

Enhancing Public Awareness about the Impact of Boycotts on Purchasing Decisions for Vaseline Products

Suci Ananda Dewi¹, Mustapa Khamal Rokan², Nurlaila³

^{1,2,3} Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan

Article Info

Article history:

Received 4 May 2024
Revised 20 May 2024
Accepted 30 May 2024

Keywords:

Impact of Boycotts; Public Awareness; Purchasing Decisions

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the impact of boycotts on Vaseline products triggered by the Israel-Palestine conflict and the strategies that can be applied to address this issue. The prolonged conflict in Gaza and international support for Palestine have spurred boycott movements, including in Indonesia, as reflected in the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). The primary focus of this research is on the methods of outreach and collaboration in managing the impact of boycotts on Vaseline products. The outreach method aims to educate both the company and consumers about the effects of boycotts and effective communication strategies. Collaboration with influencers and communities helps the company improve its brand image and strengthen its relationship with consumers. The results of this outreach indicate that while the company and consumers have gained a better understanding, strategic steps are still needed to improve brand image and effectively manage the impact of the boycott. The decline in sales and Unilever's stock price, which includes Vaseline products, highlights the tangible effects of the boycott, emphasizing the importance of communication strategies and positive campaigns to restore brand reputation and boost consumer trust.

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Corresponding Author:

Name: Suci Ananda Dewi
Department: Management
Faculty: Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business
Afiliasi: Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara
Email: suci.amanda@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has escalated following Hamas's attacks on Israel in southern Gaza. These attacks are seen as a response to years of pressure and attacks experienced by Palestinians from Israel (Khan, 2011). Palestinians in Gaza frequently face aid blockades, power and water shortages, and deteriorating living conditions due to Israeli actions (Satria, 2023). One way the global Muslim community has shown support for Palestine and condemned Israel is through boycotting companies that support Israel. Boycott actions involve rejection, prohibition, prevention,

hindrance, or redirection. Specifically, a boycott is the refusal to purchase a product, but generally includes various actions that demonstrate strong disapproval (Deariqra Ziljani, 2021).

Globally, mass movements, including the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, actively campaign for boycotts and social sanctions against brands, industries, or companies that support Israeli occupation in Palestine (Wibowo et al., 2022). Indonesia has also adopted a boycott policy against products related to Israel, as outlined in Fatwa Number 83 of 2023 issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). This fatwa was issued in support of the Palestinian struggle and in response to aggressive actions by Israel, including annexation of Palestinian territories, eviction of civilians, and in support of global humanitarian efforts to assist Palestine (Fajri & Rosyadi, 2024).

One example of a brand involved in boycott actions is Starbucks, the world's largest coffee company based in the United States (Gusnadi et al., 2022). The hashtag #boycottstarbucks has been mentioned approximately 16,000 times on social media in the past 30 days, with a total of 167 million views according to TikTok Creative Center data (CNBC Indonesia, 2023). The high level of boycott against Starbucks reflects the significant impact of the issue online, indicating the strength of support or opposition to the brand. Despite the hashtag's popularity, sentiment analysis shows that most responses are negative, with many users expressing dissatisfaction with Starbucks's decisions. Some consumers are even directly avoiding Starbucks products in response to the issue, showing that the boycott is not only symbolic online but also affects actual consumer behavior. The potential long-term damage to Starbucks's image due to this boycott campaign is estimated to exceed \$11 billion, with a stock price decline of 8.96% since November 16, 2023. The boycott led by Starbucks Workers United also plays a significant role in expressing solidarity with events in Palestine since October 2023 (Nurhadi, 2023). Starbucks's stock price has fallen since mid-November 2023. The price was \$97.02 on Wednesday (12/6/2023), up about 1.5% from the previous day. However, this price is still 6.7% lower than the previous month (Ahdiat, 2023).

In addition to Starbucks, which operates in the food and beverage industry, there are also products in the beauty and care industry being boycotted. One such company is PT Unilever. PT Unilever Indonesia is an international company that sells various consumer products across countries to meet daily needs for nutrition, health, and well-being, with products that promote well-being, beauty, and increased life satisfaction (Rosmawati & Hasibuan, 2020). However, in 2023, PT Unilever has been a hot topic. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine triggered calls to avoid or boycott Unilever products in Indonesia. This call was fueled by negative rumors on social media that Unilever products are linked to Israel. Social media revealed that Unilever products are associated with Israel. The boycott against Unilever Indonesia has impacted the company's reputation and sales, particularly in Indonesia (Firman, 2024).

In 2022, PT Unilever achieved net sales of IDR 41.22 trillion, but in 2023, PT Unilever experienced a 6.3% decrease in sales to IDR 5.36 trillion and a 10.5% decline in profit to IDR 4.8 trillion. This drop in sales indicates that the boycott actions have contributed to the decline. In addition to sales, PT Unilever also experienced a decline in stock price. According to Goodstats, in May 2023, PT Unilever's stock price was IDR 4,420 per share, but on May 21, 2024, it was recorded at IDR 2,880 per share. It is evident that PT Unilever has faced declines in sales, stock prices, and exports due to the boycott actions resulting from the Israel-Palestine conflict (Riswan, 2024).

One of PT Unilever's products is Vaseline, a hand and body lotion with a significant presence in Indonesia and recognized globally by Indonesian consumers (Rosa Indah et al., 2020). Students are among the prominent users of Vaseline hand and body lotion. They always want to look attractive, which is why students are a potential market for Vaseline hand and body products (Rosa Indah et al.,

2020). According to the Top Brand Award, several body care products have been popular among consumers over the past five years, with Citra consistently ranking first as the most used or purchased body care product. Marina follows as second, although it experienced a decline in 2022 and 2023, while Vaseline has consistently ranked third and saw a significant drop in 2024. From 2020 to 2023, Vaseline's sales increased, but in 2024, it reached a low of 12.80%. This decline could be attributed to various factors, including the boycott, which affects consumer purchasing decisions. This is evident from consumers who continue to support the boycott either directly or through platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, leading many to seek alternative products to support the boycott. The boycott movement has reached a level of success, as evidenced by the decline in sales for companies affiliated with Israel, especially Unilever, which owns Vaseline. Many consumers are continually searching for alternative body care products and seeking recommendations from peers. Comments on platforms like X support this.

Ongoing consumer boycotts can influence consumer perceptions to avoid repeat purchases of the product (Tanoto & Goh, Thomas Sumarsan, 2021), and seek recommendations for alternative products from peers. If consumers are motivated to buy alternatives, it is influenced by their perceptions of the situation they face (Tanoto & Goh, Thomas Sumarsan, 2021). Therefore, if consumers have a negative perception of Vaseline, their views on Vaseline will remain unfavorable. In addition to perceptions of Vaseline, PT Unilever's image will also be negatively affected in the eyes of consumers.

2. METHOD

This article employs the method of education and training, which plays a crucial role in providing the necessary information to understand the boycott issue against Vaseline products. This method is designed to educate both companies and consumers about the impact of the boycott on purchasing decisions. For companies, the training will cover how to effectively respond to a boycott, including communication strategies to explain the company's position and efforts made to address consumer concerns. For consumers, the training aims to enhance their understanding of how to make informed purchasing decisions, thus avoiding involvement in buying products that are being boycotted. Another method used is collaboration with influencers and communities. This strategy is effective in addressing the impact of the boycott on Vaseline products. Companies can partner with influencers to improve their brand image and convey positive messages to consumers. Influencers can help clarify the company's position and demonstrate its commitment to values relevant to consumers. Additionally, collaborating with communities that care about social issues can strengthen the company's efforts to improve its image and build positive relationships with consumers. This article uses primary data. The population for this study consists of Vaseline body lotion users residing in Medan and its surroundings, with a sample size of 37 individuals.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the community service results, it was found that both Vaseline and its consumers have not fully understood the impact of the boycott on purchasing decisions. This has led to a lack of effective strategies for handling the boycott and purchasing decisions not based on accurate information. Therefore, a training program titled "Strategies for Handling Boycotts and Educating

Consumers about the Impact of Boycotts on Purchasing Decisions" is needed to provide knowledge and strategies to both parties.

The training for the company aims to provide guidance on how to effectively manage and respond to boycotts, including clarifying their involvement in related issues and strategies to improve brand image. Meanwhile, for consumers, the training aims to provide an understanding of the importance of making purchasing decisions based on accurate and clear information, as well as the potential impact of buying products that are being boycotted. By doing so, the company can proactively address the impact of the boycott, reduce negative effects on sales, and maintain good relationships with consumers. Consumers, on the other hand, can make more informed decisions and avoid purchasing products that are being boycotted.

Through the conducted training, both the company and consumers now have a better understanding of boycotts and their impacts. The company can implement more effective strategies in responding to and managing boycotts, while consumers can make wiser purchasing decisions. The results of the training indicate that by providing appropriate education to both parties, the company can improve its brand image and increase sales, while consumers can make more informed purchasing decisions.

Discussion

Consumer perception plays a crucial role in determining purchasing decisions. How consumers view a product or brand is often a major factor influencing their choices. Various elements shape this perception, including the product's quality, the brand image built through marketing strategies, reviews and recommendations from other users, and the consumer's personal experience with the product. When consumers have a positive view of a product or brand, they are more likely to decide to purchase it. This is supported by statistical data showing that a path coefficient of 0.811 indicates a strong impact of consumer perception on purchasing decisions. The influence of consumer perception on purchasing decisions cannot be ignored, especially in a highly competitive market. Companies that can build a positive perception through high-quality products, effective brand communication, and satisfying customer service are better positioned to attract consumer interest. A path coefficient of 0.811 reflects the significant impact of this perception in determining whether a consumer will buy a product or not.

In other words, positive perception can significantly increase the likelihood of purchase. To better understand the importance of consumer perception, companies need to delve into how these various factors work. Product quality, for example, is a fundamental aspect of consumer perception. A high-quality product not only meets consumer needs but also exceeds their expectations. When consumers are satisfied with the product's quality, they will develop a strong positive perception, which in turn increases the likelihood of repeat purchases and brand loyalty. Consistent product quality can also create a strong brand image, which is another important aspect in shaping consumer perception.

Brand image itself plays a strategic role in shaping consumer perception. A brand that presents a strong image, such as being innovative, can attract consumers who value innovation. This image is created through various communication channels, from advertising to social media campaigns. Companies that consistently convey their brand messages tend to successfully create a positive perception in the minds of consumers. A positive brand image not only boosts consumer trust but also directly influences purchasing decisions.

Reviews from other customers also have a significant impact on consumer perception. In the digital age, consumers often look for online reviews before making a purchasing decision. Positive

reviews can reinforce a positive perception, while negative reviews can undermine it. Therefore, online reputation management is increasingly important for companies. Effectively managing reviews and proactively addressing customer complaints can help maintain a positive perception among consumers.

Personal experience with the product is also crucial in shaping perception. This experience encompasses the entire interaction with the product, from the purchase process to daily use. Consistent positive experiences will reinforce a positive perception, while negative experiences can damage the brand's image. Therefore, companies must ensure that every aspect of the consumer experience, from customer service to product quality, meets or exceeds consumer expectations.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this article, it is found that Vaseline products under Unilever's management, in response to the boycott issue, need to take strategic steps to maintain brand reputation and consumer trust. First, the company should conduct a thorough assessment of the root causes of the boycott, whether related to business ethics, environmental impact, or other social issues. After understanding the core issue, Unilever needs to communicate transparently with the public, explaining the company's position and the steps taken to address consumer concerns. Unilever can also strengthen positive campaigns that include promoting the company's sustainability efforts, social contributions, consumer-beneficial innovations, or reaffirming the company's commitment to values that align with public expectations. This may involve charitable activities or engaging influencers and media to spread messages that support the company's positive image.

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Enhancing Public Awareness about the Impact of Boycotts on Purchasing Decisions for Vaseline Products

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