

The Effect of Social Media Influencer on Boycott Participation through Attitude toward the Offending Country in a Situational Animosity Context

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Abstract : Using surrogate boycotts as a coercive tactic to force the offending party into changing its approaches has been increasingly significant over the last several decades, and is expected to increase in the future. Research shows that surrogate boycotts are often triggered by controversial international events, and particular foreign countries serve as the offending party in the international marketplace. In other words, multinational corporations are likely to become surrogate boycott targets in overseas markets because of the animosity between their home and host countries. Focusing on the surrogate boycott triggered by a severe situation animosity, this research aims to examine how social media influencers (SMIs) serving as electronic key opinion leaders (EKOLs) in an international crisis facilitate and organize a boycott, and persuade consumers to participate in the boycott. This research suggests that SMIs could be a particularly important information source in a surrogate boycott sparked by a situation of animosity. This research suggests that under such a context, SMIs become a critical information source for individuals to enhance and update their understanding of the event because, unlike traditional media, social media serve as a platform for instant and 24-hour non-stop information access and dissemination. The Xinjiang cotton event was adopted as the research context, which was viewed as an ongoing inter-country conflict, reflecting a crisis, which provokes animosity against the West. Through online panel services, both studies recruited Mainland Chinese nationals to be respondents to the surveys. The findings show that: 1. Social media influencer message is positively related to a negative attitude toward the offending country. 2. Attitude toward the offending country is positively related to boycotting participation. To address the unexplored question – of the effect of social media influencer influence on consumer participation in boycotts, this research presents a finer-grained examination of boycott motivation, with a special focus on a situational animosity context. This research is split into two interrelated parts. In the first part, this research shows that attitudes toward the offending country can be socially constructed by the influence of social media influencers in a situational animosity context. The study results show that consumers perceive different strengths of social pressure related to various levels of influencer messages and thus exhibit different levels of attitude toward the offending country. In the second part, this research further investigates the effect of attitude toward the offending country on boycott participation. The study findings show that such attitude exacerbated the effect of social media influencer messages on boycott participation in a situation of animosity.

Keywords : animosity, social media marketing, boycott, attitude toward the offending country

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