Article

Beyond Efficacy: How Self-Esteem and Guilt Drive Participation in Tourism Boycotts

Minkyung Park [1,*] and Hochan Jang [2]

[1] School of Sport, Recreation, and Tourism Management, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, 4D2, Fairfax, VA 22030, USA
[2] Department of Tourism, Korea National Open University, 86, Daehak-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul 03087, Republic of Korea; hcjang@knou.ac.kr
[*] Correspondence: mparka@gmu.edu

Abstract: While tourism boycotts can have a considerable economic impact on a target entity, critics often question their effectiveness in changing the target entity's behavior, particularly in international contexts. Despite these challenges, tourism boycotts have increased over time. This study explores the dynamics of tourism boycotts amid international political conflicts and investigates the motivations behind consumer participation. During an ongoing national boycott in South Korea, we conducted an online survey with a nationally representative adult panel, gathering 962 responses for analysis. Our findings reveal that tourism boycott participants—primarily women, older individuals, those with higher education and income, and the progressive—resemble consumer boycott participants in Europe and the U.S. While perceived efficacy (instrumental motivation) is often emphasized in consumer boycotts as a key variable for participation, our study suggests that tourism boycotts are primarily driven by expressive motivations, such as self-esteem and guilt, rather than a mix of instrumental and expressive factors. This suggests that consumers engage in tourism boycotts not necessarily to achieve tangible outcomes, but to express personal or ethical values, highlighting a distinctive nature of tourism boycotts in the landscape of consumer activism.

Keywords: expressive motivation; instrumental motivation; perceived efficacy; guilt; self-esteem; international politics

1. Introduction

In foreign policy and international relations, travel bans have been a popular tool for imposing sanctions, utilized by many governments to induce behavioral and policy changes in their targets and gain bargaining power in trade or international relations [1]. These sanctions can be broadly divided into economic/financial sanctions and non-economic sanctions [2]. Traditionally, travel bans were seen as symbolic measures, expected to have less impact on a target country compared to the substantial effects of economic or financial sanctions. However, a recent case of travel bans imposed by the Chinese government on South Korea demonstrates that travel bans can wield significant economic influence. Following the Chinese government's ban on chartered flights and tour packages to Korea, Chinese tourist arrivals to South Korea plummeted by 65%, and tourism revenue from Chinese tourists declined by 31% (USD 19.2 billion) over an 18-month period [3]. A study conducted by Yu et al. [4] examined the effects of tourism boycotts on visitor numbers, analyzing seven (Initially, nine cases were identified, but only seven were used for analysis due to data unavailability for the remaining two cases) recent Chinese boycott events targeting some of the top 20 most popular overseas destinations among Chinese tourists. Their findings revealed that boycotts could significantly impact visitor numbers and lead to a substantial decrease in tourism revenue, although the intensity of the impact varied depending on the underlying animosity driving the boycotts.

Traditionally, tourism boycotts were thought to be led by only small and vocal groups. However, recent trends indicate that many tourism boycotts are now initiated and mobilized by individual consumers, leveraging their economic power to influence tourism practices. Yu et al. [4] identified nine tourism boycotts initiated and mobilized on Weibo by Chinese tourists between 2008 and 2016. Shaheer et al. [5] identified 146 destination boycotts initiated between 1948 and 2015, with 90% of these tourism boycotts occurring between 2003 and 2015. Notable travel boycotts have also taken place in several states in the United States, such as Arizona, North Carolina, and Texas, impacting the local communities that rely on tourism [6]. Tourism scholars attribute the recent increase in tourism boycotts among individual consumers to the widespread use of social media and the internet [7–9]. These platforms make it easier to initiate, mobilize, and participate in boycott campaigns online [10–12].

While tourism boycotts can have a substantial economic impact and attract active participation from consumers, the professional discourse largely revolves around their effectiveness [13]. Critics often argue that tourism boycotts are ineffective at compelling a target entity to change, particularly when it comes to achieving political outcomes on an international scale. However, an important and often overlooked aspect of tourism boycotts is the role of motivations beyond efficacy, particularly expressive motivations, where consumers participate not because they expect to effect change, but because they find intrinsic value in aligning with personal beliefs or expressing solidarity. This is especially relevant in contexts where individual tourists' actions seem inconsequential in shaping foreign policy outcomes.

Existing boycott literature identifies perceived efficacy—the belief that participants can influence the entity and bring about change—as a key factor driving boycott participation. However, it also suggests that consumers engage in boycotts for other reasons, including psychological motivations such as the desire to do the right thing or to punish a target [14]. This raises an important question: in the context of tourism boycotts, where consumers may doubt their ability to influence foreign policy, do expressive motivations outweigh perceived efficacy (institutional motivation) as a driving factor?

Despite research examining tourism boycotts in various settings, few studies have specifically explored consumer participation dynamics in tourism boycotts within international political conflicts, especially when individual actions are unlikely to influence the target entity's behavior. This study addresses this gap by examining the role of expressive motivations in tourism boycott participation and the specific benefits consumers seek from their involvement in politically charged contexts. Utilizing data from an ongoing boycott amid a major international political conflict, this study provides insights into the unique dynamics of tourism boycotts, where intrinsic rewards, such as aligning with personal values or enhancing self-esteem, may drive participation despite limited expectations of efficacy.

As consumer-led tourism boycotts continue to rise, and the collective power of large numbers of tourists can seriously damage local economies and small businesses in tourism-dependent regions, understanding the distinct motivations and dynamics of tourism boycotts is crucial for destination managers and tourism practitioners seeking to mitigate the risks posed by such movements. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the importance of expressive motivations in tourism boycotts, expanding the discourse beyond efficacy, and offering a nuanced perspective on consumer behavior in the context of international political conflicts.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a literature review, examining existing research on tourism boycotts, identifying relevant theoretical frameworks, and highlighting gaps that this study addresses. Section 3 details the methodology including the research design, data collection methods, and analytical approaches. Section 4 presents key findings. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of the findings, summarizing insights and contributions to the field.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Tourism Boycotts

Tourism boycotts encompass three main realms: (1) government-imposed travel bans driven by international geopolitics and diplomatic goals [2]; (2) private sector initiatives, including ceasing operation in or trade with specific countries, in response to ethical and socially responsible practices; and (3) individual consumers advocating for and engaging in boycotts. Government travel bans have a longstanding historical precedent in various places such as Cuba, Myanmar, North Korea, South Africa, Syria, and Iran [15], serving as a potent form of sanctions. Government travel bans are still a useful tool for use as a form of sanctioning. Recent examples include Russia facing travel sanctions from the international community after the annexation of Crimea [16] and China economically retaliating against South Korea through travel bans due to the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system on its territory [17].

It is not common for the private sector (e.g., businesses) to participate in boycotts, but the recent war between Russia and Ukraine has led to calls for a worldwide boycott against Russia. Since the war between Russia and Ukraine grinds on, more than 1000 companies have voluntarily curtailed or suspended operations in Russia [18]. A non-exhaustive list of the boycotts launched by the private sector encompasses tech giants, retailers, sports teams, sporting events, food and beverage companies, and those involving travel and tourism [19]. Specifically, companies within the travel and tourism sector such as cruise lines, tour operators, and airlines have participated in the global boycott against Russia [20].

Previously, tourism boycotts were often perceived as being led by a small, vocal group mainly driven by ethical concerns [13]. However, with the recent increase in tourism boycotts, individual consumers are avoiding certain destinations for various reasons, including human rights violations [21,22], concerns about animal welfare [2,23,24], political issues, and environmental concerns [5,25]. The rise in geopolitical conflicts in recent years has further broadened the motivations behind these boycotts, with individual consumers increasingly boycotting destinations out of animosity toward certain countries in international crisis situations [26–28]. This shift suggests that tourism boycotts, once seen as niche or limited to specific interest groups, are becoming more mainstream. Recent studies have thus focused on the growing involvement of everyday consumers, highlighting the power of individual action in shaping global tourism patterns. Therefore, there remains a critical need to deepen our understanding of these individual consumers and the specific dynamics of tourism boycotts within distinct political contexts, such as those explored in this study.

In summary, research on tourism boycotts as a form of consumer behavior has emerged relatively recently. While various studies have examined boycott actions within the context of tourism, empirical research on large-scale voluntary tourism boycotts from a consumer perspective, particularly in relation to specific geopolitical events, remains limited. Despite a prevalent belief among some critics within the tourism profession that tourism boycotts are ineffective [13], consumers continue to participate in these boycotts. This disconnect highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the motivations driving consumer involvement in such actions. This study aims to address this research gap by employing the widely accepted cost–benefit framework from the consumer boycott literature to explore the motivations driving consumer participation in tourism boycotts, which will be further examined in the following sections.

2.2. Consumer Activism and Tourism Boycotts

Many researchers studying consumer boycotts consider them to be among the most effective means for consumers to encourage ethical practices by firms in the modern economy [29,30]. This perspective aligns with the tradition of political consumer activism, where individuals use their buying power to promote social good [31]. Political consumer activism prioritizes morality, ethics, and social responsibility over self-interest-driven activism [32,33]. In this line of research, most studies on consumer boycotts assume that

they are prompted by perceptions of egregious acts committed by the target entity [14,30,34]. Egregious acts are defined as "conduct [by a firm] that is strikingly wrong and that has negative and possibly harmful consequences for various parties" [11]. The concept of perceived egregiousness as a trigger for consumer boycotts helps elucidate the social aspect of boycotts, which is distinct from economic features of boycotts. In economic boycotts, consumers assess the actions of the target entity based on their perception of unfair marketing practices or prices [30,35].

Similarly, most tourism boycotts are ethical and serve as a form of consumer activism, often triggered by an entity's egregious act. Recent studies on tourism boycotts suggest that such boycotts, particularly those initiated on social media, are often sparked by negative social and political events [4,7,36]. Luo and Zhai [7] illustrated how a political event on social media, such as the Occupy Central event on Weibo in Hong Kong, could easily evolve into a tourism boycott. Additionally, in comparison to competence-related negative events, moral negative events are more likely to lead to a tourism boycott [36]. Moral negative events also often elicit stronger negative emotions and have more serious consequences than competence-related negative events [36].

Moreover, tourism boycotts intertwine political and ethical behaviors. Tourism destinations are predominantly boycotted not because of their products, services, or misconduct, but rather due to their perceived political stances by various publics. This trend aligns with Chen's [32] concept of politicized consumer activism, where consumers attribute political meanings to corporate conduct and collectively pressure corporations based on these perceptions. According to Chen [32], politicized consumer activism primarily involves joining boycotts or protests due to dissatisfaction with a company's political stance, rather than aiming for social change. For instance, when U.S. states like North Carolina and Georgia passed laws targeting the LGBTQ community, both the private sector (businesses and civic communities) and individual tourists called for and participated in a boycott, resulting in estimated damages of billions of dollars to each state [37]. In tourism, it is more common for an individual consumer's boycotting behavior to be triggered by the perceived egregiousness of a government's actions, whether ethical or political. Thus, in alignment with existing literature, our study considers perceived egregiousness as a motivating factor for tourism boycotts.

2.3. A Cost–Benefit Model and Tourism Boycotts

The cost–benefit model is a dominant framework in consumer boycott literature, with many studies using this approach to explain why consumers engage in boycotts [14,30,34,38]. This framework has evolved from two key theoretical foundations. First, it draws from a theoretical economic model that treats boycott participation as a collective action problem, where consumer decisions are influenced by the factors like free-riding and small agent issues [38]. Second, it is conceptualized as a prosocial behavior (e.g., helping behavior), wherein individuals act to benefit a larger group rather than pursuing personal gains [14,39]. Similar to helping behavior, the cost–benefit model suggests that consumers are more likely to engage in boycotts when the benefits of participation outweigh the associated costs [30]. Previous studies have identified various costs and benefits of boycotting [references], which will be discussed further in the following sections.

2.3.1. Benefits of Boycotting: Instrumental and Expressive Factors

Consumer boycott literature identifies two primary motivations that consumers evaluate as benefits of participation: instrumental and expressive [38]. Instrumental motivations are goal-oriented, focused on changing the target's behavior or policies. Consumers driven by instrumental motivations seek extrinsic utility, such as the satisfaction of influencing the contested behavior of a company or destination. This desire is rooted in the belief that their participation can affect decision-making, providing a sense of impact and purpose [14,30]. Central to this belief is the concept of perceived efficacy—the conviction that one's actions can lead to tangible change. Studies suggests that consumers who perceive boycotting as

both appropriate and effective are more likely to participate [38]. Sen et al. [40] further emphasize that when consumers believe their actions matter, they are more inclined to join the boycott, even if others do not participate.

In the context of international tourism boycotts, however, where the capacity to influence larger political outcomes may be limited, the role of perceived efficacy becomes more complex. While instrumental motivations may initially drive participation, the realities of geopolitical dynamics can lead consumers to question the effectiveness of their actions. This brings expressive motivations into focus, which are driven by intrinsic rewards such as enhancing self-esteem, avoiding guilt, or conforming to social expectations [38,41]. Consumers motivated by expressive factors may engage in boycotts not necessarily to effect change, but to align with personal or social values, gain a sense of moral superiority, or respond to social pressures [42].

This shift from instrumental to expressive motivations underscores the importance of understanding the dominant utilities within tourism boycotts. Consumers may initially join a boycott with hopes of influencing change, but the realization that their individual actions may not significantly affect political outcomes can lead them to rely more on expressive motivations. Therefore, our study proposes that expressive motivations are likely to dominate in tourism boycotts as consumers seek intrinsic rewards such as aligning with personal values or enhancing self-esteem in the context of international political conflicts, although both instrumental and expressive factors serve as benefits that can drive participation in tourism boycotts. Understanding this dynamic is crucial in the tourism sector, where the collective actions of individual consumers, despite doubts about political impact, can still exert significant pressure on local economies and tourism-dependent regions.

2.3.2. Costs of Boycotting: Free-Riding, Small Agent Rationalization, Unintended Costs

According to the cost–benefit framework in consumer boycott literature, while the benefits of boycotting encourage participation, the costs of boycotting act as a deterrent, leading consumers to weigh these costs carefully. Similarly to helping behavior, where participation declines as the costs of helping increase [43–45], the potential costs of boycotting discourage consumers from engaging when they perceive personal costs to outweigh the benefits. Key cost-related factors include free-riding, small agent rationalization, and unintended consequences [38].

Free-riding occurs when consumers choose not to participate in the boycott but still benefit from its success [46]. The small agent rationalization suggests that consumers may refrain from boycotting if they perceive themselves as too insignificant to impact larger events or if they feel powerless compared to larger actors [4,38]. This perception of powerlessness and an individual's sense of being "too small" to matter often hinders boycott participation, contributing to the challenge of mobilizing widespread consumer action [30,38].

Another key factor in boycott participation is the potential for unintended consequences. Consumers may fear that boycotting could result in negative outcomes, such as economic harm to local communities or small businesses that are not directly involved in the political conflict [14]. These unintended costs can further limit the willingness of individuals to participate in a boycott, particularly when the perceived costs outweigh the potential impact.

Our study explores these cost-related motivational variables alongside instrumental and expressive factors. By examining the broader dynamics of tourism boycotts, we aim to identify how free-riding, small agent rationalization, and unintended costs influence individual consumer decisions, particularly in the context of political conflicts where the efficacy of tourism boycotts may seem limited.

3. Study Setting

3.1. Trigger Incident for Tourism Boycott

In July 2019, Japan imposed restrictions on the export of chemicals to South Korea, which are crucial South Korea's high-tech industry to produce semiconductors and display screens [47], and removed South Korea from its list of trusted trade partners. Semiconductors, a key material used in most electronic devices, have long been South Korea's top export item, and any delay or disruption in their production could pose a significant threat to its economy [48,49]. Japanese officials claimed that their decision to ban such key chemicals was due to South Korea's inadequate management of them, but they did not provide specific details [49]. The majority of South Koreans viewed this trade dispute as closely tied to a recent decision by South Korea's Supreme Court, which held Japanese companies responsible for compensating victims of forced labor during World War II, a period when Japan occupied the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945 [50]. Many South Koreans harbored resentment towards Japan's decision, widely believed to be a form of retaliation against the Supreme Court's ruling [51]. Consequently, South Koreans called for a wide-ranging boycott of Japanese products such as beer, clothing brands, cosmetics, and travel to Japan. These two neighboring countries share a complicated history of intermittent warfare dating back to at least the 7th century [47] and continue to experience diplomatic tensions over issues such as forced labor and sex slavery, particularly referring to the concept of "comfort women", stemming from Japan's occupation period [50].

3.2. Tourism Between Japan and South Korea

Despite tensions over historic incidents and political circumstances, people in the two countries have frequently visited each other, and international tourism between Japan and South Korea has flourished. Alongside the United States and China, South Korea has consistently been ranked among the top three most visited countries by Japanese overseas travelers in recent decades. In 2019, 3,271,706 Japanese travelers visited South Korea, marking an 11% increase from 2,948,527 in 2018 [52].

Similarly, Japan has been one of the top destinations for Korean overseas travelers over the past decades. As seen in Table 1, particularly noteworthy is the significant annual increase in Korean visitors to Japan over the past five years (2015–2019), with 7,538,952 Korean travelers visiting Japan in 2018, accounting for 24.2 percent of Japan's total foreign visitors [52]. However, since the launch of the "No Travel to Japan" campaign in response to the Japanese government's export ban in July 2019, the monthly Korean visitors to Japan has dropped significantly (Figure 1). For instance, before the boycott, monthly visitor counts were relatively high, often reaching around 600,000 to 800,000. However, after July 2019, these numbers saw a stark decline, dropping to as low as 200,000 by the end of the year. In January and February 2020, South Korean arrivals in Japan remained significantly lower than during the same period the previous year, reflecting the ongoing impact of the boycott. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to intensify in Korea, and by the end of March 2020, the Korean government issued a special travel advisory, urging citizens to cancel or postpone international travel [9]. In early April 2020, Japan closed its border to foreign travelers [9]. Thereafter, pandemic-related international travel restrictions led to an unprecedented decline in global tourism, which caused the tourism boycott among Koreans to lose momentum due to external factors rather than an internal voluntary withdrawal. We believe the boycott movement could have lasted longer if not for the border closures triggered by COVID-19. In this sense, the pandemic interrupted the boycott campaign. During the peak of pandemic lockdowns from April 2020 to September 2022, visitor numbers dropped to hundreds and thousands. Japan eventually lifted COVID restrictions on foreign tourists in October 2022 [53], and by January 2023, travel to Japan had started to recover, approaching pre-boycott and pre-pandemic levels.

Table 1. International Tourism between Korea and Japan: 2015 to 2023.

	Korean Visitors to Japan	Annual Change (%)	Japanese Visitors to Korea	Annual Change (%)
2015	4,002,095	45.3	1,837,782	−19.4
2016	5,090,302	27.2	2,297,893	25.0
2017	7,140,438	40.3	2,311,447	0.6
2018	7,538,952	5.6	2,948,527	27.6
2019	5,584,597	−25.9	3,271,706	11.0
2020	487,939	−91.3	430,742	−86.8
2021	18,947	−96.1	15,265	−96.5
2022	1,012,751	5245.2	296,867	1844.8
2023	6,958,494	587.1	2,316,429	680.3

Source: Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications website, https://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/index.html (accessed on 14 November 2024), Korea National Tourism Organization Data Lab and Tourism Knowledge & Information System, https://datalab.visitkorea.or.kr/datalab/portal/main/getMainForm.do (accessed on 14 November 2024).
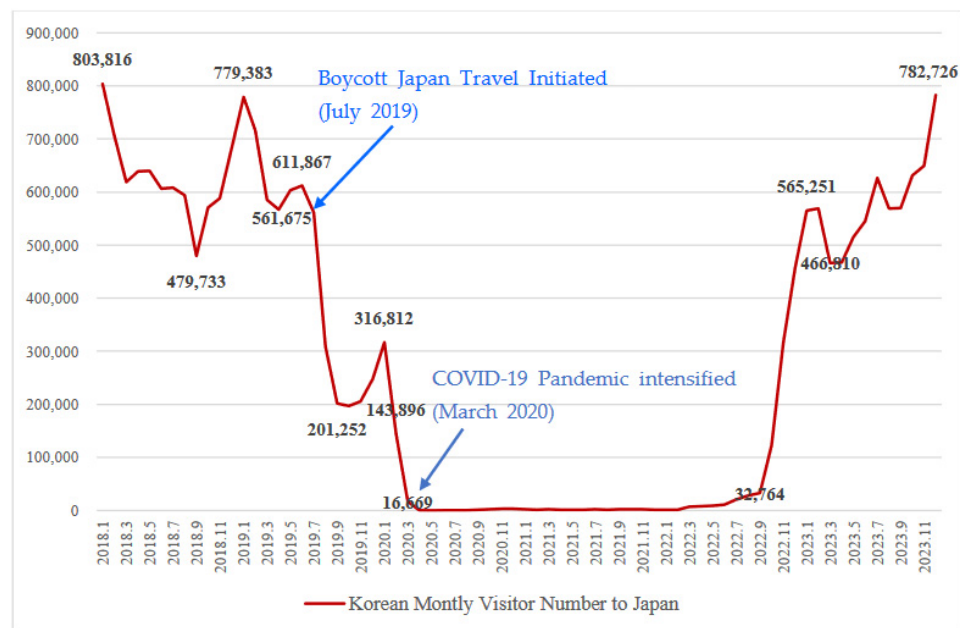

Figure 1. Monthly Visitation by Koreans to Japan: January 2018 to December 2023. Source: Korea National Tourism Organization Data Lab.

4. Methods

The researchers developed an online survey consisting of 31 questions, including demographic information, perceived images of Japan, perceived egregiousness of Japan's export ban decision, prior boycott experience, participation in travel boycotts, and motivations behind travel boycotts. The study targeted Korean adults aged 18 to 60. Quota sampling based on gender, region, and age was employed as it allows for the selection of participants who represent key demographic variables within the target population. This approach ensures that specific subgroups are proportionally represented, which is crucial for understanding variations in consumer boycott behavior across different demographic segments. As the sample was drawn from panel data maintained by a research firm in Korea, which also managed the data collection, the elderly population over 60 was excluded from the study due to a low response rate and the high cost associated with reaching this population. The low response rate is primarily attributed to their lower digital literacy [54], which affects their engagement in the study. This exclusion will be further discussed in the limitations in Section 7.2. The survey, initially developed in English, was translated into Korean by the authors, who were proficient in both languages.

Data collection was conducted over a two-week period, from 28 February to 5 March 2020, resulting in a total of 1017 valid responses. Since the data collection was managed by a research company, only cleaned and valid responses were provided to the researchers after their initial data cleaning process, which excluded incomplete or non-standard responses such as those exhibiting inconsistent patterns like selecting the same response for all items. Initially, boycott participation was measured using four categories capturing people who changed their behavior during the boycott period. Of the sample, 5.4% altered their boycott behavior during the movement: 1.3% had initially participated in the boycott but stopped by the time of the survey, while 4.1% had not initially participated but were participating at the time of the survey. For the purpose of analysis, boycott participation was simplified into two groups based on participation status. Those who changed their participation status during the boycott movement were excluded from the analysis, resulting in 962 valid responses, consisting of individuals who either consistently participated in the boycott since August 2019 or did not participate at all. Subsequently, the collected data were analyzed and interpreted using SPSS 29.0.

Since the first known case of COVID-19 was identified in China in December 2019 [55], the virus had only begun to spread in South Korea, Iran, and Italy [56]. During this period, the governments of these countries had not yet implemented border closures, shutdowns, or mandatory quarantines for international travelers between South Korea and Japan. Therefore, the authors assert that there is no reason to believe COVID-19 affected the survey responses. It is worth noting that the boycott movement in Korea had been ongoing for more than eight months since July 2019 and remained active during the study period.

Measurement

The study employed several variables to assess overall opinions of Japan and the Japanese government's decision on the export ban. Likability of Japan was measured using a four-point scale, where 1 represented "very unfavorable" and 4 represented "very favorable". Trust in the Japanese government was also measured on a four-point scale. Additionally, opinions regarding the reasons behind Japan's export ban were measured using a five-point scale. The study further examined the frequency of total international travel, as well as travel to Japan, to explore its relationship with participation in the boycott. To understand the underlying drivers of boycott participation, we used a binomial logistic regression model. Our dependent variable was coded as follows: no boycott participation as 0 and boycott participation as 1.

Our independent variables included eight variables: egregiousness of Japan's trade ban, change, guilt, social pressure, self-esteem, free riding, small agent, and unintended cost. The scales for perceived egregiousness and tourism boycott motivation variables such as change, guilt, social pressure, self-esteem, free-riding, small agent, and unintended cost were adapted from Klein et al. [14]. Perceived egregiousness was measured by assessing respondents' disapproval of Japan's action on a four-point scale ranging from "Complete Disapproval" to "Complete Approval". Other motivational variables were measured on a ten-point scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 10 indicated "strongly agree".

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Analysis

Our sample was designed to be representative of the adult population in Korea by gender, region, and age, and comprised 51% male and 49% female respondents. As presented in Table 2, the mean age of the participants was 40.4 years old, with over two-thirds (67.5%) reporting an annual household income of less than $50,000. Forty-five percent of the respondents had a bachelor's degree or higher. Given the significant attention garnered domestically and internationally, nearly all respondents (93.9%) were aware of Japan's trade ban on Korea that occurred in August 2019, and a similar portion (94%) believed that Japan's decision on the export ban is unjustified. The majority of the sample (87%) had been participating in the travel boycott to Japan since the incident, indicating

significant engagement, while 13% had not participated at all. It is interesting to note that, despite 94% of respondents expressing disapproval of Japan's trade ban on Korea, some did not participate in the travel boycott to Japan.

Table 2. Profile of the Study Sample (*n* = 962).

Variable	Category	Distribution
Gender	Male	490 (50.9%)
	Female	472 (49.1%)
Age	Mean	40.4
	Median	42.0
Annual household income	Less than $30,000	291 (30.2%)
	$30,000~$49,999	358 (37.3%)
	$50,000~$69,999	188 (19.6%)
	$70,000~$99,999	95 (9.9%)
	$100,000 or above	30 (3.1%)
Education	Less than high school	16 (1.7%)
	High school	347 (36.1%)
	Associate degree	163 (16.9%)
	Bachelor degree	352 (36.6%)
	Graduate degree	84 (8.7%)
Political Orientation	Conservative	149 (15.5%)
	Progressive	288 (29.9%)
	Moderate	525 (54.6%)
Participation in tourism boycott	I have participated in boycotting travels to Japan since August 2019	837 (87%)
	I did not participate in boycotting at all	125 (13%)

Table 3 shows the results of Chi-Square tests on boycott participation by demographic and behavioral variables. All variables except trips to Japan were found to be statistically significant. Women are significantly more likely to participate in the boycott compared to men, with 91.7% of women participating versus 82.4% of men. Men are more likely to be non-participants (68.8%). The differences between genders are statistically significant. In terms of age, boycott participants are, on average, 4.26 years older than non-participants, with this difference being statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level. There is also a significant association between education level and boycott participation. Those with higher education levels have a participation rate of 89.3%, compared to 83.2% for those with lower education levels. Income is similarly associated with boycott participation, as 90.4% of people in the higher income group participated, compared to 85.4% in the lower income group. Additionally, a larger percentage of non-participants come from the lower income group (76%). Political orientation is significantly related to boycott participation. Progressives are the most likely to participate (95.1%), followed by moderates (85.7%), while conservatives are the least likely (75.8%). Furthermore, international travel experience appears to influence participation. Those with international trip experience have a higher participation rate (90%) compared to those without (81.5%). However, there is no significant difference in boycott participation between those with or without prior trips to Japan.

Table 4 presents the results of independent *t*-tests comparing the means of various variables related to attitudes toward Japan between boycott participants and non-participants. As expected, participants show significantly lower mean scores for the likability of Japan and trust in the Japanese government, indicating less favorable views and lower levels of trust compared to non-participants. Similarly, participants are more likely to agree that Japan's export ban was a form of retaliation against the Korean Supreme Court's decision on forced labor during Japan' occupation, as well as express greater concern about the disruption to Korea's economy. Additionally, participants are more likely to disagree that Japan's export ban is related to national security concerns about Korea's mishandling of materials.

Table 3. Chi-square tests and *t*-test of travel boycott participation status with demographic and behavioral variables.

Variables	Participation (*n* = 837)	No Participation (*n* = 125)	Total	Statistical Significance
Gender				
Male	404 (82.4%)	86 (17.6%)	490	χ^2 = 18.346, df = 1, *p* < 0.001
Female	433 (91.7%)	39 (8.3%)	472	
Education				
HS and less	302 (83.2%)	61 (16.8%)	363	χ^2 = 7.488, df = 1, *p* = 0.006
Above HS	535 (89.3%)	64 (10.7%)	599	
Income				
Below $50,000	554 (85.4%)	95 (14.6%)	649	χ^2 = 4.769, df = 1, *p* = 0.029
$50,000 and above	283 (90.4%)	30 (9.6%)	313	
Political Orientation				
Conservatives	113 (75.8%)	36 (24.2%)	149	χ^2 = 34.060, df = 2, *p* < 0.001
Progressives	274 (95.1%)	14 (4.9%)	288	
Moderates	450 (85.7%)	75 (14.3%)	525	
International Trips *				
Yes	559 (90.0%)	62 (10.0%)	621	χ^2 = 14.039, df = 1, *p* < 0.001
No	278 (81.5%)	63 (18.5%)	341	
Trips to Japan *				
Yes	229 (85.4%)	39 (14.6%)	268	χ^2 = 0.798, df = 1, *p* = 0.372
No	608 (87.6%)	86 (12.4%)	694	
Age				
Mean Age	40.92	36.66		t = −3.964, df = 960, *p* < 0.001

* Total trips over the two-year period from June 2017 to June 2019.

Table 4. Opinions of Japan and Export Ban by Boycott Participation.

Variables	Boycott Participation	N	Mean	S.D.	T	*p*-Value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Likability of Japan	Participants	837	1.84	0.633	9.770	<0.001	0.526	0.793
	Non-Participants	125	2.50	0.714				
Trust in Japanese Government	Participants	837	1.62	0.561	8.988	<0.001	0.389	0.606
	Non-Participants	125	2.12	0.679				
Retaliation Against the Korean Supreme Court's Decision	Participants	837	4.42	0.870	−8.116	<0.001	−1.066	−0.648
	Non-Participants	125	3.56	1.132				
National Security Concerns Regarding Korea's Mishandling of Materials	Participants	837	2.59	1.305	2.496	0.013	0.056	0.480
	Non-Participants	125	2.86	1.090				
Disruption to Korea's Economy	Participants	837	4.37	0.857	−8.095	<0.001	−1.005	−0.611
	Non-Participants	125	3.56	1.066				

5.2. Binomial Logistic Regression Analysis

Table 5 presents the statements and descriptive statistics for independent variables. To measure the internal consistency of items within the variables of change, social pressure, and unintended cost, we conducted reliability tests. Cronbach's alphas for change, social pressure, and unintended cost were found to be 0.91, 0.78, and 0.90, respectively. Among these variables, items related to change were most strongly endorsed (mean score of 7.56), particularly the statement "by boycotting, I can help change Japan's decision" (7.74). Conversely, the least strongly endorsed variable was free riding, "I do not need to boycott Japan: enough other people are doing so" (2.75), followed by the unintended cost items

(3.15), particularly with the statement, "I don't boycott travel to Japan because it could induce Japanese boycotting travel to Korea" (2.85).

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables for Binomial Regression Analysis.

Variables [a]	Mean (n = 962)	Boycotters (n = 837)	Non-Boycotters (n = 125)
Egregiousness [b]	1.50 (0.623)	1.45 (0.590)	1.93 (0.686)
Change (Cronbach's α = 0.91)	7.56 [c] (2.30)	8.00 (1.91)	4.62 (2.57)
Boycotts are an effective means to make Japan change its actions.	7.38 (2.46)	7.81 (2.11)	4.52 (2.69)
By boycotting, I can help change Japan's decision.	7.74 (2.39)	8.19 (1.93)	4.73 (2.70)
Guilt			
I would feel guilty if I traveled to Japan	7.19 (2.73)	7.73 (2.34)	3.58 (2.39)
Social pressure (Cronbach's α = 0.78)	7.19 [c] (2.34)	7.63 (2.02)	4.26 (2.22)
I would feel uncomfortable if other people who are boycotting saw me traveling to Japan.	7.17 (2.68)	7.56 (2.44)	4.58 (2.76)
My friends/my family are encouraging me to boycott Japan	7.21 (2.50)	7.70 (2.15)	3.93 (2.19)
Self-esteem			
I will feel better about myself if I boycott Japan.	7.36 (2.25)	7.90 (2.14)	3.70 (2.34)
Free ride			
I do not need to boycott Japan: enough other people are doing so.	3.75 (2.14)	2.54 (2.18)	4.22 (2.15)
Small agent			
I do not travel to Japan anyway for it to be worthwhile boycotting; it would not even be noticed.	3.93 (2.78)	3.69 (2.74)	5.50 (2.50)
Unintended costs (Cronbach's α = 0.90)	3.15 [c] (1.92)	2.92 (1.81)	4.72 (1.85)
One shouldn't boycott because it will put Japan travel-related jobs in Korea in danger.	3.44 (2.14)	3.24 (2.08)	4.80 (2.08)
I don't participate in boycotting travel to Japan because it could negatively impact Korea's tourism industries (travel agency, hotel and airlines, etc.).	3.16 (2.13)	2.90 (2.02)	4.90 (2.00)
I don't boycott travel to Japan because it could induce Japanese boycotting travel to Korea.	2.85 (2.03)	2.61 (1.90)	4.46 (2.10)

Note: standard deviation in parenthesis. [a] All variables were measured by a 10-point Likert scale except the egregiousness variable, which was measured by a 4-point Likert scale. [b] Egregiousness: Do you disapprove of Japan's action on trade ban on South Korea? It was measured from (1) complete disapproval to (4) complete approval. [c] The average of the items within each factor.

The dependent variable was dichotomized into boycott participation and no boycott participation, and a binomial logistic regression was performed to assess the effects of egregiousness, change, guilt, self-esteem, free ride, social pressure, and unintended cost of boycott on the likelihood of study respondents participating in the travel boycott. We coded no boycott participation as 0 and boycott participation as 1. The results of the binomial logistic regression are presented in Table 6. The logistic regression model was statistically significant, χ^2 = 340.87, $p < 0.001$. The model explained 55.4% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in travel boycott participation and correctly classified 91.2% of cases. Notably, five variables (perceived egregiousness, guilt, self-esteem, small agent, and unintended cost) were found to be significantly associated with the likelihood of travel boycott participation.

Table 6. Results of Binomial Logistic Regression.

Variables	B	SE	Sig.	Exp(B)	Odd Ratio	95%CI for Exp(B)
Egregiousness ** [a]	−0.593	0.219	0.007	0.553	44.7%	0.360–0.849
Change	0.073	0.083	0.383	1.075	-	0.913–1.267
Guilt ***	0.289	0.080	<0.001	1.335	33.5%	1.142–1.562
Self-esteem ***	0.331	0.096	<0.001	1.393	39.3%	1.153–1.682
Social pressure	0.105	0.108	0.327	1.111	-	0.900–1.372
Free ride	−0.032	0.085	0.707	0.969	-	0.821–1.143
Small agent **	−0.181	0.063	0.004	0.835	16.5%	0.738–0.944
Unintended cost *	−0.216	0.109	0.047	0.806	19.4%	0.651–0.997
Constant	0.199	0.636	0.754	1.220		
Hosmer and Lemeshow Test			$\chi^2 = 8.816$, $p = 0.358$			
Omnibus Test			$\chi^2 = 340.866$, $p < 0.001$			
Nagelkerke R^2			0.554			

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$. [a] Egregiousness was measured as follows: Do you disapprove of Japan's action on the trade ban on South Korea? Responses were recorded on a scale ranging from (1) complete disapproval to (4) complete approval.

As expected, increasing feelings of guilt and self-esteem were positively associated with a higher likelihood of participating in the travel boycott. Similarly, increasing approval of the target's decision or behavior, which is equivalent to decreased perceived egregiousness, was negatively associated with the increased likelihood of boycott participation. In other words, as perceived egregiousness strengthens, the odds ratio for boycott participation increases. Conversely, the belief that one's actions would have no impact because they do not travel to Japan anyway (small agent) were negatively associated with the likelihood of travel boycott participation. Likewise, consideration of unintended costs was negatively associated with boycott participation, resulting in a decreased likelihood of participation. As expected, the instrumental motivation to effect change in the target's decision by participating in a boycott did not significantly affect the likelihood of travel boycott participation in our model. Additionally, the effects of social pressure and free-riding variables on the likelihood of travel boycott participation were not statistically significant.

6. Discussions

Our findings indicate that certain demographic groups, particularly women, older individuals, those with higher education and income, and progressives, are more likely to participate in tourism boycotts prompted by national issues. This profile, which aligns closely with the European consumer boycott demographic as well as US consumers, underscores a global trend where women, younger, well-educated, and affluent individuals are more inclined to engage in boycotts [57,58]. However, our study uniquely identifies that relatively older individuals (those in their 40s and 50s) in Korea show higher participation rates in tourism boycotts, in contrast to younger generations, potentially due to socio-political factors specific to the region. This is contrary to conventional wisdom where Generation X in Korea may be more progressive than Millennials or Generation Z who tend to be more progressive in other countries [58]. These findings warrant further investigation.

These results suggest that similar patterns might emerge in other geographical regions, depending on cultural, political, and social dynamics. For instance, in other parts of Asia or regions with similar socio-political climates, we might see parallel tendencies among progressive, middle-aged, and educated individuals engaging in tourism boycotts. Similarly, in Western societies where national issues trigger consumer activism, understanding whether generational progressivism (e.g., Generation X versus Millennials and Gen Z) influences boycott participation would be valuable. These comparisons across cultural contexts can enrich our understanding of how demographic factors and socio-political backgrounds shape boycott behaviors globally.

To expand the study's relevance, future research could explore tourism boycotts in varied regions, examining how these demographic characteristics translate across distinct cultural contexts. Investigating factors like political climates, media influence, and nationalism in different societies could provide insights into how these elements drive or mitigate tourism boycott participation. Furthermore, comparative studies across countries with varying socio-political landscapes could enhance the global applicability of these findings, offering a broader perspective on the motivations behind tourism boycotts and their relationship with demographic trends.

Another interesting finding is that individuals with international experience in the past two years are more likely to participate in the boycott. Those without such experience may feel indifferent about participating, as they might not have plans to travel to Japan regardless. This suggests that tourism consumers may have a tangible influence when it comes to boycotting. Additionally, it was expected that those who visited Japan more frequently would be less likely to participate, as their visit might indicate a high level of favoritism toward Japan. Notably, there was no significant difference in boycott participation between those who had traveled to Japan in the past two years and those who had not. However, the insignificance of this variable may be due to the two-year timespan, which might be too short to capture repeat visitors.

In terms of motivations for tourism boycott participation, while most consumer boycotts, including tourism boycotts, are driven by both instrumental and expressive motivations [59,60], the results of our study demonstrate that tourism boycotts are primarily driven by expressive utility. As hypothesized, the change variable (the perceived efficacy) was not statistically significant in predicting participation, despite having the highest mean value, indicating that individuals believe they can effect change through a tourism boycott. Instead, variables such as self-esteem and feelings of guilt were identified as highly powerful predictors of boycott participation. Participants engaged in boycotting to feel good about themselves and to avoid feelings of guilt, viewing themselves as moral people. This is consistent with the recent tourism boycott studies that underscore that ethical considerations increasingly dictate travel choices [12,22,61].

Consistent with the literature, our study confirms that perceived egregiousness has a strong and significant effect on boycott participation [14,59]. Surprisingly, despite the tendency toward collectivism in Korean culture, social pressure was not found to be significant. This contrasts with existing boycott literature, which typically recognizes the positive relevance of social pressure on boycott participation [14,40,62], especially in collective cultures where reference groups are influential. Given the historical tension between Korea and Japan, and the international politics that fueled the tourism boycott movement in Korea, the authors expected that social pressure to be a significant determinant of participation, with nationalism potentially playing a role. However, the voluntary nature of the tourism boycott became evident through the grassroots organization and mobilization of the campaign in Korea. Initiated and propelled online by anonymous individuals [31,37], the movement showed strong resistance to government interference, as the public wanted to preserve its grassroots, apolitical nature [63,64]. This is paradoxical, as the travel boycott to Japan was initially sparked by international political conflicts, and the boycott behavior could still be interpreted as political.

In terms of the costs associated with boycott participation, variables such as doubts about individual contribution (small agent) and unintended consequences (e.g., reverse impact on Korean tourism businesses, counter-boycotts by Japanese on Korean tourism) were significant predictors negatively affecting tourism boycott participation. Interestingly, the free-riding variable, which typically impedes boycott participation, was not supported in our study. According to a theoretical economic model of boycotting by John and Klein [38], a free-rider problem arises when consumers believe that if the boycott is likely to succeed, their individual participation is unnecessary—they can simply benefit from the actions of others. However, consistent with the insignificance of the change variable, the insignificance of the free-rider variable in our study suggests that perceived

success (efficacy) may not necessarily be a key factor in driving participation. Instead, it highlights the psychological and political nature of tourism boycotts in this case.

While many studies emphasize the significance of perceived efficacy in consumer boycotts [14,33], contemporary consumers continue to initiate and engage in tourism boycotts, even in the absence of perceived efficacy, particularly in the international tourism context. Our study provides empirical evidence that tourism boycotts lack instrumental utility and are primarily driven by expressive motivations. This distinction may characterize the unique nature of tourism boycotts, differentiating them from other forms of consumer boycotts.

7. Conclusions

As consumer activism and the power of tourism continue to grow, destination managers may increasingly face instances where consumer displeasure results in tourism boycotts. Socio-political issues and geopolitical conflicts are likely to impact consumer behavior, and tourism boycotts—once driven by small groups—are now more frequently organized and spread through social media. These movements tend to be driven more by expressive, emotional reasons than by a desire to achieve instrumental change.

7.1. Implications

Our study holds theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, our study advances the understanding of consumer behavior in tourism boycotts, demonstrating the dominance of expressive utility over perceived efficacy. This challenges traditional models of consumer boycott behavior, which typically prioritize achieving tangible outcomes or changes in target's behavior. While experiencing boycott success remains important to participants, this also raises a crucial question about how we define success in boycotts driven by expressive motivations. Our study suggests a need to reconsider what constitutes a successful boycott in the context of tourism boycotts where expressive motivations are dominant, warranting further research in this area.

From a practical standpoint, tourism businesses and managers need to recognize this shift, as consumers increasingly view boycotts as a way to express moral values. It is crucial for tourism practitioners, particularly Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and governments, to consider these trends when developing crisis management strategies and communication plans to ensure alignment with the values of socially and environmentally conscious consumers. DMOs might consider strategies to distance themselves from the issue driving the boycott and instead focus on niche markets unrelated to the controversy. Being proactive in crisis management, such as having a crisis management manual, maintaining open and transparent communication, and using social media platforms for direct outreach, along with diversifying target markets, may help mitigate potential negative impacts on destinations.

7.2. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. One notable limitation is the exclusion of individuals over the age of 60 from the sample. Although the conservative tendencies of this age group in Korea may suggest that their absence did not significantly affect the overall boycott dynamics, their exclusion may still overlook important variations in consumer behavior that could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of tourism boycott participation. Future research should aim to include a broader age range to capture a more holistic picture of consumer activism in tourism. Another limitation is that this study focused on a cost–benefit model, omitting concepts such as consumer ethnocentrism and organizational identification, which may offer deeper insights into boycotts driven by historical or political tensions between countries [62]. Future research should incorporate these factors to provide a more nuanced understanding of tourism boycotts involving geopolitical or international conflicts.

Additionally, this study did not specifically examine the influence of cultural factors on boycott behavior, which limits the generalizability of our findings across different cultural contexts. Similarly to helping behavior, boycott behavior may vary significantly across cultural contexts (e.g., collectivistic vs. individualistic cultures). Cross-cultural studies on boycott behavior using relevant constructs or theories may expand the generalizability of tourism boycott research across diverse cultural settings. Finally, we propose that future research could investigate the long-term effects of expressive motivations on consumer behavior in tourism boycotts. Specifically, examining how sustained participation driven by expressive motives influences brand loyalty, destination image, and future travel intentions could offer valuable insights. Additionally, a longitudinal study exploring whether expressive motivations foster ongoing activism or lead to boycott fatigue over time would enhance understanding of consumer engagement dynamics and provide tourism practitioners with strategies to mitigate the prolonged impacts of such boycotts.

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