's single-component analysis revealed that the first factor accounted for just 26.928% of the total variance, less than 50% (Akter et al., 2017). Although the total variance explained by the first factor was below 50%, this value indicates that common method variance (CMV) was not a significant problem in the data.

4-3. PLS-SEM Analysis

The PLS-SEM analysis was conducted using SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2015). Two stages of assessing the measurement model and the structural model were followed, as suggested by Hair et al. (2021).

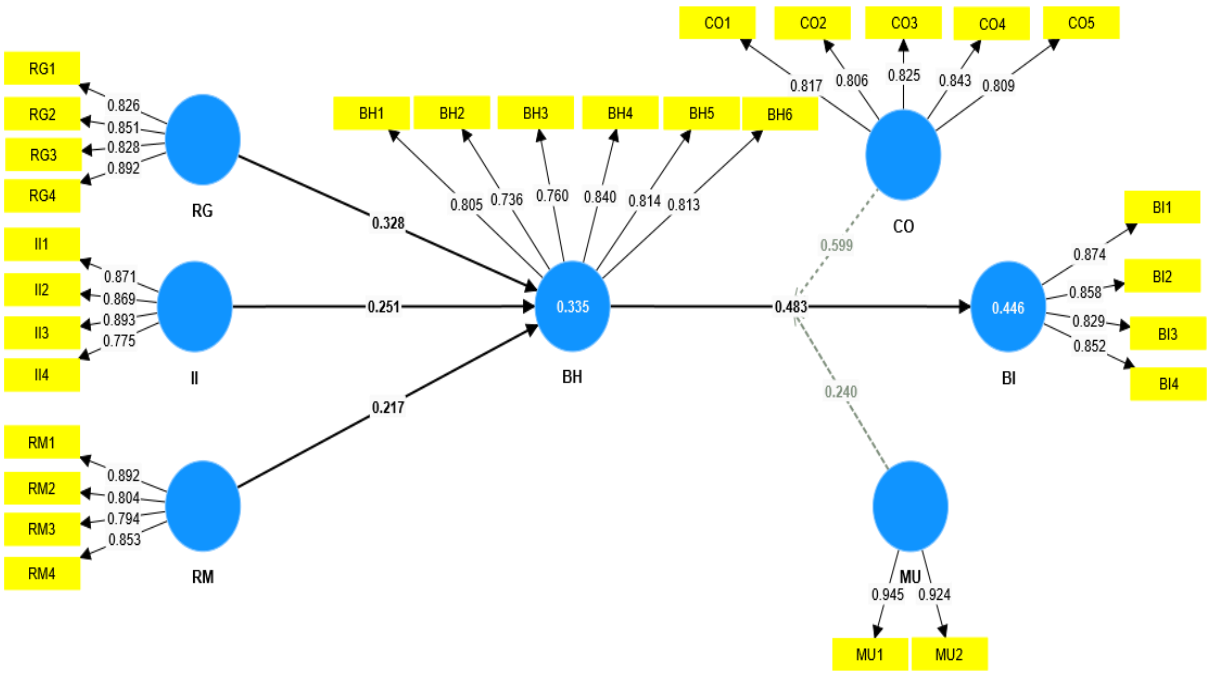


Fig. 2. Measurement Model

Note: AVE values are present in two circles. The arrows indicate the values of factor loadings.

4-4. Measurement Model Assessment

Measurement model assessment is comprised of composite reliability (CR) estimation, factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, AVE, and discriminant validity. As presented in Table 2, the results indicate that these values fall within the range set proposed by Hair et al. (2021), specifically CR > 0.7, AVE > 0.5, and Loading > 0.7. This describes that the current research model has adequate reliability and convergent validity.

Hair et al. (2021) proposed using composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and factor loadings to measure convergent validity. The average variance extracted (AVE) is used to

estimate the variance of the latent construct relative to the error variance. It is a manifestation of the convergent validity of a construct in PLS-SEM. According to Hair et al. (2021), an AVE value of 0.50 or above indicates that the construct accounts for more than half of the variance of its indicators, which is a sign of acceptable convergent validity. To achieve sufficient convergent validity, the outer loadings, as well as the CR values, must be above 0.70, with AVE not less than 0.50. Composite reliability (CR) is an indicator of internal consistency used to examine the degree to which a set of indicators captures a latent construct (Hair et al., 2021). Unlike Cronbach's alpha, CR is not based on equal indicator loadings and is therefore a more precise measure of reliability in PLS-SEM. Hair et al. (2021) define Cronbach's alpha as a traditional measure of internal consistency reliability, which refers to the extent to which a set of items measures a single latent construct. Moreover, according to Hair et al. (2021), Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) can be used to verify collinearity in structural models, where a VIF of more than 5 indicates problems with multicollinearity. Previous instructions by Hair et al. (2011) also established a cut-off value of 0.50 in factor loadings, 0.70 in CR, and 0.50 in AVE.

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment: VIF, Reliability, and Convergent Validity

Construct	Item Code	Loadings	VIF	α	CR	AVE
Brand Hate	BH1	0.805	3.531	0.887	0.912	0.633
	BH2	0.736	1.587			
	BH3	0.760	2.245			
	BH4	0.840	2.607			
	BH5	0.814	4.418			
	BH6	0.813	2.020			
Boycott Intention	BI1	0.874	2.317	0.876	0.915	0.729
	BI2	0.858	2.228			
	BI3	0.829	2.080			
	BI4	0.852	2.294			
Country of Origin	CO1	0.817	2.745	0.894	0.911	0.672
	CO2	0.806	3.682			
	CO3	0.825	3.304			
	CO4	0.843	2.025			
	CO5	0.809	1.636			
Ideological Incompatibility	II1	0.871	3.567	0.875	0.914	0.728
	II2	0.869	2.943			
	II3	0.893	3.182			
	II4	0.775	2.175			
Market Uncertainty	MU1	0.945	2.260	0.855	0.932	0.873
	MU2	0.924	2.260			
Religious Animosity	RG1	0.826	2.172	0.872	0.912	0.722
	RG2	0.851	2.387			
	RG3	0.828	1.982			
	RG4	0.892	2.875			
Rumour	RM1	0.892	2.651	0.859	0.903	0.700
	RM2	0.804	1.923			
	RM3	0.794	1.963			
	RM4	0.853	1.955			

Note. α: Cronbach's alpha, VIF: Variance Inflation Factor, CR: Composite Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted.

HTMT

Discriminant validity was also investigated to ensure that each construct is fundamentally unique. The HTMT approach is deemed more robust than cross-loading and the Fornell-Larcker criterion to establish the discriminant validity of the constructs (Hair et al., 2021). Table 3 revealed that the HTMT value of each construct was less than the 0.85 threshold criterion, indicating that all constructs in this study possess appropriate discriminant validity. The VIF test was also applied to detect collinearity before moving to structural model assessment. All values of VIF were found to be below 3; hence, no collinearity issues were detected in the measurement models (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (HTMT < 0.85)

	BH	BI	CO	II	MU	RG	RM
BH							
BI	0.465						
CO	0.299	0.163					
II	0.465	0.298	0.339				
MU	0.378	0.143	0.108	0.174			
RG	0.477	0.529	0.334	0.409	0.272		
RM	0.361	0.519	0.294	0.290	0.083	0.233	

Note. BH = Brand Hate, BI = Boycott Intention, CO = Country of Origin, II = Ideological Incompatibility, MU = Market Uncertainty, RG = Religious Animosity, RM = Rumour

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	BH	BI	CO	II	MU	RG	RM
BH	0.796						
BI	0.440	0.854					
CO	0.295	0.180	0.820				
II	0.425	0.264	0.315	0.853			
MU	-0.342	-0.124	0.034	-0.153	0.934		
RG	0.465	0.468	0.234	0.362	-0.236	0.850	
RM	0.351	0.468	0.276	0.254	-0.029	0.212	0.837

Note. BH = Brand/Consumer Hate, BI = Boycott Intention, CO = Country of Origin, II = Ideological Incompatibility, MU = Market Uncertainty, RG = Religious Animosity, RM = Rumour

4-5. Structural Model Assessment

The structural model assessment was conducted once the measurement model was reliable and valid, using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples (Hair et al., 2022). Hypotheses are generally tested at this stage. Moreover, effect sizes, coefficients of determination, and prediction relevance were also evaluated. Figures 3 and 4 illustrates this assessment without and with moderation. However, before proceeding, multicollinearity was examined according to the criteria, and all these values are less than the threshold value of 5, as per Hair et al. (2022). Therefore, there is no issue of multicollinearity. Structural relationships among latent variables were examined by path coefficient investigation.

5. Results and Discussion

Figure 3 illustrates a bootstrap process with 5,000 iterations for examining direct and indirect relationships (Hair et al., 2021). The results are presented in Tables 5 and 6. Table 5 revealed that all direct relationships are positively significant.

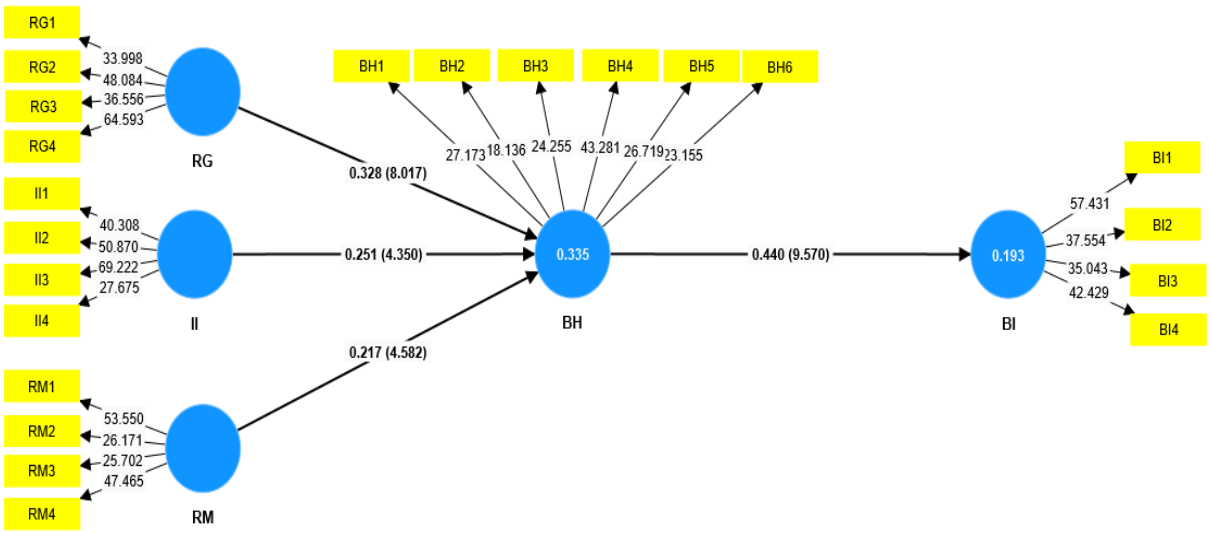


Fig. 3. SM without Moderation

Table 5. Hypotheses Testing: Direct Relationships

Path Coefficient	B	SD	*t*-Value	BC LL	BC UL	*p*-Value	f^2
H1: RG -> BH	0.328	0.041	8.017	0.245	0.407	0.000	0.138 (Small)
H2: II -> BH	0.251	0.058	4.350	0.142	0.366	0.000	0.080 (Small)
H3: RM -> BH	0.217	0.047	4.582	0.126	0.309	0.000	0.065 (Small)
H4: BH -> BI	0.440	0.046	9.570	0.349	0.529	0.000	0.322 (medium)

Note. BH = Consumer/Brand Hate, BI = Boycott Intention, CO = Country of Origin, II = Ideological Incompatibility, MU = Market Uncertainty, RG = Religious Animosity, RM = Rumour

H1 is about the positive effect of RG on BH. Results provide the following values (RG -> BH: β = 0.328, t = 8.017, p < 0.001). In past research, there was a scarcity of studies examining this relationship; only the study by Sandıkcı and Ekici (2009) investigated how RG positively affects BH. That research was conducted in Turkey among the consumers of Coca-Cola. Among all the predictors of BH, RG has a powerful impact on BH. This means that Pakistani customers are suffering from religious obligations about the brands, which are supposed to belong to Israel. As expected, the sales of these brands have decreased significantly due to these feelings.

H2 is about the effect of II on BH. Results provide the following values (II -> BH: β = 0.251, t = 4.350, p < 0.001). In prior research, there is also a scarcity of studies on this relationship. Only two research studies, Rodrigues et al. (2021) and Hegner et al. (2017), have examined how II positively impacts BH. Our result is also in line with the findings of this research. This is the second strong predictor of BH after RG. This means that Pakistani customers disagree with II about the brands that are supposed to belong to Israel.

H3 is about the effect of rumours on brand hate. Results provide the following values (RM -> BH: β = 0.217, t = 4.582, p < 0.001). This result aligns with the findings of Hashim and Kasana (2019), who demonstrate that RM has a positive impact on BH. The results indicate that both RM and II have a positive impact on BH, with RM having a more positive effect than II. This result differs from that of Hashim and Kasana (2019), who found that II has a more substantial impact on BH than RM. The reason is that the current study collected data from customers of soft drink companies, fast food companies, and other entities.

In contrast, Hashim and Kasana (2019) collected data from KFC customers in Pakistan only. That is why the results of the current study vary from those of Hashim and Kasana (2019).

H4 examines the impact of BH on BI. Results provide the following values (BH -> BI: β = 0.440, t = 9.570, p < 0.001). The result of the current study aligns with the findings of previous research by Nguyen and Nguyen (2021), Sameeni, Ahmad, and Qadeer (2024), and Sameeni, Qadeer et al. (2024). Hence, H4 is accepted. According to Cohen et al. (2003), there are three levels of effect size (f2) values: medium (> 0.15), small (≤ 0.02), and large (> 0.35). In Table 5, we assign the corresponding level according to their values.

Table 6. Hypotheses Testing: Results of Mediation

Path Coefficient	B	SD	*t*-Value	BC LL	BC UL	*p*-Value
H5(a): RG -> BH -> BI	0.144	0.025	5.654	0.098	0.198	0.000
H5(b): II -> BH -> BI	0.111	0.026	4.259	0.063	0.163	0.000
H5(c): RM -> BH -> BI	0.096	0.026	3.742	0.050	0.150	0.000

Note. BH = Brand/Consumer Hate, BI = Boycott Intention, CO = Country of Origin, II = Ideological Incompatibility, MU = Market Uncertainty, RG = Religious Animosity, RM = Rumour

The current research proposes three mediational hypotheses. The results indicate that all mediation hypotheses are accepted. BH acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between RG, II, and RM, with respect to BI. The results of the current study indicate that BH is a better partial mediator for the relationship between RG and BI, compared to the relationship between II and BI, and for the relationship between RM and BI. All three hypotheses are supported. This means that Pakistani consumers are suffering from hate feelings about Israel-based products, which is why it plays its partial mediating role for the proposed relationships. These results also confirm the results of previous research regarding the mediating effect of BH in different work settings and with varying combinations of variables (e.g., Abid & Khattak, 2017; Husnain et al., 2021, 2023; Kurtoğlu et al., 2025; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Pinto & Brandão, 2021; Platania et al., 2017; Rodrigues et al., 2021).

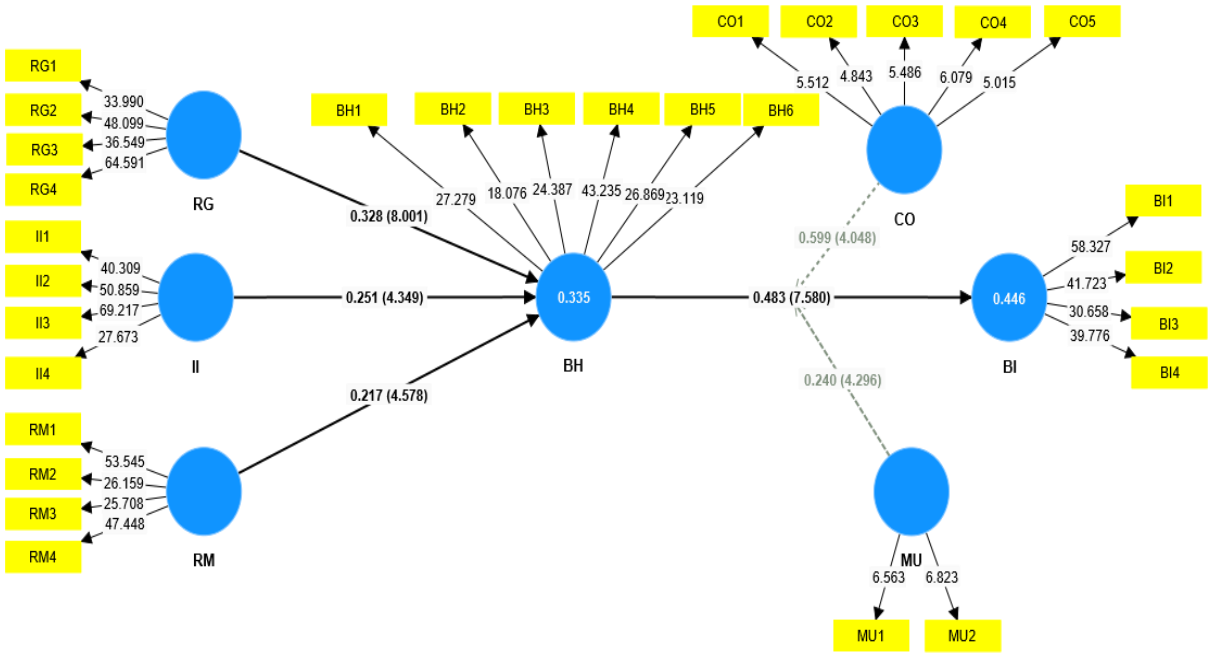


Fig. 4. SM with Presence of Moderators

Table 7. Hypotheses Testing: Results of Moderation

Path Coefficient	B	SD	*t*-Value	BC LL	BC UL	*p*-Value	f^2
H6: MU x BH -> BI	0.240	0.056	4.296	0.122	0.329	0.000	0.164 (medium)
H7: CO x BH -> BI	0.599	0.148	4.048	0.118	0.740	0.000	0.228 (medium)

Note. *p < 0.01. NS = Not Supported, S = Supported, β = Path Coefficient, S.D = Standard Deviation, CI = Confidence Interval, BH = Brand/Consumer Hate, BI = Boycott Intention, CO = Country of Origin, II = Ideological Incompatibility, MU = Market Uncertainty, RG = Religious Animosity, RM = Rumour

H6 and H7 represent the moderating effects of MU and CO, with MU significantly moderating the relationship between BH and BI. Pakistan is facing a severe economic crisis and uncertain market conditions. Hence, H6 is justified.

Similarly, the result of H7 indicates that the CO played a moderating role in the relationship between BH and BI, with a β value of 0.599. This provides evidence that the CO is the primary concern for consumers. Pakistani consumers dislike purchasing Israeli products. Following the Israel–Palestine conflict, the food and construction industries in Israel have suffered heavy losses and a 70% drop in revenue due to the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement (Sentosa & Sitepu, 2024). The net income of Coca-Cola dropped 61%, and its sales were reduced by up to 22.9% in Pakistan. Similarly, 62% of Pakistani consumers were boycotting Israeli brands (Gallup & Gilani Pakistan, 2024). Similarly, a significant decrease in sales volume at McDonald's and KFC is also observed due to the Gaza clash (Mangi & Bilgic, 2024). On the other hand, there has been a significant increase in the sales of local cola brands, with their market share rising to 12%, up from 9.5%—an increase of 2.5 percentage points (Attarwala, 2024).

When viewed comparatively, the findings of this study align with and extend evidence from other Muslim-majority countries by highlighting how contextual religious authority, political salience, and market structures shape boycott behavior differently. In Indonesia, empirical studies show that religiosity and exposure to social-media narratives significantly strengthen boycott intentions, particularly following the issuance of Fatwa MUI No. 38/2023, which framed support for Palestine as a religious obligation and urged Muslims to avoid Israel-affiliated products; however, continued consumption of *halal*-certified brands indicates that certainty, *halal* labelling, and brand image often override religious animosity in actual purchase decisions (Ramadhani, 2025; Syarif & Herman, 2024). Moreover, Rizan et al. (2025) found that religious animosity and country of origin have a substantial negative impact on repurchase intention among consumers of KFC, Pizza Hut, Starbucks, and McDonald's in Semarang, Jakarta, and Yogyakarta, in the context of the Gaza clash. In the context of Malaysia, similar results document boycott as moral and symbolic protests embedded in popular

Islam, where participation is driven more by collective norms and religious–political discourse than by sustained individual brand hatred (Kamaludeen, 2016). He further examined that Muslim consumers in the Southeast Asian region, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, were boycotting Israeli products.

In contrast, studies conducted in Egypt during the Gaza conflict report that political brand ideology and intense negative emotions (e.g., brand hate) play a more direct role in driving brand avoidance and negative word of mouth, reflecting a more affect-driven response under conditions of high political salience (El-Menawy et al., 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2020). Similarly, religiosity of Muslim consumers positively triggers the boycott intention regarding Israeli products (Yildirim, 2025). Taken together, these facts suggest that while geopolitical conflicts and religious solidarity commonly trigger boycotts across Muslim societies, the translation of religiosity and animosity into actual consumer decisions is contingent on institutional cues (*fatwas*), perceived legitimacy of information, and market assurances such as *halal* certification, reinforcing the cross-cultural originality of the present study.

Model Fit

Model fit is measured using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) technique. Researchers used this technique to estimate the inconsistency between the experiential and the model's implied correlation matrix. A GoF (goodness-of-fit) measure evaluates the overall model's fitness. The SRMR technique examines the average variance between the predicted and observed correlation matrix. There is some disagreement regarding the appropriate value of the SRMR. Some researchers argue that its value must be less than 0.08 (Henseler et al., 2014), whereas Schermelleh-Engel and Moosbrugger (2003) describe an acceptable range of 0.08 to 0.10. Other researchers state that its value ranges from 0 to 1, with lower values indicating better model fit. The SRMR value in the present study is 0.094, which falls below the 0.10 threshold. This result aligns with previous research that applied Schermelleh-Engel and Moosbrugger's (2003) criteria when interpreting SRMR values. For example, Nikzat et al. (2019) reported an SRMR value of 0.091 (< 0.10); Talan et al. (2024) reported 0.083 (< 0.10); Doğan (2022) reported 0.087 (< 0.10); Bienstein and Nussbeck (2009) reported 0.081 (< 0.10); Sacchi et al. (2018) reported 0.097 (< 0.10); and Haugan et al. (2012) reported SRMR values of 0.098 and 0.081 (< 0.10) for Models 1 and 2, respectively.

The NFI, CFI, and TLI are other fit indices that compare them against a significant value (Hair et al., 2021), and these values are higher than 0.9. In the current study, the values of NFI, CFI, and TLI are 0.914, 0.934, and 0.923, respectively, also exceeding the standard values. Similarly, D_ULS and D_G must be greater than 0.05 (Khoshmaram et al., 2025). In this research, these values are 3.828 and 2.301. These values are greater than 0.05. Hence, these values are also in range.

Coefficient of Determination R^2 and Predictive Relevance Q^2

We examined the model's power using the R-squared statistic. It is observed that variations of 35.5% in brand hate and 19.3% in boycott intention are explained by their corresponding exogenous variables. The value R^2 increased from 19.3% to 44.6% for boycott intention, indicating a 25.3% improvement in explanatory power, with country of origin and market uncertainty as moderators (Hair et al., 2022). It is stated that the country of origin and market uncertainty considerably improve the model's ability to describe variance.

Table 8. Coefficient of Determination and Predictive Relevance

Construct	Coefficient of Determination (R^2)		Change	PLS $_{predict}$ Q^2		Change
	Without Moderator	With Moderator		Without Moderator	With Moderator	
BH	0.335	0.335	-	0.318	0.318	-
BI	0.193	0.446	0.253	0.214	0.129	0.085

Additionally, PLS Predict was employed to evaluate the model's predictive performance (Shmueli et al., 2019). The results indicate that the model has a medium level of substantial predictive power. Here, moderators' country of origin and market uncertainty further reinforce the model's forecasting accuracy. However, religious animosity, ideological incompatibility, and rumours remain unchanged, suggesting that country of origin and market uncertainty do not impact its predictive relevance.

6. Conclusion

The study illustrates that boycott intention and brand hate are emerging topics and an interesting domain of investigation. Marketing researchers have considerably examined the role of constructive behavior. However, neuroscience and psychological researchers reveal that negative behaviors significantly impact customers' choices (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Zeki & Romaya, 2008). The primary purpose of this research is to analyze the negative sentiments of Pakistani customers regarding Israeli Products in the context of the Middle East conflict. In this context, the current study examines the relationship between religious animosity, ideological incompatibility, and rumour, as well as the relationship between brand hate and boycott intention. The results confirmed that all hypotheses of direct and indirect relationships are accepted. The favorable impact of ideological incompatibility on brand hate is acknowledged. Moreover, there are beneficial effects of rumour on brand animosity. The influence of religious animosity on consumer boycotts is also acknowledged. The results also indicate the partial mediation of brand hate. Brand hate serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between religious animosity, ideological incompatibility, and rumour with boycott intention. The results of the current study indicate that brand hate is a better partial mediator for the relationship between religious animosity and customer boycott, compared to the relationship between ideological incompatibility and boycott intention, and also for the relationship between ideological incompatibility and rumour with customer boycott. This indicates that Pakistani consumers are suffering from negative feelings about Israel-based products, and these feelings trigger the sentiments of boycott intention, which is why brand hate serves as a partial mediator role for the relationships of religious animosity, ideological incompatibility, and rumour with brand hate. The moderation of country of origin and market uncertainty has also been endorsed. In both moderators' countries of origin, country of origin acts as a strong moderator; for instance, consumers in Pakistan tend to avoid purchasing products from Israel.

It can be further concluded that brand hate also converts to boycott behavior as a result of collective psychological processes, rather than individual feelings. Based on the SIT, consumers perceive brands related to out-groups as symbolic threats to their religious or moral identity, triggering group-based reactions such as collective boycotts (Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Moreover, the collective emotions, particularly moral outrage and collective anger, that spread through social networks increase brand hate and justify boycotts as a socially acceptable behavior (Hegner et al., 2017; Kucuk, 2019). Therefore, boycott behavior is formed as a coordinated coping action of the group, where consumers defend the values of the ingroup and assert their collective identity. In terms of a broader theoretical framework, the findings can be situated within the literature on anti-consumption and consumer resistance, which approaches boycotts as a form of protest and moral expression. In line with the anti-consumption theory, the findings show that, in this regard, boycotting does not constitute a rational market reaction but rather a value-oriented and identity-based activity through which consumers re-establish themselves as a group and position themselves as ethical. Brand hate is an emotion that triggers ideological difference into long-term avoidance and resistance, thereby connecting SIT to emotional and moral facets of anti-consumption behavior. Combining the social identities theory with the anti-consumption views, this research proves that the consumer resistance in religious and politically sensitive markets is formed by both collective identity processes and affective responses. This holistic model offers a better insight into the reasons why the intention to boycott becomes high and enduring in situations of elevated identity salience.

Contribution of the Research

Theoretical Contributions

This research will make a substantial theoretical contribution to the field, as it will introduce the SIT to explain the negative consumer-brand relationships in Muslim-majority developing nations, where political, religious, and social sensibilities play a key role in consumer behavior. However, unlike previous studies where the antecedents of brand hate have been studied separately, this research will combine RG, II, and RM into one comprehensive model and identify how several identity threats are combined to create BH and BI. The study explains the process by which socio-religious tensions are converted into collective boycott behavior by modelling BH as a partial mediator. Additionally, the moderating effects of CO and MU demonstrate how political scripts and socio-economic uncertainty strengthen these connections, offering insight into context-specific processes that previous research

has not explored. Taken together, these developments enhance the theoretical understanding that consumer responses in politically and religiously sensitive contexts are stronger, identity-based, and reinforced by social factors, and that they develop as a result of the interaction between multiple pathways rather than a single stimulus.

The following are the more theoretical contributions of the present research. First, the current research makes a significant contribution to a valuable understanding of negative consumer-brand relationships (CBRs) by examining brand hate and boycott intention through the antecedents of brand hate and its moderators. Second, the current study also contributes to the body of knowledge by presenting the entire model based on SIT, examining the relationships between RG, II, RM, BH, BI, CO, and MU within a single model. Additionally, the impact of antecedents (II and RM) on BH and the impact of BH on behavioral response (BI) have been mainly examined in the B2C context (Bayarassou et al., 2020; Fetscherin, 2019; Sameeni, Ahmad, & Qadeer, 2024). However, this phenomenon is rarely observed in conflict situations. No research has examined BH and BI, and their antecedents, in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It was observed that negative sentiments had a profound impact on industrial markets (Zhu & Zolkiewski, 2015). A comprehensive understanding of the BH and BI remains incomplete without exploring the phenomenon of BH and BI in this context. Third, the results of current research contribute to the body of literature on BH by examining the direct effect of RG on BH. As previously observed, the effect of religious thoughts on BI, as qualitatively noted by Sandıkcı and Ekici (2009) and Kumar et al. (2023), supports this relationship. Results confirmed that RG acts as a strong predictor of BH among all the predictors. Fourth, the present study also adds novelty to existing research on BH and BI (Bayarassou et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2021; Sameeni, Ahmad, & Qadeer, 2024; Sameeni, Qadeer et al., 2024) by proposing the mediating role of BH in the relationships of RB, II, and RM with BI. To the best of our knowledge, no path of mediation from the three paths has been examined in previous research. This will open up new insights for researchers to conduct further investigations on these paths and validate the results. Fifth, Pakistan is facing uncertain market situations (Ahmad, 2025); therefore, the current study considers MU as a moderator for the relationship between BH and BI. Results also confirmed its moderating role for this relationship. Six, considering the current context of the Palestine–Israel conflict, this study introduces CO as a moderating variable in the relationship between BH and BI. As expected, the results confirm that CO exerts a strong moderating effect on this relationship.

Managerial Implication

From the manager's viewpoint, BH and BI can be stressful, as customers can openly share their negative sentiments (Kucuk, 2019), negatively impacting these companies. The food and construction Industries of Israel are suffering heavy losses and a 70% revenue drop (Sentosa & Sitepu, 2024). The net income of Coca-Cola dropped by 61%, and its sales were reduced by up to 22.9% in Pakistan. Additionally, 62% of Pakistani consumers claimed that they are boycotting Israeli brands (Gallup & Gilani Pakistan, 2024). Additionally, a significant decrease in the sales volume of McDonald's and KFC is observed due to the Gaza conflict (Mangi & Bilgic, 2024). In this scenario, dealing with customers who are suffering from BH and BI is crucial for these organizations in mitigating the negative feelings of consumers. Misalignment with local sentiments can lead to significant backlash and loss of market share. Understanding the causes and outcomes of BH and BI can help managers develop more effective solutions for regaining customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Similarly, the results of current research confirm that RG is a strong predictor of BH among all the predictors. This result provides guidelines for managers to focus more on the fact that their customers do not suffer from feelings of RG. Consistently suffering from these feelings may trigger more negative feelings regarding their brands and may ultimately lead to more brand image issues. Managers must also control the current levels of II and RM, which equally promote negative emotions in customers, resulting in an adverse level of BH. Organizations should invest in public relations strategies to counteract false narratives and promote factual information about products and their backgrounds. Organizations and managers must also distance themselves from activities that promote negative feelings among their customers regarding RG, II, and RM. Similarly, the results also confirm the partial mediating role of BH in the relationships between RB, II, and RM, as well as BI. The

results confirm that BH plays a nearly identical role to that of a mediator in these relationships. Hence, managers and companies must pay attention to controlling the level of BH, as observed in the significant direct impact of BH on BI. If managers and organizations control the current level of BH, then BH will play an ineffective role in the relationships between these variables.

Furthermore, the study observed a highly prominent role for CO as a moderator of the relationship between BH and BI. Managers and companies must recognize that the CO shapes consumer perceptions. This implies that managers and companies should distance themselves from actions that may generate negative sentiments among customers toward their products. Moreover, MU also plays its moderating role in the relationship between BH and BI. Brands must be agile and responsive to changing consumer sentiments, adapting their real-time strategies to maintain relevance and minimize negative impacts. Brands operating in diverse markets should adopt culturally sensitive marketing strategies to effectively reach their target audience. Understanding the local context and aligning marketing efforts with cultural values can help mitigate brand hate. This result presents alarming situations for the Pakistani Government, as Pakistan is also facing uncertain market conditions (Ahmad, 2025). Therefore, companies and managers must advise the Pakistani Government to control these conditions. Another managerial implication is that there has been a significant increase in the sales of local colas and other brands, with the share of local cola brands increasing to 12%, up from 2.5% earlier (Attarwala, 2024). Hence, managers of these companies also examine this matter and formulate more effective strategies to address this situation.

Social media and influencers play a crucial role in managing boycott crises, as rumours, moral justification, and collective views are frequently exaggerated on digital platforms. Companies under the threat of boycotts can tactfully involve reputable religious scholars, local leaders, and other well-trusted influencers to offer timely clarification and refute misinformation (Kucuk, 2019). Companies can rebrand themselves in ways that appeal to both ethical and religious values (Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009). Actionable measures may include active social listening to identify emerging rumors, maintaining open and non-confrontational communication to address concerns, and collaborating with faith-sensitive influencers to emphasize factual information, ethical business practices, and respect for religious values. These strategies are used to minimize uncertainty, rumour plausibility, and religious animosity by transforming the discussion and rhetoric on the internet from an emotional to a more rational and constructive approach (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Firms can run community-based engagement initiatives in major cities such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad to directly address religious animosity, rumours, and ideological concerns. For instance, arranging open forums, campus sessions, or digital town halls with Pakistani consumers can help brands clarify their values, correct misinformation, and weaken the rumour-driven triggers of BH and BI. To ensure a lack of ideological incompatibility, multinational brands may engage with reputable Pakistani institutions, such as the Edhi Foundation or Shaukat Khanum Hospital, or local SMEs, to establish trust. Local co-branding, such as this, is a sign of cultural fit and social responsibility that can reduce the chances of brand hate and boycott intentions. Companies can initiate community-based involvement programs in cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, and address rumours, ideological issues, and religious animosity directly. As an example, for brands, it may be helpful to organize open forums, campus sessions, or digital town halls with Pakistani consumers, allowing them to explain their values, clarify misinformation, and counter the rumour-based catalysts of brand hate.

The findings of this study highlight the need for proactive and systematic approaches to managing identity-based risks in sensitive markets. Managers are encouraged to adopt rumour-monitoring and social listening systems to track brand-related discussions across digital platforms in real time. By using digital analytics and sentiment analysis tools, firms can detect emerging negative narratives and misinformation at an early stage and respond before they escalate into large-scale boycott movements.

In addition, transparent and timely crisis communication is essential for reducing uncertainty and restoring consumer trust. Firms should provide fact-based explanations through official channels and clearly communicate their ethical standards and business practices. Collaboration with trusted community influencers and opinion leaders can further enhance message credibility and facilitate effective rumour correction. Moreover, organizations should establish structured crisis management frameworks with clear response protocols and dedicated digital communication teams. Continuous

monitoring and evaluation of consumer sentiment can help managers assess the effectiveness of their interventions and adjust strategies accordingly. By implementing these measures, firms can mitigate brand hate, prevent boycott escalation, and protect long-term brand equity.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the limitations of the current study is that it includes respondents from Pakistan for data collection even though negative thoughts among consumers are highly prominent in other Muslim countries. In the future, this kind of study will also consider consumers' responses to other Muslim countries and compare the results based on the country.

The other limitation of the study is that demographic variables were used as control variables. The demographic variable sect is a critical one because there are two crucial sects of Islam, i.e., Sunni and Shi'a; however, both are on the same page for the boycott campaign against Israeli products. It is beneficial for researchers to review their individual responses regarding BH and BI and compare them to identify commonalities.

Brand hate is used as a unidimensional construct. In contrast, this variable is used multidimensionally, as mentioned by Zhang and Laroche (2020). Therefore, the researchers will use the dimensional construct of brand hate in their future research. The current study did not include some important outcomes of brand hate, i.e., negative word-of-mouth, willingness to punish the brand, brand avoidance, consumer-brand sabotage, and brand retaliation. In future research, these variables may provide valuable insights.

Brand hate and brand love are opposite terminologies, and it is essential to use both variables and compare the results of brands that are disliked. The brands for which sales and market share have increased may be checked.

The current study employed a non-probability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling, due to the unavailability of a sampling frame. Future studies may employ stratified sampling if a comprehensive list of potential respondents becomes available. In future studies, multi-group analysis may also apply for checking the difference between demographic variables (e.g., gender and religious sect) which can provide valuable insights into subgroup differences.

Although the current study was conducted in a Muslim-majority context, future research could extend the analysis to non-Muslim and secular communities, where consumer behavior may be shaped by political, cultural, and ideological identities. Value incongruence, corporate activism, and political polarization can also elicit brand hate and boycott intentions. Thus, the identity-based framework can be utilized to comprehend the consumer resistance in the Western and multicultural markets with the relevant contextual adjustment.

The future studies must adopt the longitudinal and panel-based research design to test the continuity and change in boycotting behavior over time. This kind of research may be employed to conclude whether intention to boycott is a short-term emotional response or a stable consumption behavior. The longitudinal evidence can also explain the effect that corporate response and evolving conditions have on the long-term effects of brand hate on consumer behavior.

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