# Riding the Gaza Boycott Wave: A Strategic Guide for Malaysian Franchises

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**Abstract**
**Purpose**: The primary aim of this study is to explore how local Malaysian franchises can capitalize on the consumer shift triggered by the global boycott movement related to the Gaza war. Specifically, it seeks to understand the impact of the boycott on consumer behaviour and brand perception in Malaysia, examining the potential for increased patriotic consumption, ethical consumerism, and brand image repositioning among local franchises.
**Design/methodology/approach**: The relationships between the consumer behaviour with brand perception and consumer boycotts are assessed before strategies to deal with the issues are diagnosed. Seminal works of classic and current consumer behaviour and brand perception literature are reviewed in developing the conceptual background of the paper.
**Findings**: The findings suggest that the boycott movement has indeed influenced consumer behaviour in Malaysia, leading to increased support for local franchises among certain segments of the population. This shift is driven by a combination of patriotic consumption, ethical consumerism, and strategic brand repositioning by local franchises. The study identifies specific strategies that have been effective in leveraging the boycott to strengthen brand image and market share.
**Research limitations/implications**: The discussion is limited to conceptual background of the aspects discussed. Further empirical studies would enhance the applicability of the discussions presented.
**Practical implications**: The research provides practical insights for marketers and business leaders in local Malaysian franchises, offering strategies for navigating the complexities of the Boycott landscape.
**Originality/value**: This study contributes original insights into the impact of global boycott movements on consumer behaviour and brand perception, with a specific focus on the Malaysian context. It fills a gap in the existing literature by exploring the potential for local franchises to thrive amidst a boycott, offering a theoretical framework that can guide future research and practical strategies for businesses.
**Keywords**: Boycott Movement, Consumer Behaviour, Brand Perception, Local Malaysian Franchises

## Introduction

The Boycott movement, spurred by global socio-political events, has a significant impact on consumer behaviour and brand perception. The shifting consumer landscape indicates a significant change in the dynamics of brand loyalty and perception, extending beyond traditional marketing factors to include political and ethical considerations. This trend highlights the increasing importance of socio-political factors in influencing consumer choices and brand relationships. Within this context, the boycott movement acts as a catalyst for broader discussions on the impact of political activism on consumer behavior.

Research has demonstrated that consumers are more willing to adjust their purchasing habits to reflect their political beliefs, a trend with profound implications for brands operating in politically sensitive environments (Bröckerhoff & Qassoum, 2021). The intersection of consumer behavior, brand perception, and political activism presents a complex and multifaceted area for further study. In the context of the Gaza conflict, the movement has triggered notable shifts in consumer choices, especially in markets with strong socio-political ties to the conflict. This study investigates how local Malaysian franchises can strategically respond to this consumer shift to enhance their market position.

Consumers are no longer passive bystanders. Since the 1990s, they've transformed boycotts from niche labor rights tools into powerful weapons for social and environmental change. This "responsible consumption" revolution (Smith, 1991; Putnam, 1993; Friedman, 1995) goes far beyond price and quality. Today's empowered consumers wield their wallets to fight for human rights, address environmental threats, and hold brands accountable for labor practices (Baron, 2003; Jackson & Schantz, 1993). This surge in consumer power is evident in the laser focus of boycotts – targeting specific brand actions, not just the entire brand.

In today's charged socio-political climate, understanding how political movements like the boycott of Israeli products reshape consumer perceptions is critical. These movements are game-changers, fundamentally altering the brand-consumer relationship. Brands that champion their customers' values see soaring loyalty and advocacy, while those that clash face a consumer exodus. This shift is part of a global awakening – conscious consumption, where buying decisions are driven by a powerful blend of political and ethical considerations. The global boycott movement, particularly in response to the Gaza war, exemplifies this trend with its widespread, cross-demographic participation.

The double-edged sword of globalization: While offering vast expansion opportunities, it also exposes companies to new challenges and threats. Multinational corporations are increasingly aware that actions at home or abroad, along with their home governments' policies, can directly impact their reputation, trust, and sales. Today's consumers are not only aware but also highly reactive to corporate and governmental actions. A popular weapon in their arsenal is the boycott, defined by Ali (2021) as "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases."

Boycotts can affect substitute products that are connected to the main boycott in addition to their direct targets. These widespread substitute boycotts (Balabanis, 2013) pose significant challenges for companies, often stemming from actions beyond their control, such as government policies. A prime example is the boycott of products in the Middle East following the Muhammad cartoon controversy (Jensen, 2008).

Regardless of type, boycotts can inflict lasting damage. The American boycott of French wines resulted in a staggering $112 million loss (Chavis & Leslie, 2009), while the Nestle boycott cost them $40 million and years of reputation rebuilding (Nelson-Horchler, 1984). Despite the rise of boycotts and empowered consumers, research on consumer boycott behavior remains surprisingly limited (John & Klein, 2003).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has ignited global concern, particularly in Muslim-majority nations. Muslim consumers often view "Deen" as encompassing not just religion, but also faith, decision allegiance, and way of life (Wilson et al., 2013). These deeply held values can motivate them to participate in boycotts aligned with their belief systems. The numerous boycotts against Israel in response to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank highlight this. However, identifying Israeli products can be difficult, making boycotts a common form of protest (Wilson & Liu, 2011). Global events significantly impact consumer norms, values, and beliefs, ultimately shaping purchasing decisions and leading to boycotts of products from offending nations (Zakaria & Abdul-Talib, 2010; Ettenson & Klein, 2005).

A recent survey in Malaysia indicated that over 70% of consumers are actively seeking out local brands due to the boycott movement. This trend highlights a growing emphasis on social and political factors influencing consumer choices, extending beyond traditional brand loyalty. Boycotts, unlike general consumer activism, represent a targeted form of protest where consumers actively avoid specific brands or products. In Malaysia, a Muslim-majority nation, the boycott movement against Israeli products has gained significant traction (Ibrahim, Carvalho & San, 2024). This research investigates how Malaysian franchises, particularly those facing potential competition from boycotted brands, can strategically respond to this consumer shift and enhance their brand image. Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

1. To comprehend the impact of the Boycott movement on consumer behaviour and brand perception in Malaysia.
2. To scrutinize the potential for increased patriotic consumption and ethical consumerism among Malaysian consumers.
3. To recognize strategies for local franchises to reposition their brands and strengthen market share amidst the Boycott movement.

## Literature Review
### Consumer Behaviour and Boycott Movements

Boycotts have been a common social movement tactic throughout history, used to protest practices, policies, or companies. In recent times, the 'Free-Palestinian' and 'Stop War on Gaza' movements have optimized boycotts as a tool for supporting freedom movements. Boycotts, as a form of consumer protest, reflect reactions to perceived injustices, unethical business practices, or controversial political policies, providing insights into contemporary social and economic dynamics. According to Suzanne and Haeran (2015), Boycott movements are often one of the most effective anticonsumption tactics used against companies that engage in practices deemed unethical or unjustified. It is also indicated that although consumer boycotts are more commonly motivated by instrumental motives, noninstrumental motives have higher emotional intensity.

The globalized economy means that consumer boycotts can have a more immediate impact on targeted companies. Brands are more sensitive to reputational damage and sales declines and are more likely to respond to boycott threats quickly. By affecting the bottom line of companies that are seen as symbolic of their home countries' values and policies, boycotts aim to pressure these entities into reconsidering their positions or, at the very least, acknowledging the contested nature of their actions (Kristian, 2024). Customers are becoming more and more inclined to change their shopping behaviors to align with their political beliefs. This development has significant ramifications for brands that operate in politically sensitive areas.

## Brand Perception and Ethical Consumerism

Consumer boycotts give these disenfranchised citizens a way to express themselves simply by choosing not to buy brands they view as pro-Israel (Ili-Salsabila & Abdul-Talib, 2012). Several high- profile American companies have been targeted because of their perceived support for Israel and its war on Gaza. The globalized economy means that consumer boycotts can have a more immediate impact on targeted companies. Brands are more sensitive to reputational damage and sales declines and are more likely to respond to boycott threats quickly (King, 2016). By affecting the bottom line of companies that are seen as symbolic of their home countries' values and policies, boycotts aim to pressure these entities into reconsidering their positions or, at the very least, acknowledging the contested nature of their actions. Given these changes, it is imperative to comprehend the subtleties of how political movements like the boycott of Israeli goods reshape consumer perceptions in a highly heated socio-political climate. Such movements have an impact that goes beyond simple political expression and affects the fundamentals of consumer-brand interactions (Mohamed Nasir, 2016).

According to Alexander (2024) many boycotts begin at the grassroots level, social media platforms allow for rapid dissemination of information and mobilization across national borders. Traditional media outlets, mosques, universities, and public squares serve as key platforms to mobilize and amplify public support. Depending on how customers view a brand's alignment or conflict with their political and ethical principles, there are differences in the levels of advocacy and loyalty. This change in consumer behaviours is indicative of a broader worldwide movement towards consumption patterns that are more politically aware and mindful. Because of this, research on how the boycott movement has affected consumer loyalty and brand perception provides important new information on how consumerism is changing in relation to international political concerns. Some of Israeli's company witnessed the largest decline and experienced notable declines in profits (Monem, 2024).

## Patriotic Consumption

Buy national campaigns urge people to choose domestic over imported items by stating that there is a connection between a feeling of national identity and the act of purchasing. A global reaction to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in particular to the Gaza genocide of 2023, gave rise to the Gaza Boycott Wave. Worldwide, customers started aggressively boycotting companies they believed to be siding with either side of the dispute. This movement is changing consumer behaviour and modifying economic environments, which has important ramifications for corporations. Ethnic or national identity, political convictions, and moral principles are frequently the driving forces behind patriotic consumerism. Consumers participate in boycotts, according to Klein, Ettenson, and Morris (1998), as a means of expressing displeasure of a nation's political policies and advocating for social change. A global solidarity movement that aims to protest perceived injustices and human rights violations is a major driving force behind the boycott of Gaza (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

The impact of these boycotts extends beyond mere consumer choices, influencing corporate strategies and market dynamics. Companies are increasingly held accountable for their political and ethical stances, prompting them to align their business practices with the values of their consumers (Abdul-Talib & Mohd Adnan, 2017). This alignment can lead to enhanced brand loyalty among ethically conscious consumers, while those perceived to be on the wrong side of socio-political issues may face significant backlash and loss of market share.

**Methodology**

This study utilizes a comprehensive literature review methodology to explore the effects of boycott movements on brand perception and consumer behaviour among Malaysian consumers. It seeks to assess the potential rise in patriotic consumption and ethical consumerism and to identify strategies for local franchises to reposition their brands and enhance market share in response to the Boycott movement. This approach was selected for its capacity to synthesize and analyse various existing research sources, offering deep insights into a complex and multifaceted issue. The literature review process began with the identification and selection of relevant sources, involving an extensive search through academic databases, scholarly journals, and industry publications. The focus was on literature discussing product boycotts, brand perception, and customer behaviour, especially within the context of Muslim consumers. Specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure only the most relevant and high-quality sources were included.

After gathering the relevant sources, the analysis process began. This involved critically reviewing each source to understand the key arguments, methodologies, findings, and conclusions. Particular emphasis was placed on studies examining the link between political issues and consumer behaviour, as well as research specifically focused on the Muslim consumer market. Through a detailed analysis of these sources, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how boycott movements impact consumer behaviour and brand perception, ultimately offering practical strategies for local franchises to navigate and succeed in this challenging environment. Information from various sources was synthesized to identify common themes, trends, and patterns. This involved comparing and contrasting findings from different studies to understand similarities and differences in research outcomes. This process helped in identifying gaps in the existing literature and determining new directions for this research. The literature review also included a critical evaluation of the methodologies used in previous studies. This is crucial for understanding the strengths and limitations of different approaches, as well as for determining the most appropriate methodology for this research.

Finally, this literature review aims to develop a strong theoretical framework for this research. This framework will guide the analysis of data and interpretation of findings, ensuring that this research makes a significant and meaningful contribution to the existing literature. The literature review methodology enables this research to build upon previous work while also paving the way for new insights and a deeper understanding of the impact of boycott movements on brand perception and customer behaviour among Muslim consumers. Information from various sources was meticulously synthesized to identify recurring themes, emerging trends, and prevalent patterns. This involved a systematic comparison and contrast of findings across different studies to elucidate both the commonalities and divergences in research outcomes. Such an approach was instrumental in pinpointing gaps within the existing literature and charting new avenues for this research. Additionally, the literature review entailed a rigorous evaluation of the methodologies employed in previous studies, which is essential for discerning the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches and selecting the most suitable methodology for this research.

The objective of this literature review extends to the development of a robust theoretical framework that will underpin the analysis of data and the interpretation of findings. This framework is designed to ensure that the research contributes significantly and meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge. By leveraging the literature review methodology, this research not only builds on prior work but also paves the way for fresh insights and a deeper understanding of the impact of boycott movements on brand perception and customer behaviour, particularly among Muslim consumers in Malaysia.

**Findings**

*Impact of the Boycott Movement on Consumer Behaviour*

The boycott movement has significantly influenced consumer behaviour in Malaysia, leading to a marked shift in preferences towards local franchises. This change is primarily driven by a combination of ethical considerations and patriotic sentiment, which have become increasingly important to Malaysian consumers. The ongoing conflict in Gaza and the broader political dynamics surrounding the issue have heightened awareness and sensitivity towards the ethical implications of consumer choices. As a result, many Malaysians are choosing to support local businesses as a form of protest against international brands perceived to be associated with or supporting the Israeli government.

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in this shift. Consumers are more informed and concerned about the impact of their purchases on global and local issues. They are keenly aware of the connections between brands and broader socio-political matters, and this awareness influences their buying decisions. The desire to avoid supporting companies linked to perceived injustices has led to an increase in demand for products and services that are ethically sourced and locally produced. This trend reflects a broader movement towards responsible consumption, where the moral and ethical values of a company are as important as the quality and price of its products.

Patriotic sentiment also drives this shift. In Malaysia, a country with a strong sense of national identity and pride, supporting local businesses is seen as a way to contribute to the national economy and express solidarity with fellow citizens. This sentiment is further amplified by the Gaza Boycott movement, as many Malaysians view their support for local franchises as a direct way to protest against international policies and practices they disagree with. This form of patriotic consumption not only strengthens local businesses but also reinforces a collective national identity that is resistant to external influences perceived as negative.

For local franchises, this shift in consumer behaviour presents a unique opportunity to strengthen their market position. By aligning their business practices with the ethical and patriotic values of their consumers, these franchises can build strong, loyal customer bases. Emphasizing local identity, ethical sourcing, and community involvement can differentiate them from international competitors and foster deeper connections with their customers. Moreover, local franchises can leverage this sentiment by highlighting their contributions to the national economy and their support for local communities, thus enhancing their brand image and appeal.

In conclusion, the boycott movement has led to significant changes in consumer behaviour in Malaysia, with an increased preference for local franchises driven by ethical considerations and patriotic sentiment. This presents a valuable opportunity for local businesses to capitalize on these trends, strengthen their market position, and build lasting relationships with ethically and patriotically motivated consumers. By understanding and responding to these drivers, local franchises can not only survive but thrive in the evolving marketplace.

*Potential for Increased Patriotic Consumption and Ethical Consumerism Among Malaysian Consumers*

Malaysian consumers are becoming increasingly cognizant of the socio-political difficulties of their purchasing decisions. The ongoing conflict in Gaza and other global issues have keen awareness of the ethical responsibilities associated with consumption. This growing consciousness drives a preference for products and services that are perceived to align with ethical standards and support social justice causes. As consumers become more informed and

socially conscious, they are more inclined to select brands that resonate with their values. This shift in consumer behaviour is leading to a significant rise in ethical consumerism, where purchasing decisions are heavily influenced by considerations of social and environmental impact, as well as support for humanitarian causes.

Malaysia's strong sense of national identity and pride plays a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour. Patriotic consumption, where consumers prefer local brands to support the national economy and demonstrate solidarity with fellow citizens, is becoming more prevalent. This trend is particularly evident in the context of the Boycott movement, where consumers view supporting local businesses as a form of protest against international brands associated with policies they oppose. The desire to contribute to the national economy and uphold local values enhances the appeal of local franchises.

There is a growing emphasis on ethical practices in business, driven by consumer demand for transparency, sustainability, and social responsibility. Malaysian consumers are increasingly scrutinizing the origins of products and the practices of companies. Businesses that prioritize ethical sourcing, environmental sustainability, and fair labour practices are more likely to attract and retain customers. This shift towards ethical consumerism reflects a broader global trend, and Malaysian consumers are part of this movement.

The widespread use of social media and the accessibility of information have empowered consumers to make informed decisions. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter allow consumers to share information about ethical issues, boycott movements, and local businesses. This digital connectivity facilitates the spread of awareness and encourages collective action, further driving the potential for increased patriotic consumption and ethical consumerism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of supporting local businesses, as many consumers have witnessed the impact of global disruptions on the national economy. This experience has reinforced the value of local production and consumption. Consumers are more likely to support businesses that contribute to local employment, use local resources, and engage in community initiatives. This trend is expected to continue, fostering a supportive environment for local franchises.

Educational campaigns and the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in promoting ethical consumerism and patriotic consumption. NGOs and community groups can raise awareness about the importance of ethical purchasing and the benefits of supporting local businesses. Educational initiatives can inform consumers about the positive impact of their choices on social and environmental issues, further encouraging responsible consumption patterns.

In conclusion, the potential for increased patriotic consumption and ethical consumerism among Malaysian consumers is significant. Heightened awareness of global issues, a strong national identity, growing emphasis on ethical practices, the influence of social media, support for local businesses, and educational initiatives all contribute to this potential. Local franchises that align their practices with these trends can capitalize on the evolving consumer landscape, building strong, loyal customer bases and enhancing their market position.

### Strategies for Local Franchises

Based on the literature review on consumer behaviour, boycott movements, brand perception, ethical consumerism, and patriotic consumption, several strategies can be suggested for local Malaysian franchises to effectively navigate the competitive landscape influenced by the Gaza Boycott movement.

First, emphasizing ethical consumerism is crucial. For instance, a local restaurant chain could transparently showcase its use of sustainably sourced ingredients and fair labour practices by sharing detailed information on its website and social media platforms. Obtaining ethical certifications, such as Fair Trade for their coffee beans, adds credibility to these claims and appeals to morally conscious consumers.

Leveraging patriotic consumption is another important strategy. For example, a local clothing brand could highlight its Malaysian identity by incorporating traditional Malaysian designs into its products and emphasizing this in marketing campaigns. Supporting local causes and community initiatives, such as sponsoring local cultural events or contributing to educational programs, can enhance the franchise's image as a supportive and integral part of the community.

Capitalizing on brand perception involves ensuring that the brand's values align with those of consumers. A grocery store chain could actively support social justice movements, like the Palestinian cause, by stocking products that support Palestinian farmers or donating a portion of profits to related charities. Maintaining high product quality is also essential; for example, a local electronics store could ensure their products meet or exceed consumer expectations, thus differentiating themselves from competitors, especially when combined with ethical branding.

Enhancing market presence through targeted marketing is another effective strategy. For instance, a local café could engage with consumers on social media by sharing updates about their ethical sourcing practices and local community involvement, while responding to social concerns. Partnering with local influencers who advocate for ethical consumerism and national solidarity can amplify the franchise's message and reach a broader audience. A bakery, for instance, could collaborate with a popular food influencer known for promoting sustainable and ethical food choices.

Offering value-driven promotions is important to attract consumers evaluating their purchasing decisions based on value. A local grocery chain could provide special offers and discounts on locally sourced produce to entice consumers to choose their store over international competitors. Implementing loyalty programs that reward repeat customers, such as a points system for frequent shoppers, can foster long-term brand loyalty.

Engaging in community outreach by collaborating with local NGOs or religious organizations that promote ethical purchasing and social justice can strengthen the franchise's ethical image and community ties. For example, a bookstore could partner with a local NGO to host educational events on ethical consumerism. Conducting educational campaigns, like workshops or informational brochures, to inform consumers about the ethical aspects of their products and the importance of supporting local businesses can drive ethical purchasing decisions.

By implementing these strategies with specific examples, local Malaysian franchises can effectively leverage the findings from the literature review to enhance their brand image, align with consumer values, and thrive in a market influenced by socio-political movements and ethical consumerism.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The implications for literature underscore the need for ongoing research into the dynamic interplay between socio-political contexts, ethical considerations, and consumer behaviour. Scholars should continue to explore how boycott movements and ethical consumerism evolve over time, particularly in diverse cultural and political settings. By

deepening our understanding of these dynamics, literature can provide insights that guide businesses, policymakers, and consumers in navigating complex market landscapes.

For franchisor, understanding the socio-political context and ethical considerations that drive consumer behaviour is crucial. By aligning brand values with these factors, franchisor can forge deeper connections with their target audience. Brands that demonstrate transparency, ethical sourcing practices, and a commitment to social responsibility are likely to resonate more strongly with consumers who prioritize these values. Moreover, by actively engaging with ethical issues and supporting causes aligned with consumer concerns, marketers can enhance brand loyalty and foster a positive brand image. This approach not only meets consumer expectations but also positions brands as responsible corporate citizens, thereby strengthening their competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Governments play a pivotal role in shaping the regulatory environment and policies that influence business practices and consumer choices. Recognizing the growing influence of ethical consumerism and boycott movements, governments can implement policies that promote transparency, sustainability, and ethical business conduct. Supporting initiatives that educate consumers about the impacts of their purchasing decisions and fostering a conducive environment for ethical brands can contribute to a more responsible and sustainable economy. By collaborating with businesses and civil society organizations, governments can facilitate partnerships that drive positive social and environmental outcomes while protecting consumer rights.

In conclusion, the implications for literature emphasize the need for continued research to inform stakeholders about evolving consumer behaviours in response to socio-political and ethical considerations. For franchise, aligning brand values with consumer priorities can enhance customer relationships and competitiveness. Governments, meanwhile, have the opportunity to enact policies that support ethical business practices and empower consumers to make informed choices. Together, these efforts can contribute to a marketplace where ethical considerations drive positive social change while meeting consumer demand for responsible products and services.

The boycott movement presents both challenges and opportunities for local Malaysian franchises. By understanding and strategically responding to shifts in consumer behaviour, local franchises can enhance their brand image and market share. This study offers a comprehensive examination of the boycott landscape, providing not only a literature review but also practical and actionable managerial strategies. These strategies empower businesses to effectively navigate the complexities of boycotts and mitigate potential risks. This study underscores the importance of capitalizing on the growing trend of ethical consumerism and patriotic consumption.

Local franchises have a unique opportunity to differentiate themselves from international competitors by emphasizing their Malaysian roots, ethical sourcing practices, and community involvement. By doing so, they can build stronger connections with consumers who prioritize these values in their purchasing decisions. The research also highlights the significant role of transparency and ethical practices in influencing consumer behaviour. Franchises that are transparent about their sourcing and labour practices, and that actively support environmental and social responsibility initiatives, are likely to attract and retain a loyal customer base. Pursuing certifications that verify ethical standards further enhances credibility and appeals to morally conscious consumers.

Moreover, the influence of social media and digital platforms cannot be overstated. Engaging with consumers online, sharing updates about ethical and local initiatives, and responding to social concerns can keep the brand top-of-mind and foster a positive image. Collaborating with local influencers and community leaders can amplify the franchise's

message and reach a broader audience, further strengthening its market position. Additionally, the importance of community outreach and local partnerships is emphasized. By supporting local causes, participating in community events, and partnering with local businesses and NGOs, franchises can demonstrate their commitment to the community and build goodwill. Educational campaigns that inform consumers about the ethical aspects of their products and the benefits of supporting local businesses can drive responsible purchasing decisions.

In conclusion, the boycott movement offers a pivotal moment for local Malaysian franchises to align their business strategies with the ethical and patriotic values of their consumers. This study provides a theoretical framework and practical strategies to guide businesses in navigating the complexities of the boycott landscape. By prioritizing ethical practices, local identity, community engagement, and transparent communication, local franchises can not only overcome the challenges posed by the boycott movement but also seize the opportunities to enhance their brand image, build consumer loyalty, and increase their market share. Through these strategic responses, local businesses can thrive in an environment where consumer choices are increasingly influenced by ethical and patriotic considerations.

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