

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT

***THE EFFECTS OF PROTESTS AND BOYCOTTS ON A BRAND AND ITS
REPUTATION:***

***A CASE STUDY ON WOOLWORTHS AND THE BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT
AND SANCTIONS (BDS)***

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Abstract

This report, focusing on boycotting, protesting, consumer-brand relationships and brand loyalty, attempts to analyse the effects of protests and boycotts on a brand and its reputation, with a particular focus on the boycott and protests against Woolworths by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) group. Specifically, I try to understand whether consumers changed their buying intentions and brand loyalty due to boycotts and protests against the Woolworths brand, and whether consumers' trust, devotion and brand choice changed in regard to the possible tarnishing of the Woolworths brand. Online surveys were conducted with a sample size of 100 respondents, as well as a focus group with six fellow students of Vega School of Branding. The findings are in line with the latest literature emphasising the importance of ethical sourcing and healthy branding, as well as the damage that can be done to a brand as a result of boycotting and protesting. Overall, the results indicate that consumers stayed loyal to the Woolworths brand despite the boycotts and protests, and remained faithful Woolworths customers both throughout and after the boycotts were taking place. The only fault that was found by Woolworths was a slight lack in consumer engagement during the boycott by the BDS against them. The report closes with further implications of the findings, and recommendations and conclusions.

Keywords: Boycott, Protests, Loyalty, Brands, Healthy Branding, Ethical Sourcing.

Chapter One

Introduction

In early August 2014, various influential South African solidarity organisations launched a campaign against retail giant Woolworths over its sales of products from Israel. The *Boycott Woolworths Campaign* united the National Coalition for Palestine, BDS South Africa, South Africa's largest trade union federation COSATU, the ANC Youth League, the Muslim Judicial Council and various other organisations. The coalition held national days of action on the last Saturday of each month, which received widespread media coverage (Nieuwhof, 2015).

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) are a South African group advancing and working with the international 'BDS against Israel' movement. They are a global association that are attempting to increase economic and political pressure on Israel to observe the specified purposes of the group: the end of Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, total fairness for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and respect for the right for Palestinian refugees to return (Svirsky, 2011). Woolworths Holdings Limited is a South African chain of retail stores, and one of the largest in the country, modelled on Marks & Spencer of the United Kingdom (Yoffie, 1997).

Doing business in conflict areas in the Middle East has become more challenging for South African businesses, and Woolworths found themselves caught up in the turmoil. The BDS have protested inside and outside Woolworths stores across South Africa on various occasions, demanding for the franchise to stop importing products from Israel (ENCA, 2014). Through the use of both qualitative and quantitative research, as well as various academic bodies of literature, my research study will be exploring whether this boycott and protests have affected Woolworths' reputation.

I will be exploring the effects of the boycott and protests by the BDS on the Woolworths brand and its reputation. The boycott and protests have arguably had an effect on the brand's success and status, and this will be the main focus of my research. I will further investigate the ethics surrounding the sourcing and importing of Woolworths' products, and assess whether they observe good business practices and healthy brand characteristics.

My research report will investigate how the anti-Zionism displayed by the BDS via protests and a boycott against Woolworths has affected the brand, and whether Woolworths' reputation has been tarnished. Two important research questions that need to be addressed are: 'Has the Woolworths brand and reputation suffered at the hands of the BDS?' and 'Were Woolworths following healthy branding steps to ensure consistent brand loyalty despite the boycott and protests against them?' The research problem that this study aims to resolve is: *'What were the effects of the BDS' boycott and protests on the Woolworths brand's reputation?'*

My research study will contain two major bodies of literature that will be referred to. The first body of literature will deal with the effects that the actions of the BDS have had on the Woolworths brand and reputation through their protests and boycott of the organisation. The second body of literature will focus on healthy branding and its place in reputation management, as well as the ethical procedures employed by Woolworths with respect to their product imports and sourcing.

Delimitations

The topic that I have chosen for my research report is one that is both multifaceted and controversial. The following points are all relevant aspects of my research topic, however I will not be covering these factors in my thesis, as I would like to keep my research concentrated and focused. These delimitations include:

- The Israel-Palestine conflict and the effects that it has had on other South African businesses sourcing products from Israel.
- Why the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) specifically chose to boycott Woolworths, when many other South African businesses also source and import products from Israel.
- What the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) hope to achieve in the long run through boycotting and protesting against Woolworths.
- Whether or not boycotting companies that source products from Israel is the right way to fight for Palestinian rights.
- Why other products that have been manufactured in, invented by or sourced from Israel are not also boycotted, such as micro-SD cards, pace-makers, and cellphone and computer parts, just to name a few.

This is a limited list of the various alternative topics that I could delve into and that my research could relate to, but will rather be seen as delimitations to my study, as I am focusing on the effects of the boycott and protests by the BDS against the Woolworths brand and reputation. In addition to these delimitations, there are also multiple ethical issues that could affect my research study.

Ethical Issues

The topic that I have chosen for my report is politically fuelled due to the context of the protests and boycott by the BDS on the Woolworths brand, and so I may confront some controversial concerns in the collection of my research. As the BDS are an anti-Zionist group, there are many connotations that come along with this, such as presumed anti-Semitism, and as I am Jewish, the findings that I draw may be interpreted as biased or

subjective. Due to this, I will veer away from focusing on the reasons behind the protests and boycotts, concentrating only on the effects that they have had on the Woolworths brand. I will do this by creating an online survey, allowing a sample of 100 people of any age, race, religion and culture to respond, which will make my findings unbiased and objective.

Division of Chapters

The chapters of my research proposal will be divided in the following way: I have already completed the research overview above, which consists of a background to the study, the stated research problem, objectives of the study, delimitations to the study, as well as ethical issues. Below you will find the literature review, summarising the academic sources that I will be utilising in my research proposal. I will then state the methodology that I will be employing for my research thesis, analysing the research design that I will use, my data collection methods, validity and reliability of my chosen methods, and the ethics surrounding the methodology. The last two chapters include key findings and the analysis of my findings, consisting of the identification and description of the evident and dormant patterns of meaning that have emerged from my data. Recommendations will follow, proceeded by a conclusion, which will summarise the research that I have done, and make suggestions regarding my findings for the body of knowledge to which it will add.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

As mentioned in my rationale, there are two major bodies of literature that I will be concentrating on and making use of with reference to my research topic: *The Effects of the Protests and Boycotts on a Brand and its Reputation – A Case Study on Woolworths and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)*. I will focus on the effects that the boycott and protests by the BDS had on the Woolworths brand and reputation as a case study, and I will concentrate on ethical and healthy branding and business conduct, centring on whether Woolworths displayed healthy brand characteristics and reputation management skills during and after the boycott and protests against them by the BDS.

My first body of literature will be centred on the possible effects and ramifications of the boycott and protests by the BDS on the Woolworths brand's reputation. I will be utilising various articles found online related to the topic of the boycott on Woolworths specifically, as well as recommendations that have been given on rectifying the harm that was caused to the Woolworths brand. There will also be various academic literatures on the situation between the BDS and Woolworths in general.

My second body of literature will focus on ethical and healthy branding and business practices, as well as dealing with consumer protest. This will contribute towards my research on whether Woolworths were in fact acting unethically, and whether the potential repercussions and consequences that they suffered at the hands of the protests and boycott by the BDS were substantiated. I will be assessing whether Woolworths is a healthy and ethical brand, and whether they have undertaken the correct strategic solutions in rectifying the damage that has potentially been done to their brand and reputation by the protests and boycott against them by the BDS.

As the focus group that I will be conducting in my methodology is mostly qualitative, my literature review will predominantly be of a qualitative nature, too.

First Body of Literature:

The Effects of the Boycott and Protests by the BDS on Woolworths' Reputation

Woolworths Needs to Nurture its Reputation (2014) is an article written by Solly Moeng, a reputation management advisor and CEO of strategic corporate communications consultancy DonValley. The article speaks about the various statements that have been made against Woolworths by the BDS and their supporters, and how Woolworths should move forward positively. According to Moeng, condemning the retailer on the apparent relaxation of its ethical standpoint when it concerns Palestinian human rights seems to be a powerful weapon for gaining widespread media coverage for the anti-Israel cause. The fact that Woolworths import products from various parts of the world and only a few from Israel in its quest to offer a wider range for its customers to choose from, does not seem to have won it any favours in the eyes of the BDS and their followers (Moeng, 2014).

“There seems to be a sizeable number of people out there who want to dislike Woolworths for, ostensibly, so-called sins it committed in the past; sins it is rumoured to have committed; or sins it is imagined to have committed – proven or not. Some observers attribute such apparent antagonism to the retailer’s oft-repeated claim to being driven by good values and ethical considerations while seemingly not always living up to them, as well as the jealousy this might engender in some people.” (Moeng, 2014)

Moeng goes on to state that the bulk of Woolworths’ customers do not care much about the predicament of Palestinians. Consequently, apart from making too much noise and disturbing the peace of Woolworths customers, the BDS campaigners are not significant enough to hit Woolworths where it would hurt most. Moeng emphasises that Woolworths need to continue being protective of the good reputation that they have carefully built over the years. But, it also has to establish a future value for its developing customer base here in South Africa (Moeng, 2014).

This article focuses predominantly on the fact that the BDS are not strong enough to destroy the solid reputation that Woolworths have created for themselves over the years, and that the protests and boycotts are simply a hurdle that the brand needs to overcome swiftly and smartly.

Adri Nieuwhof is a human-rights advocate based in the Netherlands and former anti-apartheid activist at the Holland Committee on Southern Africa. She submitted an article titled *South Africa retailer Woolworths takes Israel boycotters to court* (2014) to the blog The Electronic Intifada. This piece speaks about Woolworths' decision to take the BDS to court, and what the concerns of the shareholders are in this respect.

Nadia Hassan conveyed the fears of a group of senior black businessmen holding shares in Woolworths regarding what they saw as the negligent way in which the company is handling the *Boycott Woolworths Campaign*. Hassan stated that the management should have met with the activists advancing the campaign to try to resolve the issue. Going to court should have been the last option pursued by Woolworths, she argued (Nieuwhof, 2014). Jewish human rights activist Alan Horwitz voiced support for the campaign on behalf of a group of Jewish Woolworths shareholders. "Boycott as a nonviolent response to state oppression is a completely valid and ethical response, and that is why we support this action," he said (Nieuwhof, 2014).

In the 1980s, anti-apartheid activists used the same tactic as activist shareholders from BDS South Africa to pressure companies to end their ties with the South African apartheid regime. According to the article, it was said to be unlikely that legal action would bring an end to the campaign. Woolworths should realise that activists have experience from a long history of creative activism against apartheid to draw on (Nieuwhof, 2014).

With this in mind, it can be said that Woolworths' decision to take the BDS to court was not well thought out, nor would it be to the brand's benefit.

Jess Mouneimne, journalist, blogger and editor, digital strategist, social media trail blazer and public relations guru, posted an article on BizCommunity.com (2014) titled: *When retail and politics collide: The Israel/Palestine conundrum*. Although I have stated that I will not be bringing in the political aspect of my topic into my research study, Mouneimne posts information on how reputation PR is essential in these situations, as it is evident that Woolworths required reputation management as a result of the protests and boycotts by the BDS (Mouneimne, 2014).

Most brands hire a PR company or person to increase their position in the market place or to become top of mind when thinking of a certain industry. Very few have a particular reputation issue they need managed, and even fewer consider that the origin of the products they sell could become a reputation issue (Mouneimne, 2014).

With the continual growth of social media, a conscious consumer has been created. One that wants to know if the food contains GMO or if the soap was tested on animals. Just as brands should have strategies in place for the ingredient list of a product, they now need to know the origin of that product and its subsequent political affiliation. This requires a proactive contingency plan because ignoring it and hoping it will disappear is certainly not the right approach (Mouneimne, 2014).

Mouneimne notes that with an active Jewish and Muslim community, many South Africans find themselves personally invested in the Israel/Gaza conflict. Furthermore, international community boycotts and sanctions were instrumental in the demise of Apartheid South Africa and because of this, the power of a product boycott tends to yank at our heartstrings just a little more than other nations (Mouneimne, 2014).

Woolworths is being accused of unethical business practice in much the same way as if they were found to be using child labourers to manufacture their products or were selling blood diamonds. Mouneimne believes that Woolworths' brand reputation is at risk should they not choose to navigate through these murky political waters wisely (Mouneimne, 2014).

BDS South Africa: Muhammed Desai on Woolworths Shareholders concerned about Israel relations is an online article that was issued by BDS South Africa, and mentions the various outlooks in regard to the protests and boycotts by the BDS and the reputation of Woolworths (Polity, 2014).

Nadia Hassan represented a group of businessmen who hold shares in Woolworths and stated: "Last year Woolworths was ranked first in the RepTrak Reputation Index survey of South African companies, it was also rated in the top three of the Sunday Times Top 100 companies for 2013 and was included in the JSE Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) index for 2013/14" (Hassan, 2014) It must have come as a surprise that Woolworths now faced the prospect of ongoing boycotts and protests. The BDS boycott had arguably already become one of the largest non-labour mass actions against a South African company, since 1994. Woolworths developed enormous goodwill for the company over the years, with their brand and reputation being wisely crafted on good citizenship and squeaky-clean values. Hassan said that it is for precisely this reason that Woolworths should pay attention to BDS (Polity, 2014).

It can be said that according to Hassan, Woolworths did not deal with the protests and boycotts in a healthy or responsible manner. They jeopardised both their brand and their reputation by taking the BDS to court, which according to Hassan, should have been their last resort (Mouneimne, 2014).

Hassan also touches on why Woolworths specifically was singled out, as there are various other South African companies that import products from Israel. "Why is Woolworths seemingly being singled out? The most obvious reason is that Woolworths has committed itself and its practices to certain values, for which it enjoys incredible support. For example, Woolworths is a signatory to the U.N Global Compact (UNGC). According to the UNGC, it is the world's largest corporate citizenship and sustainability initiative. The UNGC is underpinned by principles derived from international instruments including The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UN Global Compact asks companies to embrace, support and enact, within their sphere of influence, a set of core values in the areas of human rights, labour standards, the environment and anti-corruption. On human rights it says: "Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses" (Mouneimne, 2014). According to the BDS, Woolworths violated these standards.

The South African Jewish Report, a local free Jewish newspaper that is printed weekly and published online, issued an article written by Ant Katz that is titled: *Woolies gets tough as BDS gets dirty* (2014).

Woolworths made two strategic moves in response to the boycott and protests by the BDS. Firstly, they made good on their promise, saying that “while we respect the right to protest peacefully and lawfully, the safety of our employees and customers come first”. Paula Disberry, Group Director announced that Woolworths had filed a court application (for an interdict) to protect their employees and customers from the increasing unlawful protests inside their stores. Their second move was to announce that they only had two Israeli products in their stores, pretzels and figs. And, by Friday, pomegranates were added to the list. This, they said, was simply a normal seasonal situation and they were at pains to point out that the small “Israeli tomatoes” are, in fact, locally grown (Katz, 2014).

BDS began operating under a newly formed umbrella body known as the National Coalition 4 Palestine (NC4P); they planned to hold a protest outside Woolworths’ Cape Town head office during the AGM, together with COSATU and COSAS; they invited sympathisers to participate in a survey, which allowed BDS’ Muhammed Desai to relate the effect of its campaign to the media. The media were invited to a briefing of shareholders. Little did the reporters and shareholders realise, but it was an anti-Israel affair.

But Woolworths seemed not to be taking the bait. “We have additional security in place to ensure only authorised visitors and shareholders have access to Woolworths head office. We have engaged local authorities in addition to our in-house security measures (for the AGM)”, said Disberry.

Despite the curveballs that were thrown in the brand’s direction by the BDS, Woolworths did not succumb to the pressure. They maintained a straight, emotionless face, and clarified that they were taking the issue to the High Court in order to protect the wellbeing of their employees and customers in the face of the boycott and protests by the BDS. Woolworths dealt with the boycott and protests in a healthy and responsible manner, and have managed to maintain their reputable name.

Woolworths' *Ethical Sourcing Policy* (2014), states that Woolworths Limited has introduced an Ethical Sourcing Policy to ensure, among other things, that it is sourcing its products in a responsible manner, and working with its suppliers to improve their social and environmental practices (Woolworths Limited's Ethical Sourcing Policy, 2015).

Woolworths has specified that in accordance with the expectations of their customers, the community, and the requirements of the Law, they endeavour to always operate responsibly within the community, and they expect the same from their suppliers (Woolworths Limited's Ethical Sourcing Policy, 2015). Maintaining a reputation for the highest legal, moral and ethical standards in their dealings with their customers and other key stakeholders is critical for their ongoing success. The Policy has been developed to compliment their core values of integrity, trust and acting responsibly (Woolworths Limited's Ethical Sourcing Policy, 2015).

According to this policy, it can be said that Woolworths have and always will be committed to sourcing from ethically sound sources, and will strive to constantly accord with the expectancies of their customers. Woolworths has always taken ethical sourcing very seriously and driven this primarily through the Woolworths Code of Business Principles and supplier audits.

Second Body of Literature:

Ethical and Healthy Branding and Business Practices and Dealing with Consumer Protest

To Boycott or Not: The Consequences of a Protest (2010) is an article posted on the Wharton University of Pennsylvania's website. The use of the boycott as a form of consumer protest is currently more popular than ever. "Boycotts are shockingly common," says Maurice Schweitzer, a Wharton professor of operations and information management. (Knowledge@Wharton, 2010).

Calls for a boycott are one thing - convincing consumers or businesses to change their behaviour is another. Americus Reed II, a professor of marketing at Wharton who has studied how social identity drives consumer behaviour, says for a boycott to succeed, the situation that incited it must be both visible and severe. Reed notes that while the Internet and a 24-hour news cycle increase the speed with which bad news travels and the number of people who see it, those forces can also dampen the effect of a boycott, because people become desensitised to bad news (Knowledge@Wharton, 2010). At the same time, for a boycott to gain traction, there must be a low financial and psychological cost for consumers to get on board. If there are easily substitutable products available, the barrier to participating in a boycott is lower (Knowledge@Wharton, 2010).

How successful are boycotts in general? It depends on how you define success. If the goal is to get the target company to give in to boycotters' demands, the success rate is not high. Monroe Friedman, emeritus professor of psychology at Eastern Michigan University, published a paper in 1985 in the *Journal of Consumer Affairs* examining 90 boycotts in the United States between 1970 and 1980. Friedman found that only 24 of the 90 boycotts were completely or partially successful in getting the target to change its behaviour. Not surprisingly, the research found that the more organised and planned campaigns, including those that used picketing and other attention-grabbing techniques, had a greater degree of success (Knowledge@Wharton, 2010).

Boycotts may inflict less visible damage to a company's brand, but it is still long lasting. "Most companies expend significant resources in the bid to establish relationships with their customers," says Andrew John, professor of economics at Melbourne Business School in

Australia. “A boycott severs that relationship in a dramatic way and encourages customers to seek out and try competing products instead” (Knowledge@Wharton, 2010).

There’s no disputing the media’s role in a boycott’s success or failure, experts say. Brayden King, a professor at North-western University’s Kellogg School of Management, studied 188 boycotts that took place between 1990 and 2005. He found that companies were more likely to give in to boycotters’ demands when the controversy generated a lot of media. The research also found that fear of damage to a company’s reputation was a greater determinant of caving to boycotters than the fear of lost sales. “Boycotts do not tend to work in the way people think, meaning by hurting the bottom line,” says King. Instead, King says the big driver tends to be “the threat to a company’s reputation” (Knowledge@Wharton, 2010).

There are still reasons to believe a boycott will not have an oversized impact. For one thing, according to Wharton management professor Lawrence G. Hrebiniak, boycotts tend to be more successful when there is a clear connection between the act of boycotting and some desired outcome (Knowledge@Wharton, 2010). As Woolworths are only importing 0.1% of their products from Israel, and are well within their rights to do so according to their Ethical Sourcing Policy which they strictly abide by, it seems that the BDS were simply using Woolworths as a scapegoat to publicise their anti-Israel and anti-Zionist beliefs in an unconstructive way.

D.H. Tustin and D. de Jongh write in the *Southern African Business Review* (2008) an article titled *Ethical consumerism as a key consideration for future brand strategy development in South Africa*. In the absence of sound business ethics practices in South Africa, consumers' opinions and hopes of businesses' ethical behaviour will be fundamental causes of market share and sustainable growth of South African businesses in the future. Clear evidence has emerged from recent research on ethical consumerism in South Africa, that South African consumers will be key drivers of the ethical agenda. This will generate sustainable growth predictions for existing and new products and services of companies that endorse ethical practices (Tustin & de Jongh, 2008).

This article focuses on some insights into purchasing behaviour in metropolitan areas of South Africa with the primary focus on:

- Consumer preferences for ethical products/services;
- The nature of consumer purchasing decisions based on company reputation;
- Consumers' perceptions of the availability of ethical products/services;
- Intentions of consumers to purchase ethical products/services; and
- Ethical product labelling (Tustin & de Jongh, 2008).

These consumer behaviour issues all relate to ethical consumerism, which is expected to form a key consideration in future branding and product lifecycle management strategies of South African companies. Woolworths can take all of these insights into consideration when dealing with the protests and boycotts against them by the BDS. They should focus on ensuring that all their products are perceived to be ethical, that their products are labelled ethically, stating exactly where it has been sourced from, as well as do research into the intentions of their customers to purchase ethical and ethically sourced products.

Ethical purchasing is defined as buying goods/services that are produced ethically by companies that act ethically. 'Ethical' can be a biased term both for companies and consumers, but in its realest sense it means a practice of producing/purchasing products and services that actively seek to minimise social and/or environmental damage and the avoidance of products deemed to have a negative impact on society or the environment (Tustin & de Jongh, 2008). This is relevant to the Woolworths brand as although 'ethical' is

subjective, in the eyes of many they were behaving unethically by importing products from Israel. In this case, it is up to Woolworths to ensure that they avoid products that are deemed to have a negative impact on society, as the boycotts and protests were politically fuelled.

According to Tustin and de Jongh (2008), consumerism may also involve the active boycotting of companies that are perceived to have acted unethically. In this case, that is exactly what happened. Woolworths were perceived by certain groups to have acted unethically by importing products from Israel. With the increase of a consumer-led market, combined with solid consumer ethical considerations, brands that do not respond to these pressures in their value proposition will have to face consumer boycotts and loss in market share (Tustin & de Jongh, 2008). Woolworths' reaction to the boycott and protests would have to be quick and smart.

Brandgrowth brand specialists, a creative marketing company that specialises in the creation of engaging brands, have an article on their website titled: *Ethical consumerism – do South Africans walk the talk?* (2012). The piece asks the question: Are South Africans genuinely interested in ethical products and would they act on these preferences through their purchase behaviour? Louise Gardiner, founder and MD at First Principles Sustainability Services, is the author of this article, and she takes a closer look.

Green consumerism is on the increase globally, but not equally in all countries. First Principles recently completed a high-level comprehensive survey of South African public opinion focused on perceptions of corporate citizenship, and the willingness of consumers to make purchase decisions based on environmental and social criteria. The study forms part of an annual global survey conducted in over 25 countries led by international researchers GlobeScan Incorporated (Gardiner, 2012).

Entitled “Keeping Good Company”, the South African study draws on results of a 2011 nation-wide survey of what South Africans see as the most important issues affecting society and how they believe the private sector should respond. It also identifies consumer attitudes about which products need to be more responsible (Gardiner, 2012). The findings reveal that just under half of those surveyed have contemplated rewarding a company they feel is socially responsible, and roughly 20% have actually done so in the past year. Regardless of the decrease in actual purchase behaviour, the results show consistent evidence of a significant portion of the South African public that can be counted on to consider ethical issues in their purchase choices (Gardiner, 2012).

Notably, this year’s survey exposed that South Africans have much higher expectancies for ‘operational responsibilities’ than ‘citizenship responsibilities’. This means that, in addition to companies showing they have invested in the community; consumers want to know about how products are sourced and produced (Gardiner, 2012). This is especially relevant to Woolworths and the boycott and protests that they experienced by the BDS. If they were aware of the fact that South Africans were so focused and concerned about how products are sourced and produced, perhaps the brand would have anticipated the boycott, and been able to plan ahead for necessary reputation management and avoidance of bad media.

Alexander Garrett published an article in *Management Today* on *Dealing with Consumer Protest* (2013). The piece gives advice to organisations on how to deal with protests and boycotts by consumers in a healthy and constructive way.

Being prepared and engaging with the broader world will guarantee you are aware of issues before they reach boycott stage. Management can be narrow-minded, and it is vital to look beyond the business. Duncan Gray, consultant at crisis management specialist Sancroft, adds: "You should have a process for crisis management in place, so you do not have to start from scratch when the storm hits" (Garrett, 2013).

Businesses must always take a boycott seriously. An isolated call to action on Twitter in the morning can be re-tweeted by an influencer or celebrity and escalate rapidly. If a mainstream journalist picks it up, it can be on the national news that evening. Perfect storms can be created in real time (Garrett, 2013). Responses by the boycotted brand must always be organised. Dealing with a crisis often falls to the communications team, but operations, finance and marketing should all be involved. If it affects the whole organisation, all the organisation's employees need to be ready to react (Garrett, 2013).

It is also important for the company to speak to the protesters to find out what they really want; sometimes, it's not the thing they've threatened the boycott over (Garrett, 2013). Potential damage must also be evaluated, as many companies overestimate a boycott's effect on sales and underestimate the impact on long-term reputation. Considering your position is another vital necessity. A key motivation for people join boycotts is improvement of their self-esteem. The 'substitution effect' must also be considered. Are there plenty of alternatives if a consumer decides to boycott your company's product? Make a business decision. "Once you have considered the issue objectively, looked at your own values and what your customers and other stakeholders want, you will have to decide what is the right outcome. Then communicate it fast" (Garrett, 2013).

Once the organisation has decided on a course of action, it must be prepared and shared with everyone involved. Make sure that they are aware of the good things your company does. Do say: 'We have asked to meet the campaigners to hear their concerns.' Do not say: 'It will blow over soon' (Garrett, 2013). Woolworths, and any other company that has been faced with a boycott crisis, should take all of these points into due consideration.

Business Ethics in Africa by Deon Rossouw (2002) answers ethical questions challenging the African business community. One of Rossouw's focuses is the myth that although unethical conduct is wrong, it is not really harmful to society. Unethical behaviour is not only harmful to society, but also damages the reputation of an organisation. A good reputation, such as that of Woolworths, is an invaluable asset: it offers reliability, credibility, and quality (Rossouw, 2002). This inspires trust from business partners and customers and persuades them to enter into a long-term commitment. For this reason, companies are willing to invest heavily in protecting their image and reputation. The damage that unethical business behaviour can do to a company's reputation is huge, especially if it receives media attention, such as in the case of the boycott and protests against Woolworths by the BDS.

A code of ethics is a document or agreement that stipulates morally acceptable behaviour within an organisation. It defines the moral standards or guidelines that need to be respected by all members of an organisation in their dealings with others (Rossouw, 2002). A code of ethics seeks to do more than simply raise the level of ethical behaviour within an organisation. Ethical codes can serve a variety of purposes in the internal, external and cultural spheres (Rossouw, 2002). Rossouw emphasises how a business must constantly adapt to changes in national and international culture. This could be relevant to the issues that Woolworths faced when confronted with the boycotts and protests by the BDS. Would they need to adapt their code of ethics to keep in line with the desires of their anti-Israel consumers? The solution to this issue would lie in shared values. When all members of an organisation can agree to a shared set of values, control and focus can be restored (Rossouw, 2002).

Woolworths consolidated and ensured that all members of their organisation agreed that the boycott and protests by the BDS were unjustified and ethically incorrect. By assuming a shared set of values, they managed to focus on the issues at hand, and deal with the BDS in the most ethically sound way possible in their eyes – by taking them to court.

Deon Rousseau discusses cultural influences on buyer behaviour in the book *Buyer Behaviour* (2007). Culture is a set of learned beliefs, values, attitudes and forms of behaviour that is shared by a society and is transmitted from one generation to the next by members of that society through language and symbols (Bloem *et al.*, 1985). Consumer needs and preferences are in many ways universal. Everyone seeks value for money, price discounts, variety to choose from, reliable after-sales service, guarantees, clean stores, honest staff, etc. However, communication differences occur for various target populations, based on differences in cultural values, lifestyles, languages, education levels, religions, and so on. These factors have to be taken into account if sales messages are to be effectively communicated via the media to cultural and subcultural groups (Rousseau, 2007).

In November 2014, the High Court in Johannesburg ruled that pro-Palestine activists are banned from protesting in Woolworths stores. The order prevented members of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) South Africa from organising, co-ordinating or encouraging any form of protest action in the stores. Paula Disberry, group director of retail operations at Woolworths, said that Woolworths welcomes the court decision to protect their customers and employees from unlawful BDS in-store protests. "Woolworths respects the constitutional rights of protesters to express their views lawfully without infringing the right of others. We trust that BDS will respect the decision of the court," she said (BDLive, 2014).

Woolworths managed to relay their sales messages in an effective way via the media, allowing for fair and just decisions to be made regarding the protests and boycotts that they fell victim to by the BDS. Paul Disberry, Woolworths' group director, welcomed the court ruling and said the chain store had to think of its customers' and employees' safety although it respected the right to protest peacefully (Grobler, 2014).

Woolworths took the needs and preferences of the majority of their consumers and employees into consideration, and decided to take a legal stand against the BDS in court. The ruling was in the brand's favour, and has resulted in the end of the boycotts and protests.

The first theme that is clear throughout my literature review is that the boycott and protests by the BDS against Woolworths did not actually affect the brand in a long-lasting negative way. Woolworths' commitment to quality and ethical sourcing are prevalent features in all that the brand does and will continue to do. The BDS are not strong enough to destroy the solid reputation that Woolworths have created for themselves over the years, and the boycott and protests was simply a hurdle that the brand needed to overcome swiftly and smartly, which they did. There is reason to believe a boycott will not have an oversized impact on a brand's reputation. As Woolworths are only importing 0.1% of their products from Israel, and are well within their rights to do so according to their Ethical Sourcing Policy which they strictly abide by, it seems that the BDS were simply using Woolworths as a scapegoat to publicise their anti-Israel and anti-Zionist beliefs in an unconstructive way.

The second theme is that consumers are becoming more aware, and ethical consumerism is on the rise. This makes it more difficult for companies to keep their customers happy. Woolworths, and other South African organisations, need to educate themselves on the desires of their consumers in order to be able to prepare and anticipate possible protest by the public. If they are prepared, they will be able to avoid long-lasting damage to their reputation, and avoid any further repercussions.

In conclusion, my thesis will make a significant contribution to this particular body of research, as I have examined both the effects that the boycott and protests by the BDS had on the Woolworths brand and reputation, as well as a focus on sound and ethical business practice in a South African and global context, asking the question of whether Woolworths is in fact in line with their stated guidelines and policies.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The way in which I will be collecting data for my research report, *The Effects of Protests and Boycotts on a Brand and its Reputation: A Case Study on Woolworths and the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions (BDS)*, will be of both qualitative and quantitative methods, making it a mixed-methods methodology.

Qualitative research deals with the central aspects of personal experiences and the implications related to phenomena. By exercising qualitative data collection, it is likely to acquire an abundance and profundity of data, collected from intricate and multidimensional phenomena in a particular social context. The fundamental purposes of qualitative research are to investigate, comprehend and define (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Through utilising the qualitative research method of a focus group, I will be able to accumulate rich, comprehensive data on my topic, allowing for constructive conclusions to be made on my research question.

The first method that I will be utilising for my research study will be the case study approach, that being a case study on the boycott and protests by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) on the Woolworths brand and reputation. A case study is a dense and thorough account of a social phenomenon that lives within a real-world context. The case study reports a real-life situation by thoroughly recounting the setting in which the phenomenon transpires. It is an effort to comprehend a phenomenon within an exact position (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). I feel that it is appropriate to make use of this method as the situation that occurred between Woolworths and the BDS is a real-life one, and I will be using it as the actual case study in my research. The focus on this case study will allow for an in-depth exploration into relations between Woolworths and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) group, and ought to result in a thorough understanding of the particular and lived experience of Woolworths as a brand, and the effects that the protests and boycotts by the BDS had on their reputation.

The second qualitative method that I will be utilising for my research will be a focus group. A focus group is a group interview that is used to determine the attitudes, behaviour, preferences and dislikes of participants who are interviewed simultaneously by a facilitator (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014:183). I will be interviewing six of my classmates from Vega School of Branding, in the hopes of attaining a point of view on my topic that is brand-focused. I will identify broad questions and themes in advance, and will then use them to facilitate a discussion among the participants. The discussion will be conducted in a natural and unstructured way, in a classroom on the Vega campus, and the participants will be free to express their views and opinions about the topic at hand. This will result in a free exchange of ideas between the selected participants (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014: 184).

I feel that I had a strong presence in the field in Woolworths, as my research gave me the ability to feel very involved in the on-goings being Woolworths and the BDS throughout the boycott and protests. This gave me the ability to conduct field research. Field research or fieldwork is the collection of information outside of a laboratory, library or workplace setting. The approaches and methods used in field research vary across disciplines (Burgess, 1984). Conducting my focus group added to this field research, too.

The type of sampling that I will be making use of in my research thesis is non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is used when it is almost impossible to determine whom the entire relevant population is, or when it is difficult to gain access to the entire population (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The elements in the population will not all have an equal opportunity to form part of the sample. However, the representativeness of the sample is not considered important. The focus is more on how many people are needed in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem that is being explored (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

The findings from non-probability sampling are often not used to generalise results to the larger population, and are not considered reliable in the same way that findings from a probability sampling would be (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). As Woolworths is a very large organisation in South Africa, I will not have the ability to interview consumers from all over the country. So instead, I will send out an online survey, allowing for 100 respondents to answer my survey questions. The focus group will be made up of myself, and six respondents.

Exploratory research can be based on one or more of the purposes identified by Du Plooy (2006:48), namely:

To obtain new insights as part of a pre-test or pilot test - Through my online survey and focus group I will be gaining new insights on a personal basis directly from Woolworths consumers and South African citizens who may or may not have been aware of the boycott and protests against the Woolworths brand.

To identify key concepts - The new concepts that I will be identifying will be the effects and potential damage to a brand from boycotts and protests against them, in connection to the Woolworths brand and the boycott and protests against them by the BDS in specific.

To identify key stakeholders - The key stakeholders that I will be identifying through my exploratory research will be 100 South African citizens who were directly or indirectly affected by the boycotts and protests of the BDS against the Woolworths brand, as well as an additional 6 respondents who will take part in my focus group.

To prioritise social needs - The social needs that will be prioritised in my research study are the needs for ethical sourcing by Woolworths, and ensuring that they have transparency with all of their stakeholders.

To identify consequences of research problems - The consequences of the research problem have been addressed in my 'Ethics' section above. Unfortunately, I will be unable to focus on other aspects of my research, as it is a multifaceted and controversial topic. Instead, my focus will be on the effects of the boycott and protests by the BDS on the Woolworths brand and reputation.

To develop hypotheses - The hypothesis that has been developed for my research study is that the boycott and protests by the BDS did in fact have a negative effect on the Woolworths brand, and damaged their reputation. Despite this, Woolworths managed to remedy the issue to their best ability, and continue to be a healthy, reputable and successful South African brand.

To confirm assumptions - Through my exploratory research study I will be able to confirm the assumptions that I have made regarding the reputation of the Woolworths brand as affected by the boycott and protests of the BDS.

To become familiar with unknown situations, conditions, policies and behaviours - By sending out an online survey to 100 South African citizens and conducting a focus group with 6 respondents, I will become familiar with unknown situations, conditions, policies and behaviours in relation to the topic that I have chosen, guiding me in my research study.

In exploratory studies, data reliability and validity are usually not scientific measures, as the research design has to be elastic in order to allow an understanding of an unknown area of research. The research methods that are used in exploratory studies typically include qualitative methods such as personal and focus group interviews, surveys and case studies (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

In research, one wants to be able to trust the findings of researchers. We want to know that if a different researcher were to repeat the research, he or she would find similar results. The terms 'validity' and 'reliability' are most commonly used in quantitative research. In contrast to this type of measurable, numerical and statistical research, the purpose of qualitative research is to endeavour to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Therefore, 'validity' and 'reliability' are not useful terms to use within these types of studies. Qualitative researchers prefer to use the concept of *trustworthiness* to measure reliability and validity within qualitative results (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The aim of qualitative research is to promote understanding of a particular phenomenon within a specific context, and not to generalise results to a broader population (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

Through my research methods of a case study on the effects of the boycott and protests by the BDS against the Woolworths brand and reputation, and the online survey and focus group with South African citizens and loyal Woolworths customers, I will be able to understand the phenomenon that I have chosen to focus on in this context. The information gleaned via the surveys and focus group that I will be conducting will give me a trustworthy insight into the effects that the Woolworths brand has experienced, and how their reputation was affected throughout the boycotts and protests.

There is a move towards the use of different terminology to indicate validity and reliability in qualitative studies. The overarching term that is used for validity and reliability in qualitative research is 'trustworthiness', which is further divided into credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interpreted the data that was provided by the participants. Credibility is increased when the researcher spends long periods of time with the participants in order to understand them better and gain insight into their lives or the situation that is being researched (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Colls & Hussey, 2003). Additionally, credibility is increased when your findings are believable from the participants' perspective. I will be able to attain credibility for my research by conducting a focus group, as well as collecting data from the online surveys sent to 100 respondents. Through spending time with the respondents of the focus group, I will be able to gain insight into how the Woolworths brand and reputation was affected by the protests and boycotts of the BDS in their eyes, and what their take on the situation is. I will ensure that the analysis of my findings is believable and credible in the eyes of the participants of my focus group.

Transferability is the ability of the findings to be applied to a similar situation and delivering similar results. This would allow for generalisation within an approach that does not lend itself to generalised findings. It is the degree to which the results and analysis can be applied beyond a specific research project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Colls & Hussey, 2003). Through my research in analysing the steps that were taken by Woolworths before, during and after the protests and boycotts on them by the BDS, I will be able to assess whether this would allow for generalisation to other companies that have experienced similar issues. Dependability refers to the quality of the process of integration that takes place between the data collection method, data analysis and the theory generated from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Colls & Hussey, 2003:278-279). The process of integration between my data collection methods of a focus group, online survey and a case study, my data analysis methods and the theory that I manage to generate from the data I have collected and analysed will be one that is dependable. It will be clear that I have ensured that the process is one that is reliable and valid, and can be utilised to assess the reputation management of a brand after being a victim of protests and boycotts in the future.

Confirmability refers to how well the data collected support the findings and interpretation of the researcher. It indicates how well the findings flow from the data. It requires the researcher to have described the research process fully in order to assist others in scrutinising the research design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Colls & Hussey, 2003). Others who look at the data must come to similar conclusions as the researcher did. I will describe my research process fully in order to help others in studying and scrutinising my research design. Each process that I choose will be easily understandable, and have the ability to be confirmed in the future by anyone who wishes to do so. As I am collecting data from South African citizens made up of multiple loyal Woolworths customers, the information that I collect will be valid, trustworthy, and confirmable in the future.

Qualitative researchers need to be able to persuade their readers, and the participants, that their findings are credible and make a worthy contribution to the body of knowledge. They put criteria in place in order to ensure that their research is credible (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). I endeavour to make a laudable contribution to the body of knowledge in my research study on *The Effects of Protests and Boycotts on a Brand and its Reputation: A Case Study on Woolworths and the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions (BDS)*. The research that I collected through the case study, focus group and online survey will be analysed and interpreted in a qualitative and quantitative way, and transformed into findings. I, as the researcher, will be completely immersed in the data, and identify and describe evident and dormant patterns of meaning that emerge from the data, enabling this transformation.

Through grounded theory and performing a case study with a focus on Woolworths and the BDS, as well as the structured online survey and focus group, I will be conducting unobtrusive research, as well as content analysis, a slight historical analysis to determine how their brand's reputation may have changed through the situation with the BDS, as well as a minor analysis of existing statistics regarding their brand reputation and health. Overall, my chosen data analysis methods will be qualitative.

Content analysis is used as a method to both collect and analyse data. The distinguishing feature of content analysis as a data analysis method is that it is employed for both the context of text and all transcribed data. We transcribe data from all of the raw information that we have collected from the written and verbal responses of participants, in this case via the structured in-depth interviews that will be conducted. The data will then be copied and

converted into a written or visual format so that it can be analysed using a systemic method (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009:309-311) discuss the eight steps in the process of qualitative content analysis. The first step is to prepare the data. I will need to organise and convert or transcribe the raw data that I have collected into written text before I can start with the analysis (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). After conducting the in-depth interviews, I will organise the information gleaned into constructive and understandable data that will potentially have patterns. The second step is to define the coding unit to be analysed. I will need to indicate whether I am going to use individual words, phrases, symbols, sentences or paragraphs as my coding unit. It is a way of organising my data into manageable chunks (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). I will analyse the data that I have collected through my research methods and compare and group my data into various sections that will be organised into segments that make sense to me.

The third step is to develop categories and a coding scheme or conceptual framework. In this step, related coding units need to be grouped together to form categories of codes. A conceptual framework is developed, which will assist me in coding my data. I will group my data into related coding units, and ensure that they are:

- **Exhaustive** – I will have enough categories to accommodate all of the data that I have collected;
- **Mutually exclusive** – each theme and category will be distinct, and will have no overlap in meaning; and
- **Specific** – the relevance of the themes and categories will be obvious and discernable (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

The fourth step is to test your coding scheme on a sample text. This step will involve me testing the clarity and consistency of my category definitions on a sample of my draft. All the possible doubts and problems that are related to my coding categories will now be resolved (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Fifthly, one needs to code all text. In this step I will carefully scrutinise my data, taking note of all the meaningful and relevant sections and items. I will most likely use selective coding, which will involve the selection of the core or essential codes that closely correspond with the typical behaviour that has been observed

through my in-depth interviews, or codes that will most adequately describe the central notion of my research study (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

The sixth step involves assessing your coding consistency. Once all my coding has been completed, I will recheck the consistency with which my coding was conducted. The seventh step will require me to draw conclusions from the coded data (interpret my data). This step will involve the interpretation of the themes or categories that I have identified. I will make inferences and present my reconstructions of meanings derived from the data. I will augment the analysis with my own interpretation by drawing on existing theories and previously conducted studies, also utilising my own sense of the meaning of the text. I will follow the following three steps:

1. I will explain the relationships that were found;
2. I will take any extraneous information into consideration; and
3. I will take all relevant factors affecting the problem into account in order to avoid false interpretations.

Lastly, I will need to report my methods and findings. In this final step, I will report on the process that I will have applied in my coding, analysis and interpretation, as completely and truthfully as possible (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

The third method that I will be making use of in my data collection is an online survey. A survey is a data collection tool that consists of a series of questions designed to gather information about a relatively large group of people, in this case, 100 respondents. This research tool is used to provide a quantitative or numeric description of the trends, attitudes or opinions of a population by asking questions of a sample of respondents and then generalising the results to the population from which the sample of respondents were collected (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014:149). I will be using is a cross-sectional survey design, which creates an overall picture of a phenomenon at one point in time. I will only be collecting data from the 100 respondents once, and there will be no repeats (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014: 149).

The questions that I will be asking in the online survey include the following:

1. Are you a loyal Woolworths customer?
2. Do you know who the BDS (Boycott Divestment & Sanctions) group are?
3. Do you know about the protests and boycotts held against Woolworths by the BDS?
4. Do you think the boycotts on Woolworths by the BDS were justified? Please give a reason for your answer.
5. Do you think the boycotts had a negative effect on the Woolworths brand?
6. Did you stop shopping at Woolworths while the boycotts and protests were taking place?
7. Did the boycotts and protests affect your decision to continue supporting Woolworths? Please state why.
8. As a South African citizen, were you impressed with the way Woolworths dealt with the accusations, boycotts and protests?
9. As a consumer, what other ways do you think exist to prevent boycotts from negatively affecting a brand's image or reputation?
10. Would you partake in a peaceful protest: 'Boycott the Boycott', campaigning against the boycotts against Woolworths?

The answers to these questions will expectantly lead me to the collection of reliable and viable data for my research thesis, and will assist in my thesis adding to the body of knowledge.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics are a matter of integrity on a personal level, but their implications reach much further than the individual. A researcher who acts with integrity adheres to ethical principles and professional standards that are essential for practising research in a responsible way. It is a commitment to act in a trustworthy and respectful way, even in the face of adversity (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). I will take it upon myself to go about my research in an ethical and professional manner, ensuring that I am always acting in a trustworthy and respectful way. Even though I may encounter some adversity during my research process due to it being a controversial topic that is filled with contentious issues, I will maintain my trustworthiness and respect in every aspect of achieving my research. I will be sensitive during the in-depth interview process with the managers and employees of Woolworths, and I will collect my data in a manner that is ethically sound.

Chapter Four

Key Findings

After both conducting a focus group and sending out an online survey via Survey Monkey for 100 respondents to fill in, I managed to attain sufficient data and findings to conclude my research on *The Effects of the Protests and Boycotts on a Brand and its Reputation – A Case Study on Woolworths and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)*. The first set of findings that I will relay is from the focus group that I conducted.

I conducted my focus group on Thursday, the 1st of October 2015 at Vega School of Branding, Bordeaux. The focus group consisted of six of my classmates from the degree of Honours in Strategic Brand Leadership, specialising in Brand Management. I chose participants of this nature so as to give my research report a stance from an educated and vast branding perspective, and I also ensured that they were familiar with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) group and the Woolworths brand. The participants preferred to remain anonymous due to the nature of my research topic. Please find an overview of the focus group under Analysis of Findings.

The second set of findings that I will relay are from the online survey I compiled on Survey Monkey and sent out to 100 respondents. The survey was aimed at Woolworths consumers, and I managed to reach 70% of respondents that are loyal Woolworths customers. Below are the ten survey questions, and a graph depicting the results of the survey question below each one. Please find an overview of the survey responses under Analysis of Findings.

Focus Group

The findings of my focus group were as follows:

- All six participants were loyal Woolworths customers.
- Only four participants had heard of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS).
- All six participants knew about the protests and what the protests were about.
- The protests were said to be a farcical attack on a big brand to gain media exposure for themselves. It was a massive canvas for media coverage.
- Two participants were Jewish and therefore pro-Israel, which I took into account when collecting information from them.
- If there was any effect on the Woolworths brand and reputation, it was very slight.
- Mostly people who are BDS members and anti-Israel have a bad image of the brand now.
- All six participants did not stop shopping at Woolworths during the boycott, but if the protests were going on in-store while they were shopping, they would leave for safety reasons, returning at a calmer time.
- Four participants did not know what Woolworths did to deal with the boycott.
- The protests were said to be illegal, organised incorrectly, unfounded. This is based on the information that Woolworths winning in court, and the BDS being banned from protesting inside and outside stores.
- For a brand to avoid getting their reputation ruined by a boycott, participants mentioned that the brand would have to have a squeaky clean record, and not have something to hide. Additionally, the boycott would have to be justified.
- To assist in counteracting a boycott, the boycotted brand could create an advertising campaign against the boycott, sharing their side of the story. This could either help the damage, or avoid further damage to the brand and reputation.

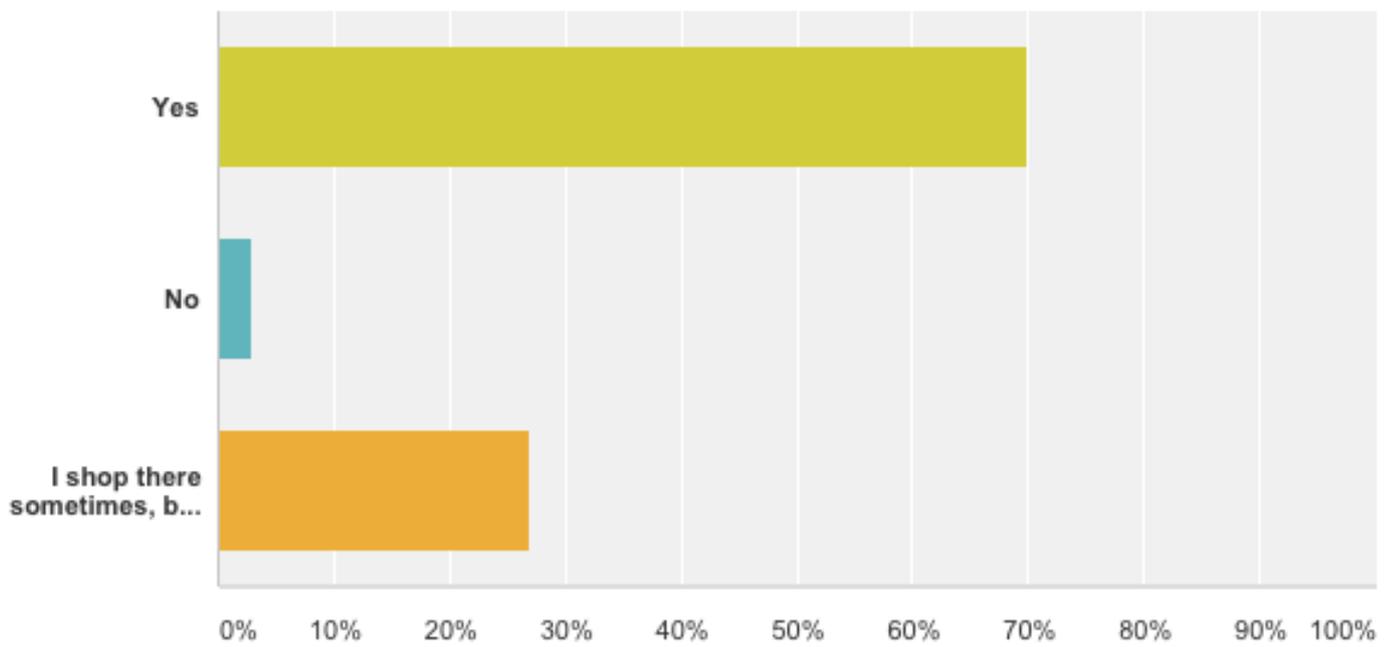
Online Survey

I have attached graphs depicting the results from my online survey that I created with Survey Monkey. The survey reached 100 respondents, and the findings will be analysed under Analysis of Findings.

The key findings of my online survey included:

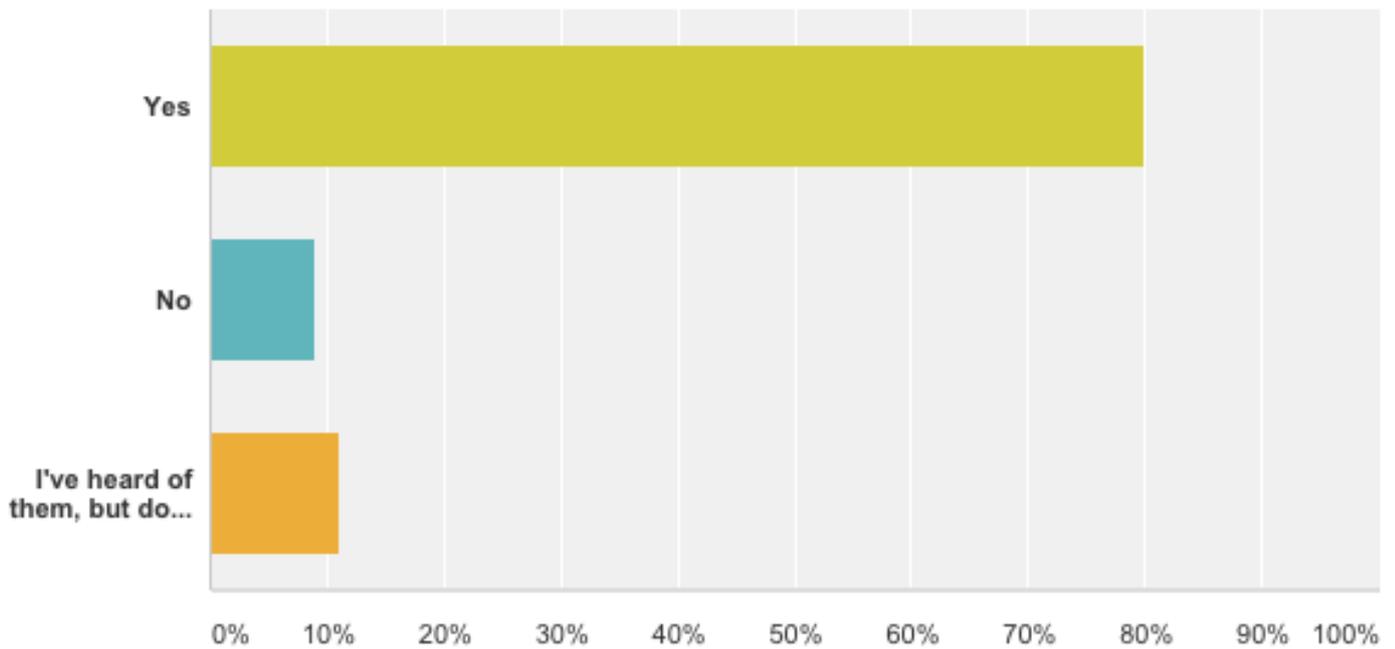
- 70% of respondents were loyal Woolworths customers.
- 80% of respondents knew who the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) were.
- 85% of respondents knew about the protests and boycott held against Woolworths by the BDS
- 83% of respondents did not think the boycotts on Woolworths by the BDS were justified.
- 61% of respondents did not think the boycotts had a negative effect on the Woolworths brand.
- 93% of respondents did not stop shopping at Woolworths while the boycott and protests were taking place.
- The boycott and protests did not affect 88% of respondents' decisions to continue supporting Woolworths.
- 66.33% of respondents were impressed with how Woolworths dealt with accusations, boycott and protests.
- 31.63% of respondents were unaware of how Woolworths dealt with the boycott and protests against them.
- 61.86% would partake in a peaceful protest: 'Boycott the Boycott', campaigning against boycott against Woolworths.

Q1. Are you a loyal Woolworths customer?



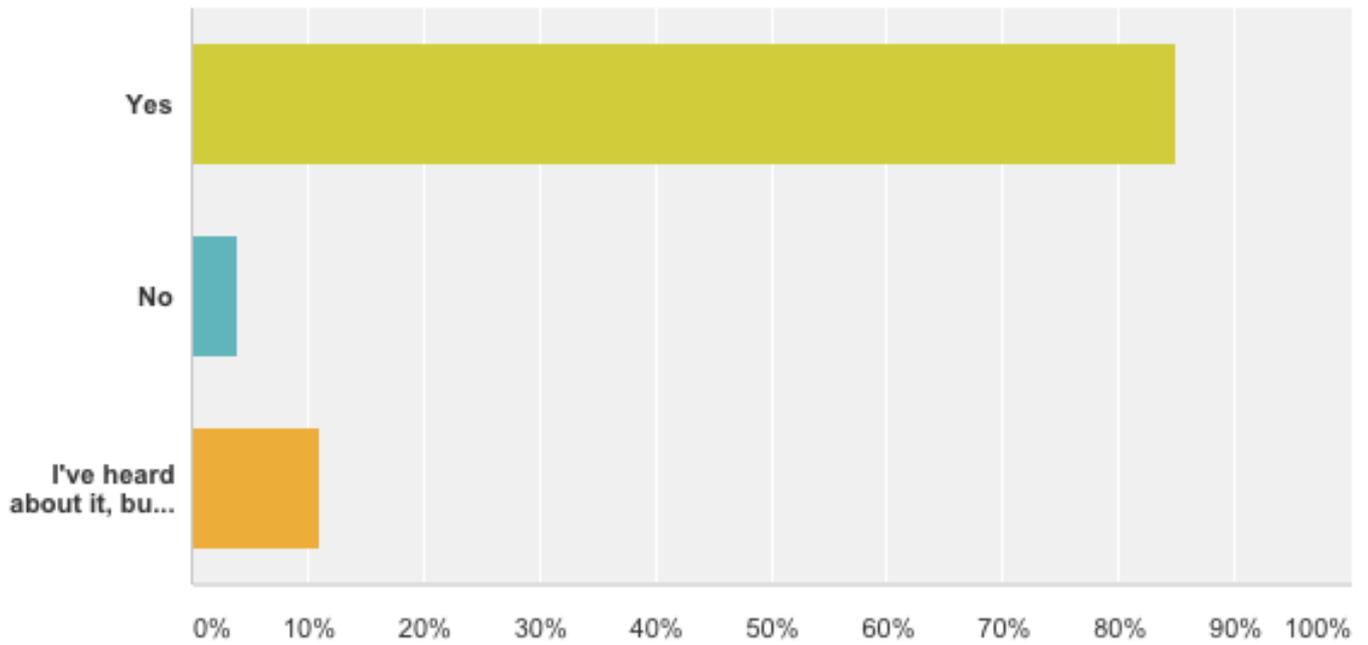
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	70.00% 70
No	3.00% 3
I shop there sometimes, but wouldn't call myself loyal	27.00% 27
Total	100

Q2. Do you know who the BDS (Boycott Divestment & Sanctions) Group are?



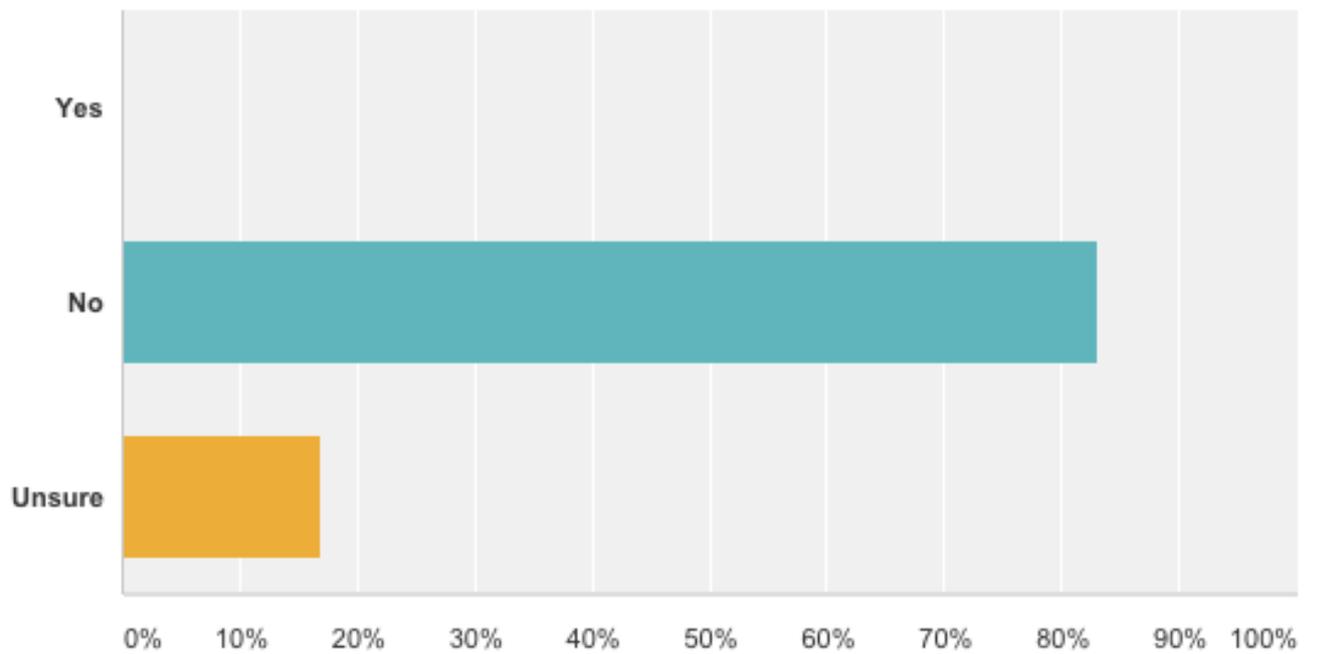
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	80.00% 80
No	9.00% 9
I've heard of them, but don't know details	11.00% 11
Total	100

Q3. Do you know about the boycott and protests against Woolworths by the BDS?



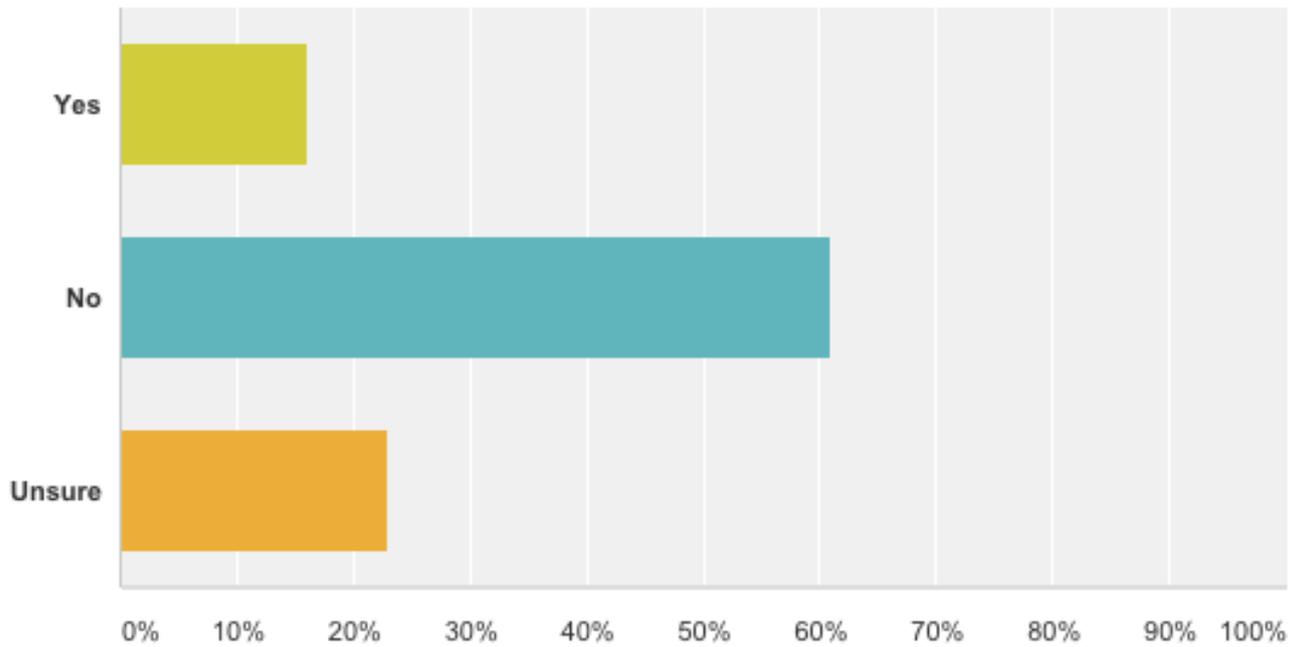
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	85.00% 85
No	4.00% 4
I've heard about it, but don't know much	11.00% 11
Total	100

Q4. Do you think the boycott on Woolworths by the BDS was justified? Please give a reason for your answer.



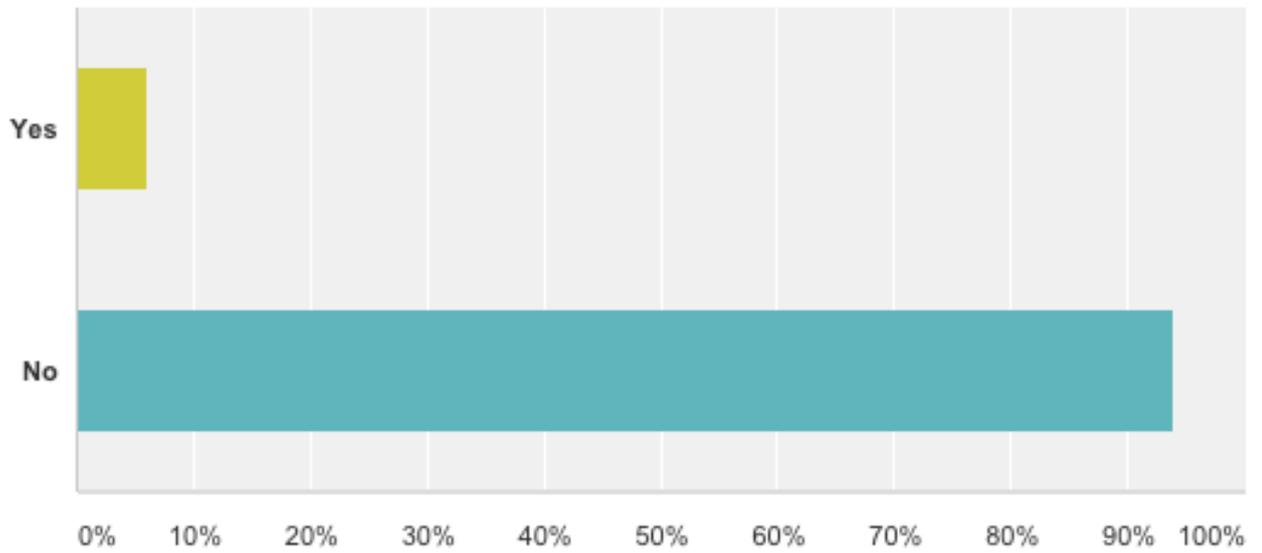
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	0.00% 0
No	83.00% 83
Unsure	17.00% 17
Total	100

Q5. Do you think the boycott had a negative effect on the Woolworths brand?



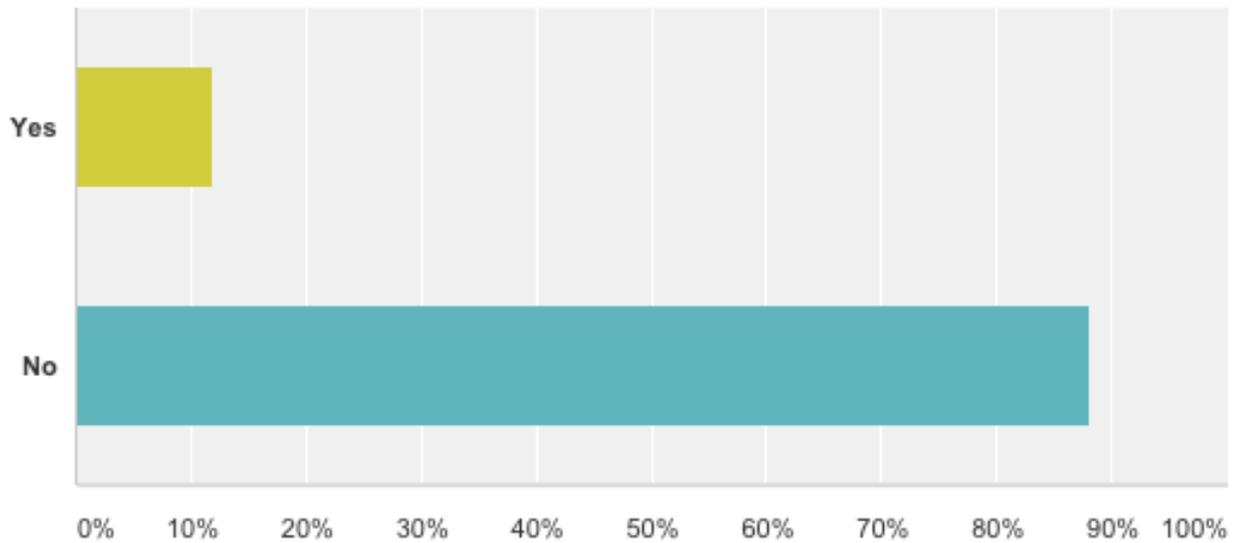
Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	16.00% 16
No	61.00% 61
Unsure	23.00% 23
Total	100

Q6. Did you stop shopping at Woolworths while the boycott and protests were taking place?



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	6.06% 6
No	93.94% 93
Total	99

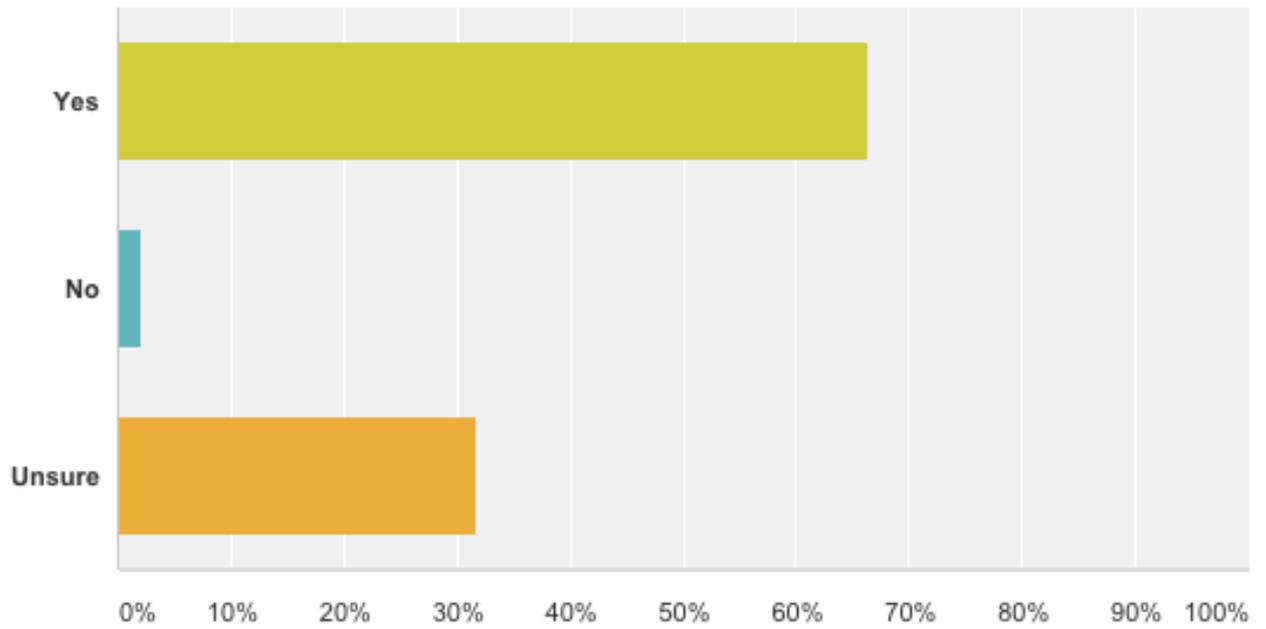
Q7. Did the boycott and protests affect your decision to continue supporting Woolworths? Please state why.



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	12.00% 12
No	88.00% 88
Total	100

The statements as to why the boycott and protests may have affected the respondents' decisions to continue supporting Woolworths will be analysed in Analysis of Findings.

Q8. As a South African citizen, were you impressed with the way Woolworths dealt with the accusations, boycott and protests?



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	66.33% 65
No	2.04% 2
Unsure	31.63% 31
Total	98

Q9. As a consumer, what other ways do you think exist to prevent boycotts from negatively affecting a brand's image or reputation?

This question required respondents to give a written answer. My survey collected 48 written answers for this question, as some respondents skipped the question. Some of the answers included the following:

Contrary to popular belief I don't think BDS has a strong following at all and I don't think it's affected business to any degree. I think it should be made clear to all South Africa and democratic countries that a a democracy people have the right to chose where to shop and what they want to buy. Movements like BDS who infringe on that right and attempt to boycott and intimidate people should be disallowed to do so. Whether doing this is stopping their so-called 'freedom of expression' is questionable in itself but BDS should not be allowed to operate in the way they have done so, if at all.

10/2/2015 1:05 PM [View respondent's answers](#)

The brand needs to proactively strategise around events as such, rather than wait for it to happen. Communications need to be proactive and they need to happen. The brand can not keep quiet.

10/2/2015 12:59 PM [View respondent's answers](#)

Clearly state that a small group of individuals cannot effect the whole country.

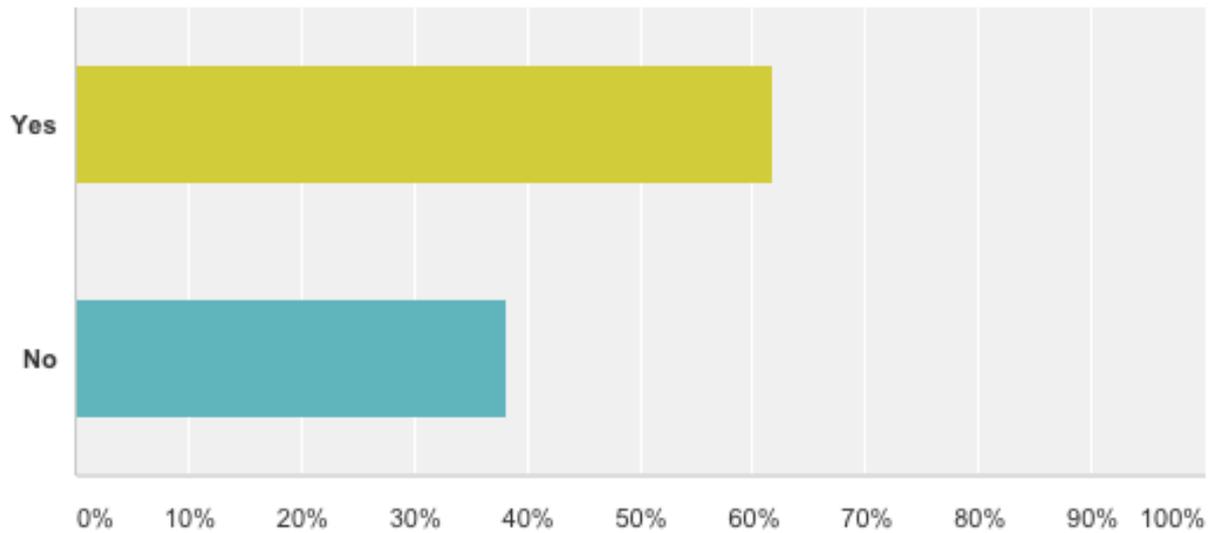
10/2/2015 11:53 AM [View respondent's answers](#)

1. Consistent Consumer Engagement 2. Addressing issues people have immediately before they blow up into bigger problems 3. Routine checkups on social trends and how the brand can benefit. 4. Proactive instead of reactive; involve your brand in any relevant social issues to build good rapport with relevant markets.

10/2/2015 10:18 AM [View respondent's answers](#)

The analyses of the answers to this question will appear in the next chapter, Analysis of Findings.

Q10. Would you partake in a peaceful protest: 'Buycott the Boycott', campaigning against the boycott against Woolworths?



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	61.86% 60
No	38.14% 37
Total	97

This particular question was asked in reference to research that I was accumulating for my Research Activation, in which I proposed a counter-boycott and campaign for companies who have been a target of a boycott or protests.

Analysis of Findings

Focus Group

The focus group that I conducted had a very relaxed atmosphere, as it was six classmates from Vega School of Branding, Bordeaux, and myself facilitating. I will refer to the participants as Participants A-F. I started off by asking the group if they know whom the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Group are. Only four participants had heard of the BDS, and so I enlightened them on who the group are. In contrast, all six participants stated that they are loyal Woolworths customers, and they were all aware of the boycott and protests against Woolworths, as well as what the protests were about.

We discussed the protests and the reasons behind the boycott, and most participants said that they believed the protests were unjustified, based on the fact that only 0.1% of Woolworths' products are sourced from Israel. Participant C said that the boycott was a farcical attack on a big brand to gain media exposure for themselves; it was a massive canvas for media coverage.

Participants A and B were Jewish, and therefore pro-Israel. I took this into account when considering the answers to my questions, as well as their contribution to the discussion. All participants agreed that if there was any effect on the Woolworths brand and reputation as a result of the boycott, it was very slight, and it is safe to assume that only BDS members and anti-Israel individuals or groups have a bad image of the Woolworths brand now. The word 'propaganda' popped up quite often during the discussion, as all participants agreed that it seemed that the marketing behind the campaign was propagandist and one-sided.

All six participants stated that they did not stop shopping at Woolworths during the boycott, but if the protests had been going on in the store while they were shopping there, they would have left for safety reasons, returning to the Woolworths store when it was calmer. Participants C, D, E and F were unaware of what Woolworths did to deal with the boycott. I educated them on the facts of the matter, telling them that Woolworths took the BDS to court instead of directly meeting with the group, so as to ensure safety for their employees and customers. All participants agreed that this was a fair choice and move on Woolworths'

part. Participant B commented in this regard that the protests were illegal, organised incorrectly, and unfounded. This is based on the information that Woolworths won in court, and the BDS was banned from protesting inside and outside Woolworths stores.

Another question I posed was what could a brand do in situations such as the one Woolworths found themselves in to avoid getting their reputation ruined. Participant D said that the brand would have to have a squeaky clean record, with nothing to hide. In addition to this, a comment was made that the boycott would have to be justified, unlike that against the Woolworths brand. Participant E stated that the brand being boycotted and protested against could create an advertising campaign against the boycott, reiterating their side of the story. This could either help the damage, or avoid further damage to the brand and reputation.

I asked the group whether any of them would partake in a peaceful protest: 'Buycott the Boycott', campaigning against the boycott against Woolworths. This question was in reference to my research activation, and most participants mentioned that they aren't generally the type of people who would attend a protest. But, if it got to the point where it was out of hand and on a serious level against a brand they loved, then Participants C, D and F would partake in the campaign as concerned customers. Participants A and B would partake in the campaign regardless, as they are pro-Israel citizens, and Participant E was indifferent.

Participant A mentioned that it did not matter that it was Woolworths who was being boycotted and protested against as the BDS are a movement that they do not agree with. It was said that they made a scene about something so miniscule, and that the mind-set behind it was both unjust and unethical.

Overall, the participants of the focus group were against the boycott and protests by the BDS, and firmly stood by Woolworths' side. Other than Participants A and B, none of the group members were politically inclined, allowing for their comments and answers to be objective and unbiased, adding value to my research in a tremendous way.

Online Survey

100 anonymous respondents filled in my online survey via Survey Monkey. The results of the survey were very positive, and added great value to my research report. 70% of the respondents stated that they are loyal Woolworths customers. 80% of respondents said they know who the BDS are, and 85% knew about the protests and boycott held against Woolworths by the BDS. This shows that although not all respondents are loyal Woolworths customer, another 27% said that they shop there sometimes, but would not call themselves loyal. This proves that 97% of respondents shop at Woolworths, ensuring that the results of this survey were focused on Woolworths customers, and people who were aware of the boycott.

83% of respondents did not believe that the boycott on Woolworths by the BDS was justified. Most respondents stated that this was because it was unreasonable to boycott Woolworths for the small amount of Israeli goods that they stock. Some respondents were unaware of the reasons behind the boycott, and therefore could not comment on this question. Various reasons given for this answer included the following:

- “Woolworths source less than 1% of their products from Israel, which implies that the BDS isn't focused on boycotting a company that "supports" Israel, but rather simply on attention-seeking and tarnishing reputations.”
- “Woolworths is a local business that supplies thousands of jobs to South Africans. It contributes an enormous amount to the South African workforce and donates large amounts of money and resources to schools in the country. The BDS is so concerned with alleged injustices happening halfway across the world that it fails to see the injustices taking place on its front door, injustices that Woolworths tries in its own way to combat.”
- “Boycotting Woolworths does not further the BDS' cause. It is an unfair attack on a company that is successful and exemplified corporate citizen.”

61% of respondents said that they do not think the boycotts had a negative effect on the Woolworths brand, while 23% were unsure. 93% did not stop shopping at Woolworths while the boycotts and protests were taking place, showing the strong brand loyalty of Woolworths customers. The boycotts and protests did not affect 88% of people's decisions to continue supporting Woolworths, again reiterating their strong consumer relationships

and the loyalty that their customers showered them with throughout the boycott. Some consumers were unable to comment on this question, as they were unsure of the details of the boycott. In contrast, many respondents commented with positive feedback about the high quality goods that Woolworths provide, making that a reason to continue supporting them. Other factors mentioned were that Woolworths are “constantly making great effort to be a socially responsible brand.” One respondent stated with reverence that “Woolworths has refused to involve itself in a pseudo-political war that has been going on since long before its inception. I respect Woolworths right to self-determination.” Although many respondents seemed unaware of the boycott and protests against the brand, others remained devoted to Woolworths through it all.

66% of respondents were impressed with how Woolworths dealt with accusations, boycott and protests. 31% were unsure, showing that Woolworths managed to do a quiet and professional job with dealing with the BDS. On the other hand, it could be said that Woolworths should have kept their customers in the loop; not relying on mainstream media to relay the information on the court case with the BDS. Respondents left the following comments in regards to this question:

- “They kept it quiet & professional. Very little of their point of view came to the fore on social media, etc.”
- “I am appreciative that they stood their ground and did not succumb to the oppression being hurled at them. I am glad they were willing to stay true to South Africa and it's needs and not concern itself with international politics.”

The second last question of my survey asked the respondents what they think, as a consumer, are other ways to prevent boycotts from negatively affecting a brand's image or reputation. The answers were multifaceted, and included comments on brand management, brand awareness, and control. Consistent consumer engagement was also brought up, as well as addressing issues that people have immediately, before allowing them to blow out of proportion. One respondent mentioned that “routine check-ups on social trends and how the brand can benefit are vital”, as well as being “proactive instead of reactive; involving your brand in any relevant social issues to build good rapport with relevant markets.” Another respondent stated that a brand could start an awareness campaign to justify why their non-involvement is justified. “People are emotional, and jump at the sound of certain words - colonialism, apartheid,

genocide. Woolworths is an upper-market brand and they should speak in the language of their target-market: sense.” The main themes in this answer were consumer engagement and brand management, both of which Woolworths focused on in their fight against the boycott and protests by the BDS.

My last question was in reference to my research activation, and asked respondents whether they would partake in a peaceful protest: 'Buycott the Boycott', campaigning against boycott against Woolworths. 61.86% said that they would, while 38.14% said that they would not. This doesn't necessarily reflect the brand loyalty of Woolworths customers, but rather personal choice of respondents in attending a protest that may be commenting on a political standpoint, not only as concerned customers in support of a brand that they are loyal to.

Overall Analysis

The results that I collected from both my focus group and online survey were an accumulation of rich, comprehensive data on my topic, allowing for constructive conclusions to be made on my research report, *The Effects of the Protests and Boycotts on a Brand and its Reputation – A Case Study on Woolworths and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)*. My original research questions were: 'Has the Woolworths brand and reputation suffered at the hands of the BDS?' and 'Were Woolworths following healthy branding steps to ensure consistent brand loyalty despite the boycott and protests against them?' These questions have definitely been answered in various ways through my data collection methods.

According to all six members of the focus group, and 61% of the survey respondents, the Woolworths brand and reputation did not suffer at the hands of the BDS. It was unanimously agreed that Woolworths still are and will continue to be a strong brand that has a reputation for quality service and goods. In Solly Moeng's article, *Woolworths Needs to Nurture its Reputation* (2014), he emphasises that Woolworths need to continue being protective of the good reputation that they have carefully built over the years. This is something that Woolworths consumers seem to be fully supportive of. Just as Moeng stated that condemning the retailer on the apparent relaxation of its ethical standpoint when it concerns Palestinian human rights seems to be a powerful weapon for gaining widespread

media coverage for the anti-Israeli cause, Woolworths customers agree. It seems that loyal Woolworths consumers see the BDS boycott purely as a way to gain media coverage. Lastly, Moeng commented on the fact that the BDS campaigners are not significant enough to hit Woolworths where it would hurt most, and that the protests and boycotts are simply a hurdle that the brand needs to overcome swiftly and smartly. This information from my Literature Review has been fully substantiated in my focus group and survey findings.

Adri Nieuwhof mentioned in her article titled *South Africa retailer Woolworths takes Israel boycotters to court* (2014) that Woolworths' decision to take the BDS to court was not well thought out, nor would it be to the brand's benefit. Although this assumption was incorrect, as Woolworths succeeded in winning their case, resulting in the BDS being banned from protesting inside and outside Woolworths stores, many consumers were not actually aware of the steps Woolworths took in dealing with the BDS. This can be said with conviction as four out of the six members of my focus group, as well as 31% of respondents from my survey, were uninformed regarding Woolworths taking the BDS to court.

To add to the above point, Alexander Garrett published an article in *Management Today on Dealing with Consumer Protest* (2013). The piece mentions that if a company is boycotted, two important things that should be done are to speak to the protesters to find out what they really want, and to share the course of action that they have decided on with everyone. Make sure that they are aware of the good things your company does. Do say: 'We have asked to meet the campaigners to hear their concerns.' Do not say: 'It will blow over soon' (Garrett, 2013). Unfortunately, Woolworths did not take these points into due consideration. The brand refused to meet with the BDS to discuss the reasons behind the boycott and protests, and instead took the Group to court and had them banned from protesting inside or outside any Woolworths stores. Although the court voted in Woolworths' favour, the public were not made aware of the court case in a widespread manner, which left loyal Woolworths customers feeling left out and uninformed.

It can be said, after deeply analysing my literatures and data collection results, that the Woolworths brand and reputation did not suffer at the hands of the BDS. Woolworths seemed to carefully follow healthy branding steps to ensure consistent brand loyalty despite the boycott and protests against them. 93% of survey respondents, as well as all six members of the focus group did not stop shopping at Woolworths while the boycotts and

protests were taking place, displaying the strong brand loyalty of Woolworths customers. Woolworths managed to maintain the loyalty of the majority of their customers despite the turmoil that they found themselves caught up in. The fact that the boycotts and protests did not affect 88% of people's decisions to continue supporting Woolworths again reiterates their strong consumer relationships and the loyalty that their customers have for the brand throughout the boycott.

The significance of these findings is substantial, as even though Woolworths has managed to maintain their strong reputation and solid customer loyalty, they failed to keep their devoted consumers in the loop when it came to dealing with the boycott and protests in court. This may have resulted in further implications in their brand loyalty or reputation declining, as although this was not apparent in my findings, I only collected data from an accumulated 106 respondents. Consumer engagement is something that Woolworths will have to focus on in the future.

Chapter Five

Recommendations

Based on the literature that has been reviewed, as well as the data analysis on the focus group conducted and online survey that was completed, the following recommendations can be made for my research topic: *The Effects of the Protests and Boycotts on a Brand and its Reputation – A Case Study on Woolworths and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)*.

Consumers are becoming more aware, and ethical consumerism is on the rise. This makes it more difficult for companies to keep their customers happy, and Woolworths need to educate themselves on the desires of their consumers in order to be able to prepare and anticipate possible protest by the public. If they are prepared in this respect, they will be able to avoid any potential damage or repercussions to their strong reputation, and avoid any negative consequences.

Consistent consumer engagement is a vital point to acknowledge from the collection of this research. With the rise of mobile and social technologies, customers are now more powerful than ever. Their always-connected status and ability to find information in seconds puts them in control of their own experience, and this trend has forced organisations to rethink how they engage and connect with their customers. Woolworths' only prevalent issue throughout their saga with the BDS was not communicating with their consumers. Low consumer engagement can result in a decline in customer loyalty, and Woolworths could not afford that with the bad publicity that the boycott and protests were bringing. It is recommended that Woolworths, or any other brand being boycotted, should focus on consumer engagement in order to keep their brand healthy, and their reputation upheld.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that I was successful in answering my two research questions, 'Has the Woolworths brand and reputation suffered at the hands of the BDS?' and 'Were Woolworths following healthy branding steps to ensure consistent brand loyalty despite the boycott and protests against them?' for my research report topic *The Effects of the Protests and Boycotts on a Brand and its Reputation – A Case Study on Woolworths and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)*.

Woolworths managed to maintain their reputation and the strong brand loyalty among their devoted customers. Despite the negative connotations that came along with the politically fuelled boycott against their brand by the BDS, Woolworths took a stand, and came out stronger for it. As Woolworths only import 0.1% of their products from Israel, and are clearly within their rights to do so according to their Ethical Sourcing Policy which they strictly abide by, it seems that the BDS were simply using Woolworths as a scapegoat to publicise their anti-Israel and anti-Zionist beliefs in an unconstructive way.

It can be stated that the boycott and protests by the BDS against Woolworths did not actually affect the brand in a long-lasting negative way. Woolworths' commitment to quality and ethical sourcing are vital and promising features in all that the brand does and will continue to do. The BDS were not strong enough to destroy the solid reputation that Woolworths have created for themselves over the years, and the boycott and protests were simply a hurdle that Woolworths needed to overcome swiftly and smartly, which they did. There is reason to believe a boycott will not have an oversized impact on a brand's reputation. As Woolworths are only importing 0.1% of their products from Israel, and are well within their rights to do so according to their Ethical Sourcing Policy which they strictly abide by, it seems that the BDS were simply using Woolworths as a scapegoat to publicise their anti-Israel and anti-Zionist beliefs in an unconstructive way. This was further highlighted through the results of my focus group and online survey, as many respondents had feelings that were in line with the literature I reviewed; the BDS were boycotting Woolworths to gain media attention, and their true loyal customers stood by them regardless.

Overall, the feedback from the literature, focus group and online survey were predominantly positive, clarifying the answers for my two research questions, and summing my research report up in a focused and expounding way.

'Were Woolworths following healthy branding steps to ensure consistent brand loyalty despite the boycott and protests against them?' Other than having to work on consumer engagement, yes.

'Has the Woolworths brand and reputation suffered at the hands of the BDS?' No.

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