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# Gender Difference in the Perception of Guilt in Consumer Boycott in Brazil

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/65277>

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## Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to analyze consumer boycott from the perception of men's and women's guilt on a specific case involving Nike company through partners in its supply chain in China. The study was conducted with 281 consumers in the city of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 2012. In the process of validating a scale of consumer boycott in Brazil, the 13 items of the original scale were kept, but were grouped in different factors. The emerged factors were perception of guilt, influence from others, boycott efficiency, and purchase frequency. Testing relationship among demographic variables and these factors, only gender was significant on perception of guilt. In this sense, we seek in psychology, psychoanalysis (also briefly in anthropology and history), features that could explain the reasons why women feel guiltier than men, and thus are more likely to boycott.

**Keywords:** gender difference, consumer boycott, perception of guilt, consumer behavior, boycott motivations

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## 1. Introduction

In Brazil's society there are more differences between women and men than people around the world could ever imagine. Actually, there are a lot of examples of these differences, such as income, working positions, political beliefs, to name a few. In Brazil many cases show women as a part of a minority group. Brazil is a sexist country [1] and historically women were prepared to be house maids or mother. Despite this, throughout years women are less educated than men and they occupy marginal working positions. However, this context has been changing and nowadays women know about the importance of their presence in the Brazilian society.

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Women empowerment in Brazil is a result of feminist movement started in 1970, at the end of the dictatorship and the beginning of the democracy [2]. The presence of women at universities used to be rare [3] or the relevance of the first female president in Brazil. On virtual social networks (VSN) women have been demonstrating their power fighting against sexist speeches, companies, people, or situations. In 2015, #meuamigosecreto (hashtag secret santa) became famous in Brazil when women who had been sexually abused decided to demonstrate their dissatisfaction and personal traumas involving harassment. Similarly, in April of 2016, the *Veja* magazine (an important national magazine in Brazil) published on its cover a sexist content about the possible next first lady if Dilma Rousseff is impeached. A lot of women on VSN, especially on Facebook, refuted *Veja's* title "Pretty, coy and home-girl." In their vision, this title represents all sexist speech against whom they are fighting all these years.

On VSN in Brazil, women publish their dissatisfaction with companies which go against their values and beliefs and by boycotting their products or services. While the intention is only to complain about speeches or actions, we could not consider this intent as a boycott. Boycott is an act that involves not to buy products or services from some company [4–6]. The literature on boycott presents the backlash concept: a repudiation intention or act involving some company or situation [7] and boycott could be a type of backlash [8]. Consumer behavior studies highlight differences between women and men in several ways such as age and nutrition consumption [9], feminist knowledge in marketing consumer research [10], consumption of branded fashion apparel products [11], and boycott [4–6].

Specifically in relation to gender difference and intention, women are more intended to have a politically motivated behavior in buying (or not buying) than men [5]. They could award some company or brand doing their boycott—to buy because some company has been acting in accordance to their ideology or values [12]. In the opposite way, they could boycott to show their repudiation [4]. Some studies present statistical results about gender difference. For example, in Greece women were more intended to boycott products in a supermarket than men [13]; on average, women are more likely to boycott for political reasons or ideology—such as a feminist consumer [14]. In other worlds, generally, women are more worried to understand a context involving a brand, service, or product than men because their vision is more holistic than male [13–18].

The Girlcott group is a group which has been founded in 2005 in U.S. when a group of high school girls protested against Abercrombie & Fitch company because of sexism slogans on t-shirts. In this situation the girls received attention from U.S. media. These girls were not only worried about sexism, but they were paying attention to women health as well, specifically products that could be correlated to cancer [17]. In this empirical case in U.S., we can see how stronger is the gender on consumption because the Girlcott group is not worried to boycott only—these girls wanted to build a different world and this new world is a result of their purchases and political engagement in consumer behavior.

Boycott intention is not a new consumer behavior among women. The boycott theory discussed all these years (1990) this behavior evidencing the perception of women about sexist advertising, e.g., [18]. The difference between consumers nowadays and 30 years ago is the engage-

ment on VSN. On VSN, consumers express about bad experiences, human rights violations, bad social employer conditions, or sexist speeches.

Trying to understand the Brazilian consumer intention to boycott Nike (Nike's partners in China have employed child labor), a survey in Brazil (281 consumers) was conducted in 2012 in Rio de Janeiro city to validate a boycott marketing scale [5]. Although the scale items were identical, the factors were different from the original study conducted in U.S. The most important factor in Brazilian context has been the perception of guilt. We tested some demographic variables (gender, education, income, and age) to understand factors that emerged and gender was a single variable that was significant on the perception of guilt factor. Others demographic variables were not related to the other three factors (influence from others, boycott efficiency, and purchase frequency). Similarly, gender was not correlated to these three factors as well. Perception of guilt was influenced by gender only.

After this empirical result, we decided to go deep to understand the reasons of guilt involving Brazilian women and the society. Thus, this chapter aims to understand cultural, anthropological, and historical reasons in the Brazilian context to correlate the statistical result on boycott intention survey and historically women's self-perception of guilty. Our analysis here could help to understand the reasons why women engage on VSN in Brazil nowadays. Next section presents the boycott theory to highlight the difference between boycott and backlash.

## 2. Consumer boycott

Boycott happens when some consumers decide not to buy a product, service, or brand from a company [4–6] showing his/her repudiation to that company or context involving a supply chain. Consumer boycott involves consumption, consumers, and their potential relationship among companies and other actors in a society. While boycott is an act to punish some company, backlash is another kind of repudiation (e.g., as manifestations, strikes, repudiation videos on virtual social networks) [7, 8]. This difference is relevant on boycott studies because backlash involves boycott as an act of repudiation from consumers. In Brazil media always uses boycott to explain a backlash situation. It could be a result of Portuguese language as there is no translation to the word backlash.

Consumer boycott motivations can be analyzed from three dimensions. Two of them show ideological (social, religious, minority groups, and ecological boycotts) and economical (economic boycott) dimensions [19]. The third dimension is experiential and highlights the consumer's experience with a company (relational boycott) [20] or products and services (experiential boycott). We understand that political boycott [20] is motivated by ideological reasons and we aggregate this kind of boycott on ideological dimension.

Economical dimension has been discussed understanding the market structure (monopoly) or abusive prices on market. For example, consumers could do their boycott when they understand that (i) prices do not represent the fair value at market or production costs and (ii) a monopoly structure does not permit to buy from other companies. Economic boycott is the only kind of boycott included in this dimension.

Ideological dimension aggregates social, minority groups, religious, ecological, and political boycotts. Here, consumers decide not to buy because some company behavior, attitude, or actions hurt their personal values or ideology. For example, a consumer who cares about gay people could boycott Barilla after Barilla's CEO promoted the orthodox family (man and woman). In the same way, a member of Green Peace is more intended to boycott companies that make products with animal skins than a person who do not care about the environment. Boycotts in this dimension are motivated by personal values and personal characteristics [19].

When we analyze ecological boycott on ideological dimension, we consider actions from some company that can harm the environment [4]—Arezzo (a Brazilian company) was attacked on VSN in 2011 for making products using animal skins [19]. Despite religious boycott on ideological dimension, Brazilian protestants boycotted Salve Jorge Brazilian Soap opera (2012/2013) because the entertainment content was about Saint George (a Catholic saint) [21]. Political boycotts happen when consumers decide not to buy because of political reasons involving states or countries (such as Catalan and Spain). South Spain consumers boycotted Catalan Cava wine from Catalonia because of a historical conflict among Catalonia and others parts of Spain [20].

The third and last dimension in a consumer motivation boycott is the experiential dimension. This dimension aggregates relational and experiential boycotts. These types of boycotts are motivated by personal experiences with a company or products/services offered by some company. Here, consumers have had a bad experience trying to solve problems after sales (relational boycott) [22] or a bad experience using products or services (experiential boycott).

Even the boycott theory shows types of boycotts and dimensions for aggregating them. We understand that boycott decision is influenced by demographic variables such as gender [13–15], income, education, and age [12]. Despite this, we highlight the difference among women and men on boycott studies. However, in the next section we present studies that show women as more intended to boycott companies/brand/services than men.

### **2.1. The gender difference on consumer boycotts**

Demographic variables are always analyzed on statistical studies and too many times we found really interesting results which differs between women and men such as income [23], working positions [24], and education [25]. The purpose of this book is to aggregate different papers around the word in distinct areas to present these differences. On consumer boycotts studies we affirm that women are more intended to boycott than men.

Women engagement on boycotts is discussed in studies in a marginal way. For example, in Greece at the first economic crisis moment (2010), women were more inclined to boycott than men. It could be a result of women's characteristics because women generally pay more attention with family and other stakeholders than men [13]. An important investigation published in 2004 in the *Journal of Marketing* demonstrated the difference between women and men on consumer boycott. The study revealed the women's inclination to boycott was higher

when they were compared to men. In a sample of 1216 consumers in U.S., women showed to be more ready to boycott than men by 6% ( $p < 0.01$ ) [5]. What are the reasons of higher boycott intention among women than men?

When we compare real boycott cases, involving women engagement to academic reports on journals, we perceive how big the distance of reality and studies are—it could be a result of boycott theory recently becoming a new field of investigation. Several real cases could be presented highlighting the demographic variables or specifically the contexts or consumer decisions. When we analyze women engagement on boycott, we can appreciate cases such as Girlcott in U.S., DSTRKT nightclub in London [26], or “O Boticário” advertising campaign in Brazil [27].

As we can see, women engagement is not a personal characteristic of some country. The Girlcott is a group fighting against companies that make products what could affect women health [28]. Girlcott shows us the importance of women engagement in trying to change products that damage their health. Actually, Girlcott encourages women to say no to cancer-causing products and to buy healthy products instead, which are safer for the health of consumers in the long run [17]. In Brazil, for example, there is a group on Facebook for boycotting sexist brands, which shows us women engagement on boycotts.

Even sometimes this discussion is marginal on academic studies; we have some cases in Brazil which highlight women participation in boycotts. For example, Dilma Rousseff (Brazilian President) has been attacked by media and companies. Some Brazilian women can boycott these companies and the media showing their repudiation behind sexism or politically motivated speeches. Another case in Brazil shows women repudiation and boycott. “O Boticário” (a Brazilian cosmetic company) was engaged in 2015 to discuss divorce in Brazil but the stereotyped adverting conducted by “O Boticário” influenced women to boycott the company. Maria Filó (luxury clothes brand) was attacked on Facebook after Maria Filó's owner made a joke with a pregnant employer. A plenty of women were encouraged not buy Maria Filó clothes anymore.

### 3. Methodology

A survey with 281 consumers was conducted in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 2012. The real case chosen was Nike Company (which has been accused of employing child labor in their supply chain). The scale developed by Klein, Smith, and John published in *Journal of Marketing* was tested and validated on Brazilian context—we have followed all the statistical steps to validate this marketing scale [29–31]. All statistical assumptions were attempted for scale validation and reliability. The tests KMO (0.783), Bartlett (1019.047), and Cronbach's alpha were significant. Despite this, 13 items explain 63.3% of the variability (**Table 1**). The six items on Guilt Factor are presented in **Table 2**.

Factor	Factor name	Number of items	Degree of individual explanation (%)	Degree of accumulated explanation (%)
1	Guilt	6	30.59	30.59
2	Influence from others	3	13.28	43.87
3	Boycott efficiency	3	10.71	54.59
4	Purchasing frequency	1	8.70	63.30

Source: The authors, based on field data analysis.

**Table 1.** Individual and cumulative variances of the four factors found.

Item	Factor score
I would feel guilty if I bought Nike products	0.436
I would feel uncomfortable if people who abstain from buying Nike products would see me buying or consuming them	0.655
Everyone should stop buying them, every contribution, no matter how small, is very important	0.732
If the Nike child labor case were confirmed, I would stop buying their products	0.670
I will feel much better if I stopped buying Nike	0.815
I feel bad if I keep buying Nike products	0.765

Source: The authors, based on field data analysis.

**Table 2.** Guilt factor items.

#### 4. Do women feel more guilt than men on Nike's boycotts?

Testing the gender difference on 13 items on boycotts motivation scale, we found one statistical significant result: only the guilt factor was significant ( $p$ -value was 0.002). Influence from others, boycott efficiency and purchasing frequency were not significant. As we can see in **Table 3**, the difference between men and women just appears on the perception of guilt factor. It corroborates the results about boycott and politically motivated consumers, which shows women as more intended to boycott.

Our sample does not show any relationship about previous consumer experience and boycott intention. In other words, we cannot affirm if a previous consumer experience could influence (or not) a boycott decision. If a consumer is a fan of some brand, she/he could have an internal conflict to boycott, for example. Similarly, other consumers do not influence the boycott in this sample and the self-perception of boycott efficient either. Although among women and men, there is a significant influence when we analyze guilt.

Despite this, women feel guiltier than men or they would feel uncomfortable if they buy Nike knowing about child labor in Nike's supply chain. These women's believe in not buying Nike

is an important contribution and they feel much better to stop buying Nike's products. Even relevant, these results are just statistical and we approach to psychology to understand a historical context of women guilt. This approach could make these boycott results stronger on marketing theory.

		Sum of squares	DF	Mean square	F-test	Sig
Guilt	Among groups	9,207	1	9,207	9,566	0,002
	In groups	243,505	253	0,962		
	Total	252,712	254			
Influence from others	Among groups	0,556	1	0,556	0,553	0,458
	In groups	254,045	253	1,004		
	Total	254,600	254			
Boycott efficiency	Among groups	0,236	1	0,236	0,235	0,628
	In groups	254,559	253	1,006		
	Total	254,795	254			
Purchasing frequency	Among groups	1,433	1	1,433	1,430	0,233
	In groups	253,559	253	1,002		
	Total	254,992	254			

Source: Authors, based on field research's data analysis.

**Table 3.** Hypothesis test for differences between genders in each factor (ANOVA).

## 5. Historical and theoretical contextualization of the self-perception of guilt in contemporary women

In the final stage of the Neolithic period (between 4400 and 2009 BC), the concepts of power, affiliation, and inheritance were becoming imperatively masculinized, and women as valuable commodities and suppliers of future labor, which shows that women were gradually losing power [32, 33]. Women then became exclusively male property and inheritance was only devised to legitimate sons.

With the impacting discovery of paternity, the phallic principle (the ideology of male supremacy) conditions the way of living of humanity and generates patriarchy – a social organization based on the pose of the father, whose descendants and kinship exclusively take into account the male lineage. Women were considered inferior to men and were subordinate to their domination [32, 33]. The establishment of patriarchy in Western civilizations took place between 3100 and 600 BC.

Patriarchy (in the context of controlling women's fertility and the sexual division of labor) features three points of conditioning that are essential to its oppressive dominance over women: (i) the control of fidelity — used by men to protect and legitimize their heritage, treating women as suspects, patronized subjects, uninteresting, and incompetent relationship partners; (ii) control of children — idealized rightful heritage, whose good development is only recognized as a merit of the father, and whose surname they customarily and lawfully adopt, unconsciously reinforcing the idea that both the mother and the children are properties of the father; and (iii) the control of sexuality — women were used as social objects and exclusively defined by the relationship with their husbands. Positive inferences on their self-esteem were prohibited, they were taught to deny their self-worth [33, 34].

Western cultures live in a state of normality under patriarchy. That normality is based on two cornerstones: religion (mainly based on the Bible) and science. The Bible is a collection of Judeo-Christian books written by many people over the course of more than a thousand years, starting approximately in 1450 BC. Its influence in the West, including on the unconscious of people, is undeniable [33]. Its coercive power on guilt (through the idea of sin) is strong and is a perfect element to corroborate the foundations of the questioning based on our data analysis of the scale validated by our study, which shows a self-perception of guilt that is greater in women than men (in the boycott context). Given the fact that Brazil is a religious country, the Brazilian population, too, is the result of that Judaic-Christian culture, in which guilt prevails in the social unconscious. Alternatively, it has therefore become virtually impossible to escape the influence of that agonizing guilt (even non-Christian individuals are insured in contexts of “sin” and “guilt”).

The Bible consistently depicts women as the source of sin and degradation. In female biblical figures (which guaranteed the patronizingly superior attitude of God and men), symbols of the denial of sex, women are configured as the scapegoat at humanity, occupying a “lower” position in relation to men [34, 35]. Even the later biblical figure of Mary, a small attempt to revalue women, has been a failed initiative — as the rejection of her importance is clearly shown by her position in masses, prayers, and popular imagery of their strength — masked by submissive and subservient patience toward her husband and son.

Women represented directly and indirectly the source of all problems of humanity and the conditioning of the past centuries forced them to live in constant shame for the simple fact of being a woman and in deep penance toward humanity, since they had caused the countless problems of the world [33, 36]. Thus, the Bible ultimately dominates, enslaves, and continually devaluates women in its texts, degrading their position.

Thus, the influence of the Judeo-Christian culture, in a context of syncretism of Hebrew and Roman customs of the Near East, defines women as fragile, false, and emotionally unstable — which explains the transition of the female figure from “primarily influential and essential” to “property of the father, the husband, and the son.” Motherhood is her only form of sexual expression, intrinsically linked to pain, creating a concept of suffering and self-punishment for being a woman [35]. It is precisely that historical and cultural context that helps us understand the relationship between perception of guilt and gender, as the socially created contexts assigned to women were always inferior or submissive, historically creating a guilty social

subject, responsible for the failures of men. This analysis is essential to understand the construct of the perception of guilt in relation to consumer boycott.

## **6. Psychoanalytic conceptualization of guilt and its relationship to gender difference**

“Guilt” is the painful awareness that we have somehow harmed others (objects), felt by the person herself [37]. Melanie Klein [38], the renowned child psychologist, states that the development of the feeling of guilt starts in individuals as soon as the baby attacks the (original) maternal figure, ambivalently loved and hated because it is initially its first and unique environmental reference, generating as much pleasure and displeasure, which is part of the subject's differentiation process in the world.

Those moments (called “depressive position”) symbolized by the child result in a context of great anxiety (causing psychological suffering due to the distressing perception of the conflict between love and hate of the parental figure), since it leads to a possible loss of that figure (externally and internally). Therefore, the child takes repairing action so as not to lose its loved object [38, 39].

Thus, over time, the child introjects its parental figures and the ambivalence and guilt felt toward them, i.e., internalizing and marking them as internal behavioral reference points. This process makes it possible to build up a superego, a psychological construct of moral nature (and, therefore, social), repressor of behaviors, and creator of social adaptation in individuals [37, 40].

By relating this psychological construct in subjects to the historical and cultural bases previously presented (such as patriarchy, which denotes a strong introjection of the father figure in women), we may draw a line of thought that corroborates a more intense self-perception of guilt in woman than in men, caused by the impressive father figure and the temporal control established by men over women.

In our study, within the interrelationship between the “perception of guilt” construct based on our data analysis and the Kleinian guilt concept presented above, it becomes clear that the possibility of causing some kind of damage to one or more individuals who make up the consumer's group, women are subjected to greater self-awareness of guilt and experience the anxiogenic elements arising from that perception. That anxiety then forces the subject to take action aimed at maintaining a certain behavior—the boycott.

Given women's historical submission and lack of social role, and correlating that to the difference observed in the “perception of guilt” construct that resulted from the validation of the scale that was part of the field research of our study, we found that those feelings of anxiety and guilt caused by that constellation (through introjected parental figures, especially male ones) cause more intense guilt conflicts in women than in men. This finding is supported by the items developed by our study that allowed including the “perception of guilt” construct into the validated scale. This construct is not originally a part of the study by Klein, Smith, and

John [5], which provides insights for future research related to the issue of consumer boycotts or, more specifically, to the difference in “Perception of Guilt” and “Gender.”

## 7. Theoretical and practical implications and future research

The validation of the “perception of guilt” construct in our study provides theoretical and practical contributions related to consumer boycott. Theoretical implications include: (i) the “consumer gender” versus “boycott” issue, since there are few studies that present an empirical verification of those variables; (ii) the theoretical psychoanalytical analysis conducted after the development of the “perception of guilt” construct to verify an epistemological basis that justifies the relationship of the construct with a greater predisposition to guilt of women than men; and (iii) enable other researchers to use the scale validated by our research to replicate our study in other groups or associate it with other variables—e.g., identify which type of boycott (ecological, social, minority, religious, or economic) scores higher in the “perception of guilt” of consumers.

Problem	Objective	Possible result
Boycotting women and company actions to retain women who abstain from buying	Survey possible actions that a company might take to win back former costumers	Open, due to the fact that this is a qualitative exploratory study
Religion and perception of guilt in boycotts	Find out if religious women feel guiltier than atheists	Religious women feel guiltier than atheists
Business area of the company and perception of guilt in women	Find out if the business area of a given company alters the perception of guilt in women	Segments that operate exclusively for the female audience feature lower perception of guilt than other segments
Perception of guilt and education	Find out if the perception of guilt increases proportionally to the years of schooling	Consumers with a higher educational level feature a higher perception of guilt rather than those with a lower educational level
Perception of guilt, gender and ecological boycott	Identify whether women feature a higher perception of guilt than men in ecological boycotts	Women tend to score higher in Perceived guilt rather than men in Ecological boycotts due to the anxiogenic elements of guilt

Source: Authors.

**Chart 1.** Suggestions for further research.

Regarding practical implications, two different analysis perspectives of “perception of guilt” and “gender” emerge, named (i) communication strategies with consumers or former consumers and (ii) diagnosis of corporate image among women or men. Regarding communication strategies, as women feel guiltier than men when it comes to boycotts, the development of tools that aim to reconcile consumers and companies could, e.g., take into account the more intrinsic aspects of the psychotherapeutic trend of women which may be an effective strategy for crisis managements processes of consumer boycott situations. With regard to the diagnosis of the corporate image among men and women, women may assess a company negatively because they feel guiltier than men and thus influence other consumers, making them stop buying products from that company, which eventually would result in tangible and intangible losses regarding both company image and its reputation.

The scale validation results of our chapter as well as the psychoanalytic approach of guilt presented as a development of the scale validation and the theoretical and practical implications of this research lead to other research questions, as shown in **Chart 1**.

To conclude, we deem our article relevant for the area of consumer behavior in Brazil, since it now only discusses with scientific rigor the validation of a boycott motivations scale in Brazil and the developments of constructs found in this process in relation to the gender of the consumer, but it also seeks historical, psychological, and anthropological developments that underlie the empirical and statistically significant difference found in consumers who participated in the sample. Moreover, by presenting proposals for future research, the authors highlight the knowledge gaps that permeate the subject of consumer boycott.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Gladys Garcia and Antônio Lopes Drummond (English and Portuguese language specialists) for translating and revising the scale items from English to Portuguese (vice-versa).

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