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Pride and Prejudice:
A Netnographic Study of Boycott Motivations

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Abstract

- Title:** *Pride and Prejudice: A Netnographic Study of Boycott Motivations*
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- Authors:** Katherine Lodder, Jorge Luis López, Scott Luptowski
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- Keywords:** Boycott, Netnography, Consumer Behavior, Consumer Motivation, Blogs
- Thesis Purpose:** The main purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of boycotter motivations in a current and ongoing boycott. From the data gathered we establish our own boycott motivation themes relating specifically to the Kellogg's case. We aim to compare them to previously established consumer motivations as well as more traditional consumer movements and ideologies.
- Methodology:** This study uses an inductive approach. As an Internet-specific research design, Netnography is the main method used for the collection of qualitative data. We also used email interviews as complementary sources.
- Theoretical Perspective:** With the aid of previous literature we established prevalent themes relating to the drivers of anti-consumption and boycott participation. These themes of the Evil Corporation, American Pride, and Pot Culture are compared with the pre-established themes of Self-Image, Brand Avoidance, and Consumer Resistance and Retaliation.
- Empirical Data:** This is a purely qualitative study and focuses on one specific case study: the 2009 Kellogg's boycott in the United States. Blog posts and comments are our main data source. Other data came from email interviews.
- Conclusion:** We believe that we are the first group to use a Netnographic approach (and qualitative data) to study an ongoing boycott. Our conclusions show that one single egregious act motivates individuals to boycott for many different reasons. We grouped these individuals into three themes based on their motivations. Each of these themes related back to more traditional consumer movements and ideologies, such as nationalism, liberalism and power struggles.

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CHAPTER ONE – BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

1.1 The Kellogg's Case

In early February 2009, a photograph surfaced of the American Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps smoking from a marijuana pipe at a house party (appendix 1). The photo was originally published in the British paper News of the World, along with a prediction that the "astonishing picture ... could destroy the career of the greatest competitor in Olympic history" (Dickinson, 2009).

The story was widely reproduced in print, online, and on television. Phelps immediately issued an apology for his behavior and accepted responsibility for his actions without ever confirming that marijuana was in fact the substance inside the pipe (Associated Press, 2009a). At least four of his professional sponsors – Visa, Mazda, Speedo and Omega (appendix 2) – publicly expressed support for Phelps and accepted his apology (Zinser, 2009). USA Swimming, the official swim team of the United States, suspended Phelps for three months (ibid).

One of Phelps' sponsors at the time of the incident was The Kellogg Company. Based in Battle Creek, Michigan and informally known as Kellogg's (appendix 3), the corporation manufactures products such as cereals and trail mix and sells them worldwide. The company reported revenue in excess of \$12 billion USD in 2008 (Google Finance, 2009). At the time the photograph was released, Phelps had appeared on the packaging of at least two brands of Kellogg's products – Frosted Flakes and Corn Flakes brand cereals (appendix 4).

Following the release of the photograph, Kellogg's announced that they would not seek to renew their sponsorship of Phelps, which was set to expire at the end of February 2009. An official statement from the company said that Phelps' behavior was "not consistent with the image of Kellogg" (Sage, 2009). Later, however, the company stated that the timing of the two events was "purely coincidental ... with Michael's obligations to us met, our decision ... was for business reasons" and not related to the publication of the photograph (Thomas, 2009).

Almost immediately, individual consumers began to call for a boycott of Kellogg's products. Bloggers publicly shared their thoughts on the matter (Eick, 2009). Editorials in support of Phelps were published on influential blogs such as the Washington, DC based Huffington Post as well as by newspapers such as The Los Angeles Times (Stranahan, 2009b; Richardson, 2009). These sources and others promoted an online petition to Kellogg's that garnered over 7000 'signatures' (Stranahan, 2009a; Stranahan, 2009b). USA Today, the widest-circulated newspaper in the country, published an article about the spread of the protest; the Washington Times noted that much of the inspiration behind the formal petition arose from conversations on the microblogging website Twitter (Associated Press, 2009; Harper, 2009; BurrellesLuce, 2009). CNN even produced a segment about the spread of boycott news and sentiment over the Internet and aired the segment on their show American Morning (CNN and Jeanne Moos, 2009). The segment, 3:24 long and later posted on YouTube, discusses the popularity of the boycott among users of websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (ibid). CNN cites the number of boycott groups on Facebook, some with an excess of 25,000 members, and response videos from YouTube users, as evidence of the popularity of the boycott among "pot smokers" (ibid.)

Shortly before the photograph of Phelps was published, Kellogg's issued a recall of all of their products containing peanuts or peanut by-products due to the possibility they were infected with salmonella bacteria during production (Kellogg Company, 2009). But this health risk seemed to disappear from public view and was quickly overshadowed by news of Phelps. Some blogs noted that Kellogg's seemed "more concerned with Phelps than tainted peanut butter," as callers to the Kellogg Company were instructed to "press one to speak to a representative" about Phelps and to press two if their call concerned the "recent peanut butter recall" (Grim, 2009; Sullivan, 2009). Indeed, a comparison of blog posts about the two stories we conducted with Google Blog Search found that nearly five times as many blog posts were written about Michael Phelps and Kellogg's than for salmonella and Kellogg's in the month of February 2009.

With boycotts and protests growing from the grassroots level, advocacy groups began to express their support for the issue. The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML – appendix 5), based in Washington, DC and the country’s largest pro-marijuana organization, announced their support and called for a total boycott of all Kellogg’s products until 4 May 2009 or until Michael Phelps was reinstated as a spokesperson for the Kellogg’s brand (NORML, 2006; Armentano, 2009). A group called the Marijuana Policy Project (MPP – appendix 6) offered their support for the boycott and urged Americans to “take a stand” against unfair and unjust marijuana laws (MPPstaff, 2009). An MPP representative appeared on a CNN discussion about the legalization of marijuana; the video was posted on YouTube and viewed over 33,000 times (CNN, 2009). The group produced a video with pictures of individuals such as George W. Bush and Barack Obama next to text that read “This man used marijuana and no one cared” (MPPstaff, 2009). Next to images of Phelps, however, the video read “But this man used marijuana... and everyone cared. Why? Take a stand” (ibid). The video was posted on YouTube by the organization and viewed over 35,000 times (ibid).

Other organizations, including Students for Sensible Drug Policy, Stop the Drug War, and the Drug Policy Alliance Network (appendix 7) also endorsed the boycott (Associated Press, 2009b). Perhaps owing to the fact that individuals called for a boycott before groups expressed their support, each of these groups issued a slightly different set of demands. Even though these groups publicly endorsed the boycott, the movement clearly spread through blogs and through the work of individual people.

1.2 Problematization

The main purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of boycotter motivations in a current and ongoing boycott. We have not found a previous study of a current boycott where researchers do not rely on face-to-face interviews or on participant awareness. We feel that the unobtrusive observation of ongoing boycotts is an underexplored field. Previous research on current and ongoing

boycotts utilizes quantitative research methods and may overlook important motives (Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Klein, Smith & John, 2004).

It is important for researchers to study and understand these emotions because focusing on a boycott as it happens means that the boycotters may more accurately reveal their emotions. In this context (real-time) boycotters are able to express their true feelings and motivations for boycott participation.

From the data gathered we aim to establish our own boycotter motivation themes related specifically to the Kellogg's boycott. These will reference previously established consumer motivations as well as more traditional consumer movements and ideologies. An understanding of this data is important for companies who may face a boycott situation. With appropriate knowledge, a company can better respond to such boycott behavior.

1.3 Boycotts

1.3.1 A History of Boycotts

"A boycott is a planned collective action by a consumer community to change an existing construct" (Yuksel & Mryteza, 2009: 249; Buechler, 1995; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). The term 'boycott' comes from an Englishman named Charles C. Boycott, a land agent "living in Ireland who was ostracized in 1880 for refusing to reduce" rental prices (Tyran & Engelmann, 2005: 1). Boycotts are much older, and documentation of their use goes as far back as the American Revolution of 1764 – 1776. The boycott of imported British goods by American colonists was "politically motivated ... intended to force repeal of distasteful tax laws" (Witkowski, 1989: 216). But boycotting is far from a tool that consumers use only when protesting matters relating to rental prices and taxes. Boycotting is no longer used just to "[force] functional and structural change" but to express deeper consumer emotions (Herrman, 1993: 133; Cherrier, 2009: 189).

Over time, boycotts became a method for consumers to voice their opinions and to make an impact against organizations they feel have committed an offensive action. It is a way for consumers to express their dissatisfaction and to organize and influence change. Their frequency is increasing: "from the mid-1980's to the mid 1990's boycotts in the United States increased about fourfold" (John & Klein, 2003: 1196; Beuchler, 1995; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). As many as "50% of Americans claim to have taken part in a product boycott" (Tyran & Engelmann, 2003: 1; Dolliver, 2000). Boycotts appear everywhere and for almost any conceivable reason. The increase in use of methods of communication such as the Internet has contributed to this growth, helping people with similar – and not so similar – opinions across the country and around the world connect with each other (Kozinets, 1999). Boycotts thus demand investigation for a better understanding as to how they originate and spread, as well as for an examination of their true implications.

Boycotts are a relevant tactic across the entire marketplace but are more common for certain products. Friedman suggests that boycott targets are generally selected if they offer commodities such as "common necessities and inexpensive luxuries" (Friedman, 1999: 215). Boycotts for items such as these are easier in some respects because participants do not have to look hard to find substitutes for the objectionable product(s) or company. Relevant examples of boycott targets offering such commodities include corporations such as Nike (child labor issues) and McDonald's (health issues) (Corporations.org, 2006).

The rapid growth in the frequency of boycotts has led to a parallel growth in research. Recent trends in research include deep investigations into consumer behavior and the managerial implications of boycotts (Cherrier, 2009; Klein et al., 2004; John & Klein, 2003; Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009; Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Funches, Markley & Davis, 2009; Yuksel & Mryteza, 2009, Witkowski, 1989). Explanations as to why boycotts happen are as numerous as they are varied, though most researchers agree that a boycott begins when a company commits an offense – the so-called egregious act – that creates in a consumer "the belief that a firm has engaged in conduct that is strikingly wrong

and that has negative and possibly harmful consequences for various parties” (Klein et al., 2004: 96; Friedman, 1999).

Because the egregious act that instigates a boycott can be just about anything, and because a boycott can range in size from only one person to a near infinite number of participants, it is important for companies of all sizes to have the ability to prevent boycotts, or to at least know how to deal with them if they occur. A large and/or effective boycott can have a number of ramifications for a company: boycotts “disrupt the planning, implementation, and analysis of ... marketing activities,” can potentially affect the morale of company employees, and require that a company “redirect significant resources to crisis management activities” (Ettenson & Klein, 2005: 201). The company may not have a crisis management plan to consult, and thus a large and/or effective boycott can further hurt the company because they need more time to resolve the issue (ibid).

Many factors contribute to the success of a boycott, including the persistence of the participants, how achievable their demands are, and how much public support the boycott receives (Friedman, 1999). A boycott's success also depends, in part, on the expectations of those who are participating. A study by Sen, Gurhan–Canli and Morwitz focuses on consumer expectations and boycott success, and looks at the effects of “social pressure” to comply with a boycott and “the costs [participants] incur in boycotting” (Sen, Gurhan–Canli & Morwitz, 2001: 399-400). There is an “interplay between selfish motives and cooperation that requires individual sacrifice in the short run for the benefit of all individuals in the long run” (ibid: 400). Boycotters must sacrifice material comforts for the sake of the group. John and Klein discuss the concept of false consensus, where “perhaps people participate in boycotts because they overestimate the extent to which others will also do so” (2003: 1206)

Other factors may negatively impact the success of a boycott. One of the major problems in defining the actual success of a boycott lies in creating a valid measurement of its effectiveness and determining whether a company that alters its objectionable policies was influenced directly by the demands of the boycotters or by other unrelated factors. The Heinz tuna boycott of 1972 and the animal

rights boycott of Benetton in the late 1980s are examples of situations where the requests of boycotters led to a change in policy (Friedman, 1999).

Friedman believes that the poor and "seemingly powerless" instigate boycotts on topics such as equal rights; he states that boycotts, "like the poor, will always be with us" (Friedman, 1999: 225). The inescapable possibility of a boycott provokes a need to study them and to sort them based on their common criteria. This categorization will help researchers and companies learn from the most relevant past examples to help them react and adapt to consumer demands.

1.3.2 Boycott categorization

There are a variety of ways to group boycotts. Previous studies have sorted them on a number of categories, including: the goals of the boycott, the tactics used to achieve the goals of the boycott, and the target of the boycott.

Goals

Boycotts fall under one of two different categories based on their goals: there are instrumental boycotts and expressive boycotts. A boycott with specific goals and demands – one that attempts to influence policy – is defined as an instrumental boycott. People who demand the reinstatement of Phelps as a sponsor by Kellogg's, for example, boycott the company for instrumental reasons. "By contrast, an expressive boycott lacks clear goals and functions as a way to 'vent the frustrations of the protesting group' without necessarily demanding anything from the offending party" (Ettenson & Klein, 2005: 201). Friedman expands on the expressive boycott when he implies that these movements seem to lack the longevity of instrumental boycotts due to their unclear or unspecific goals (1999: 12).

A prime example of an expressive boycott is 'Don't Buy Anything Day', a "nationwide boycott of all retail stores that was called in 1973 to demonstrate to American business that it is dependent on the consumer" (Friedman, 1999: 13). This is an expressive boycott both for its short time frame (one day) and for the vague goal of 'demonstrating' the power of consumers. There is also a hybrid form

of a boycott that combines properties from both instrumental and expressive boycotts: known as a punitive boycott, it "may be expressive in the short term and instrumental in the long term" (ibid). One example of a punitive boycott is the long-term campaign against Nestlé. The company changed its policies after more than seven years of boycotting from individuals who were upset and angry over their sale and promotion of infant milk formula in underdeveloped countries (Pagan, 1986). The boycott began in the late 70s and in 1988 the Multinational Monitor named the company one of the top 10 worst corporations of the year (Mokhiber & Falloon, 1988).

Tactics

Boycotts are grouped based on the type of activities used by boycotters to promote their cause and achieve their expressed goals. Marketplace-oriented boycotts occur when the primary focus is on activities held within the marketplace. Examples of such behavior include public demonstrations, protests, and picketing. Media-oriented boycotts, on the other hand, are more concerned with news media and the publicity surrounding the boycott. These methods are common when a full-scale marketplace-oriented boycott is not possible (Friedman, 1999: 219). Media-oriented boycotts focus more specifically on tainting the image of the particular target, though the terms are not mutually exclusive. A "marketplace-oriented boycott may also be concerned with the media, and a media-oriented boycott may also be concerned with the marketplace" (ibid: 213). In today's hyper-connected world, and with the growth of the Internet, it may be impossible to stage a marketplace-oriented boycott without also involving the media. In fact, the publicity generated by media attention may even prolong the life of the boycott or alert others to its existence. The following table outlines the tactics used by boycott leaders (Friedman, 1999*).

Media-oriented versus Marketplace-oriented boycotts

Strategies Envisioned by Boycott Leaders for Various Types of Instrumental Boycotts		
Orientation	Nonsurrogate boycott	Surrogate boycott
Media-oriented boycott	Adverse effects on target's image lead to desired change in target's behavior	Adverse effects on target's image lead target to apply pressure on offending party leading to desired change in behavior of offending party
Marketplace-oriented boycott	Adverse effects on target's image and sales lead to desired change in target's behavior	Adverse effects on target's image and sales lead target to apply pressure on offending party leading to desired change in behavior of offending party

**(Friedman, 1999: 22; Re-creation of Table 2.1 - Strategies Envisioned by Boycott Leaders for Various Types of Instrumental Boycotts)*

Target

Boycotts are defined either as direct (nonsurrogate) boycotts or as indirect (surrogate) boycotts. If a consumer is upset with the action of a company and reacts by boycotting that specific company, this is a direct boycott. Sometimes, however, it is hard to find an accessible target for the boycott. If a boycotter disagrees with the policies of a nation, for instance, they may choose to boycott goods coming from companies based in that country. This is an indirect boycott. Their boycott of these companies "transform[s] issues ... [that are] external to the marketplace ... into consumer-accessible marketplace issues" (Friedman, 1999: 14). An example of this practice is the boycott of French goods by Australian consumers to protest France's nuclear testing in the South Pacific (Ettenson & Klein, 2005).

Other Methods

Boycotts are classified as either productive or unproductive (Friedman, 1999). A boycott that achieves some of its demands is productive, while one that fails in its demands is unproductive (ibid). Boycotts are further grouped as either positive or

negative. The more common form, which creates a 'black list' of items to avoid, is known as a positive boycott. The alternative, a negative boycott, creates a 'white list' of products that are acceptable for purchase (Friedman, 1999).

1.4 Previous Literature Findings

Our examination of previous literature relating to boycotters and anti-consumption behavior indicates that qualitative analysis is the preferred method for studying this type of information (John & Klein, 2003; Lee, et al. 2009b, Funches et al., 2009; Sen et al., 2001). Several studies of ongoing boycotts used quantitative methods instead (Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Klein et al., 2004). Authors such as John and Klein have made some major contributions to this particular research field. Their 'dynamic modelling' approach developed a "typology of motivations of consumer boycotts" to better explain these motivations from the point of view of the consumer, rather than the organization (John & Klein, 2003: 1196). This examination stemmed from their observation that "there appears to be little or no motivation for an individual to participate [in a boycott]. Yet they assuredly occur" (ibid: 1196). The study finds a number of possible motivations behind boycott participation, including "guilt, the maintenance of self-esteem and the avoidance of dissonance. Individuals may seek a 'thrill of victory,' or [their] behavior may be influenced by a false consensus bias," defined as the belief that their behavior creates more of an impact than it actually does (ibid: 1207).

A separate laboratory study conducted by Klein, Smith and John studied an ongoing boycott of a multinational firm (Klein, Smith & John, 2004). The study captured the real-time reactions of boycotters upset over the firm's recent decision to close factories in the area. The researchers tested the following four factors and their effect on boycott participation: "the desire to make a difference, the scope for self-enhancement, counterarguments that inhibit boycotting, and the cost to the boycotter of constrained consumption" (ibid: 92). "Kozinets and Handelman (2004) argue that anti-consumption movements seek moral and ethical changes to consumerist ideology" (Lee et al., 2009b: 175). This contrasts with the beliefs of Hogg, Banister, and Stephenson who argue that a "focus on anti-consumption incorporates the interaction between avoidance, aversion and abandonment, and

the relationship between distastes and the undesired self" (2009: 148). We will further elaborate on previous literature in our theoretical framework section.

1.4.1 Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior is the driving force behind boycott participation. The company's egregious act is the catalyst for boycotting and provokes negative emotions such as hate, anger, disappointment and distrust (John & Klein, 2003; Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Lee et al., 2009b). Therefore, a true understanding of these behaviors is essential to understand why boycotts occur.

Corrigan highlights that not until the beginning of the mass-consumption era of the 18th century did people begin to realize how vital consumerism was to the economy – this was the beginning of a consumer society (Corrigan, 2006). More recently a noticeable shift in power has taken place from the supplier to the consumer, where "the consumer is a god-like figure, before whom markets and politicians alike bow... [because] they embody a simple modern logic – the right to choose" (Gabriel & Lang, 2006: 1). An abundance of marketplace choices means that "consumers will carefully weed out those that they do not trust," instead choosing to do business with the companies with whom they agree (Holt, 2002: 88). A further implication of the abundant choices available means that finding product substitutes is easier. Both of these realities mean that companies must now, more than ever, respond to the needs of their consumers.

The struggle between consumers and companies is evidence of the principle of consumer sovereignty, a central concept within the field of boycotts. Smith suggests that consumer sovereignty is one marketing discipline with a "large ideological component," and that "corporate executives believe in the power of the consumer" (1987: 10).

Foxall suggests that "behavior analysis is an interpretation as well as a science," because of the complexity of human consumers (1994: 12). He argues that consumer behavior is linked with every individual consumer's "learning history"

as well as "hedonic reinforcements" (ibid: 32). "Modern hedonism" focuses on pleasure-seeking emotions rather than pleasure-seeking sensations, and because pleasure is directly related to emotions it in turn affects consumer behavior (Corrigan, 2006: 16*). And just as consumption is based on pleasure-seeking emotions, anti-consumption is based on the impact of non-pleasurable emotions. Corrigan argues that the subject can control these emotions, as pleasure is derived from the control of the meanings of objects and events (2006). Boycotts are therefore a means for consumers to control their consumption. Douglas and Isherwood argue that consumers "use goods to construct an intelligible universe and to make and maintain social relationships", while Baudrillard provides a different perspective where consumption is "not to the individual consumer but to the overall economic system as a whole" (Corrigan, 2006: 17; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Baudrillard, 1988 [1970]).

Modern Hedonism

Traditional versus modern hedonism	
Traditional hedonism	Modern hedonism
Search for pleasure tied to specific practices Pleasure tied to sensations Emotions not under control of subject Pleasure derived from control of objects and events	Search for pleasure in any or all experiences Pleasure tied to emotions Emotions controlled by subjects Pleasure derived from the control of the meanings of objects and events

**(Corrigan, 2006: 16; Re-creation of Table 1.3 - Traditional versus modern hedonism. Source: based on Campbell, 1987)*

Bourdieu implies that consumers use objects both for expression and to show their position in a social structure (1984; Corrigan, 2006). Boycotts, like consumed objects, are a means of expression (ibid). Bourdieu suggests that taste is present "at the very basis of social life, [ensuring] harmony and social order" as well as social struggles (Corrigan, 2006: 32; Bourdieu, 1984). This struggle (he defines it as one between old and new) implicitly affects boycotts, as certain groups of consumers (who generally share at least one common belief and/or demographic category) act in favor or in opposition to certain brands (ibid: 31). Based on this background we will now look at consumer behavior occurring online.

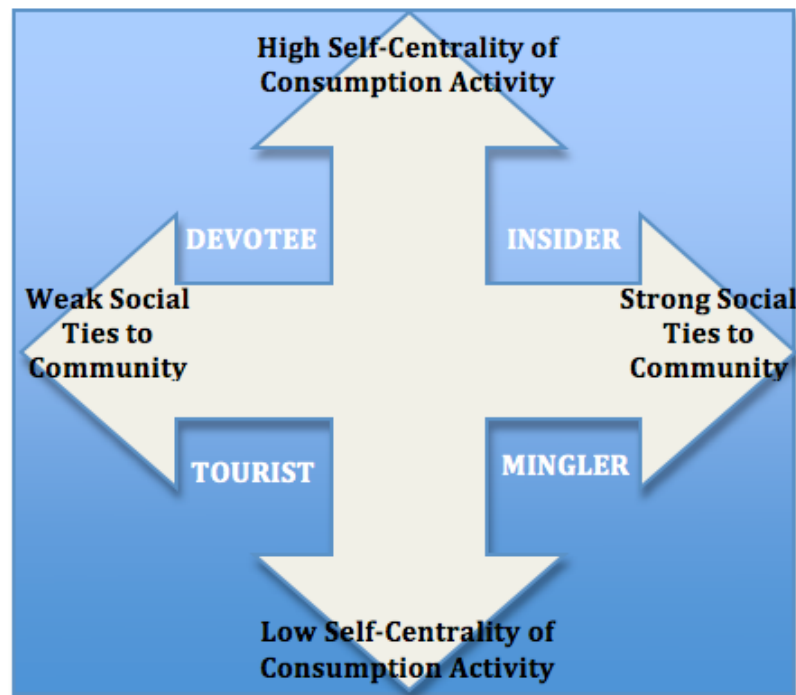
1.4.2 Consumer Behavior Online

"Online consumers are not merely passive recipients of consumption information, but also active creators who become deeply involved in articulating and re-articulating their consumption activities" (Kozinets, 1999: 257; Rothaermel & Sugiyama, 2001). These consumers are incredibly vocal with their praise or disdain for companies and brands, and word travels fast (Hanlon & Hawkins, 2008: 14-15). Every consumer is now "modelled not only as an individual, but as part of a complex and interrelated global network" (Kozinets, 1999: 260). Research shows that 49% of bloggers believe that blogs are "just as valid media sources as traditional media" (Technorati, 2008). The combination of this trust with the ability to quickly disseminate their opinion to people all over the world demonstrates that every consumer plays a part in this network of opinion exchange.

Kozinets assigns a category to each participant in an online community based on their behavior (1999). Participants are categorized as either the Devotee, Insider, Mingler, or Tourist based on their level of interaction with the community and with the "consumption activity" that is the general focus of discussion (ibid: 254).

Someone classified as an Insider has "strong social ties and strong personal ties to the consumption activity" (Kozinets, 1999: 255*). One potential example is the 'serial blogger' who chooses to write blog posts on a regular basis and even comments on other posts. The polar opposite is the Tourist. They "lack strong social ties to the group, and maintain only a superficial or passing interest in the consumption" (ibid: 254). Somewhere in between these extremes lie the Mingler, with strong social relationships but questionable involvement in consumption, and the Devotee, with heavy consumption but weak social skills with the group (ibid).

Types of Virtual Community of Consumption Members



**(Kozinets, 1999: 255; Re-creation of Figure 2 - Types of Virtual Community Consumption)*

An understanding of these group classifications is important to a boycott situation. The so-called tourists and other people who may not regularly visit these community sites may arrive via links from elsewhere on the Internet. In fact, they may never visit these pages again. This not only demonstrates the way that information travels over the Internet but also shows that when evaluating a boycott online one must be careful when establishing which roles and voices are the most common and the most influential.

1.5 Research Gap and Contribution

Current Boycott as a Contribution

An examination of previous boycott literature shows that a majority of studies draw their findings either from retrospectively-studied boycotts or from boycott-like situations that are simulated in a laboratory environment (Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Lee et al., 2009b, John & Klein, 2003; Sen et al., 2001; Funches et al., 2009). The findings from these studies may suffer because it is only natural for the

emotions of boycotters to subside or change over time. If the experiment was conducted artificially, then the findings may not reflect that of real boycotters. This means that the emotional data gathered by the research is at best out of date and at worst questionably relevant due to the manner in which it was created.

Our study will purely focus on a current and ongoing boycott. Studies of this nature are less common and thus we will make a contribution to this field of literature. By avoiding a retrospective approach and instead investigating consumer motivations as the boycott takes place we will gather real and relevant emotions. As mentioned in our consumer behavior section, these emerging emotions are the main drivers behind boycott participation.

We are aware of potential drawbacks involved when investigating a current boycott. The study is high-risk in nature because of the ability for events unrelated to the boycott occurring during the data collection process to affect public perceptions of the company. For these reasons we chose to use the Netnography method in our research. This Internet-specific research method minimizes any of these possible effects. The Netnography approach limits any consumer bias as people are not aware that they are being studied, and will therefore reveal their true emotions. From what we know, no previous study has used a Netnography approach in order to understand boycotter motives. We will therefore make a contribution to this field of study.

We would like to restate that the purpose of our study is an attempt to understand the motivations of boycotters while they participate in a current and ongoing boycott. It is important to capture these emotions as they develop. Focusing on a boycott as it happens means that boycotters may more easily express their true feelings. The qualitative and unobtrusive data collection method we use to establish boycotter motivations limits the amount of bias.

Based on the findings we aim to demonstrate that boycotters are motivated for different reasons yet by the same egregious act. We aim to establish our own boycotter motivation themes that relate specifically to the Kellogg's boycott. They will relate back to previous literature findings as well as to more traditional

ideologies. With appropriate knowledge, a company facing a boycott may better respond to such boycott behavior. We will use the Netnography method to gather our data and will further explore this process in the following section.

CHAPTER TWO – METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

2.1 Qualitative and Inductive Approaches

We use a purely qualitative and inductive approach for this study. We chose an inductive approach because it allows each respondent to reveal their motives and thoughts naturally. This approach grants authenticity to the study as we did not pre-establish themes of boycotting behavior and force individuals to fit within these constructs. However, it is only natural to sort and categorize these opinions into groups based on their depth and frequency. These themes were established after analyzing the data.

Although qualitative research is not as straightforward as quantitative research, it is a useful tool to find meaningful data to analyze in a number of ways. Emotions, attitudes and thoughts are better understood qualitatively rather than quantitatively (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Kozinets states that "qualitative methods are particularly useful for revealing the rich symbolic world that underlies needs, desires, meanings and choice" (2002: 62). Bryman and Bell discuss and list four traditions of qualitative research, including naturalism and emotionalism (2007: 403). Our research project is largely concerned with the emotionalism approach, which "exhibits a concern with subjectivity and gaining access to 'inside' experience; concern with the inner reality of humans" (ibid: 403).

The reliability and validity of qualitative research must be adapted for such a study as "measurement is not a major preoccupation among qualitative researchers" (Bryman & Bell, 2007: 410). As researchers, we must have certain empathy for the boycotters in order to see things from his/her perspective. This style of qualitative research becomes meaningful when broken down into the following terms: external reliability – "the degree to which the study can be replicated"; internal

reliability – whether members of the "research team agree about what they see and hear"; internal validity – the "match between the researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas they develop"; and external validity – "the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings" (ibid: 410).

2.2 Netnography as a Research Tool

The term Netnography was introduced in the 1990s as a research method that combines the principles of ethnography with the tools available on the Internet. "Based on the traditions and techniques of cultural anthropology," a Netnography observes and examines "consumer behaviors" that appear in an Internet setting (Beckmann et al., 2005: 1).

Previous researchers studying boycotts and boycotters predominantly use face-to-face interviews, questionnaires, and/or laboratory simulations to capture the emotions, attitudes and thoughts of boycotters (Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Lee et al., 2009b, John & Klein, 2003; Sen et al., 2001; Funches et al., 2009). The very nature of the Kellogg's boycott suggests an Internet-heavy research design. We exclusively used the Internet and online communities to find boycotters and their opinions.

The strength of any study of a current boycott is the way it provides real, up-to-the-very-moment thoughts, and a Netnography reinforces these advantages. "Netnography provides marketing researchers with a window into naturally occurring behavior" (Kozinets, 2002: 63). The Netnography method is a perfect fit for our study because we want to observe boycotters as they discuss and express themselves freely, in public, without interference. It is in these blog comments where they show their real motives and emotions. If the data was gathered from alternative methods, such as in an interview or laboratory study, the respondent may exaggerate their involvement in the boycott or repress their true feelings and emotions, as they are consciously aware of their participation in the study. We believe that these methods could possibly compromise the integrity of the data.

We believe the Internet is the boycotters' playground because it is the fastest and cheapest way for them to expand their message beyond boundaries at an amazing pace. It is the most effective way to obtain the opinions of people all over the world. Boycotters have used the Internet "in recent years ... as a quick, cheap, and effective way of informing millions of consumers about boycotts" (Sen et al., 2001: 399). Moreover, the Internet is where consumers feel more confident and empowered because they can interact with each other by sharing and expressing their opinions and ideas freely. "The Internet helps to reduce information asymmetries and to improve market transparencies" (Rezabakhsh, Bornemann, Hansen & Schrader, 2006: 13). Researchers believe that with the growth of the Internet as a tool to distribute information to large numbers of people, boycotts will become more powerful and possibly more effective (Sen et al., 2001). Already, research has shown that nearly half of bloggers believe that blogs are just as credible as mainstream news sources (Technorati, 2008). This supports the predictions of Sen et al. (2001) and demonstrates that users trust the information they receive from these exchanges.

The Internet has facilitated a growth in communication among groups of individuals with similar interests. These groups are sometimes called tribes, and research shows that consumers in virtual communities tend to be "more active and discerning" than other consumers (Kozinets, 1999: 252). Hanlon and Hawkins reveal that "traditional media offer monologues [while] new social media prompts dialogue" (2008: 14–15). Examples of this new social media come in the form of blogs, chat rooms, and online video posts on websites such as YouTube. Despite their differences, they all provide a space where people can interact with each other and discuss their common interests. One pertinent topic of discussion is what consumers may like (or dislike) about a certain brand (ibid, 2008).

A Netnography approach is an essential research tool for providing insight into boycotting behaviors in the 21st century. It is a means to capture motives from a wide-range of candidates from around the globe without even having to consult them. The tools needed to perform a Netnography include various search engines and the ability to detect which blog posts are the most popular and the most relevant. To effectively perform a Netnography, researchers must be able to draw

data from a variety of sources in order to construct a clear picture of the subjects being studied.

2.3 Systematic Data Collection Method

We first became aware of this boycott due to the media coverage it received online. News of the decision by Kellogg's to not renew their contract with Phelps was reported by the Associated Press and was thus widely distributed by traditional media outlets. We heard of the events through these channels in February 2009, before we were considering topics for our thesis.

To evaluate the potential of this topic, we revisited these traditional news sources to learn about the story in detail. We visited the web pages of USA Today, CNN, and the New York Times to re-read the original news stories and learn more about the case. The articles we found mentioned the popularity of the boycott among bloggers and also named the organizations supporting the boycott.

We then visited the pages of these organizations – NORML, the MPP, and SSDP – to learn about their involvement in the boycott. Visiting these websites provided us with background knowledge about the groups and their demands. We found that NORML facilitated deep discussions on their website while the pages of the other groups were comparatively less developed. We then began to look for other blogs that facilitated this same type of discussion.

The article published in USA Today specifically mentions The Huffington Post as a blog with plenty of discussion about the Phelps case (Associated Press, 2009). We trusted the validity of the blog because of this mention in a credible newspaper. We visited the blog and found a large number of posts and an even greater number of responses. We marked these pages for later use.

Even at first glance, we were amazed at the content of the posts on the Huffington Post. The amount of discussion between blog authors and respondents¹ was staggering, and confirmed Hanlon and Hawkins' assertion that "social media prompts dialogue" (2008: 14–15). Already encouraged with our findings, we began to use blog search tools to discover more communities discussing the Kellogg's boycott.

The two tools we used in this stage were Google Blog Search and Technorati. Google Blog Search is a specialized service offered by Google that provides results only from blogs. Among its other advanced options, the tool allows users to limit search results to blog posts published only within a certain time frame. We used this option to find the first posts about the Kellogg's boycott. We performed a similar search using Technorati, a blog search engine virtually identical in its features to Google Blog Search. Instead of sorting blog posts by date, however, Technorati lists its search results by the amount of 'authority' the blog has. This number is determined by how many other blogs link to the content of the blog (Technorati, 2009). A high amount of authority means that a post from a popular blog (The Huffington Post, for example) gravitates to the top of the search results. Posts about the boycott on smaller, more personal, blogs with fewer readers appeared towards the end of the results. On both Google Blog Search and Technorati we searched for posts that contained the word "boycott" and/or "phelps," as well as one of either "kelloggs," "kellogg," "kellogg's," or "kellog's," to account for possible spelling mistakes.

Personal blogs were a source of information, but we found that these pages were scarcely home to significant conversation and communication. Many personal bloggers "write" posts that are word-for-word copies of blog posts by other, more popular, bloggers. These copies are essentially glorified links. This reality means that many personal bloggers fail to incite conversation among their smaller

¹ We use the term "respondent" throughout this paper to differentiate between people who write original blog posts and readers who comment on these posts. Individuals who write the original content on blogs are referred to as "bloggers," while people who respond to and comment on those posts are called "respondents." We do not mean to imply that these respondents were personally responding to us or to any questions that we asked them.

readership, as readers are more prone to continue to, and share their thoughts on, the original post on the more popular blog.

The high authority assigned by Technorati to The Huffington Post and to the blog of NORML confirmed the relevance of those pages. For future searches, we excluded blogs with an authority rating of zero: according to Technorati, such a blog would have received not one mention on another blog within the past 180 days (Technorati, 2009). We justified this decision with our belief that the overwhelming popularity of the boycott among bloggers means that relevant content is found and reposted by bloggers. Evidence of this practice, described above, shows the way that bloggers repost content they find interesting and credible.

Our next search provided many more relevant results. We found bloggers with sizable audiences and intelligent comments that provoked discussion. We also found links on these pages to a number of other sources. One example is the website of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer newspaper. Because the page is not a blog, it did not appear in our search results. And because the newspaper is not as nationally known as USA Today or the New York Times, we did not initially consult it. This is a further example of the way that bloggers provide links to pages with more active discussion.

We examined the discussion on a number of blogs for a period of three weeks. We also read through the signatures on the online petition to Kellogg's. We searched YouTube for relevant news clips and response videos about the situation, and routinely visited the websites of the boycotting organizations to learn about any new developments. In addition, we contacted two personal bloggers via email and asked them some questions about their involvement in the boycott. Two types of data were collected during this phase of the research – data “directly [copied] from ... online community members and data [we] inscribe[d] regarding the” conversations (Kozinets, 2002: 63). We copied for our own records any post that we felt was suitable for analysis.

2.3.1 What makes a Good Blog Post or Comment?

To illustrate our decision making process, we will provide three examples from the same source: the online petition to Kellogg's. The most important element we looked for in blog posts and comments was an explanation, no matter how developed or how simple, of the person's motives for participation. An example of a comment lacking this requirement is "I will never again buy a product from Kelloggs [sic]" (Stranahan, 2009a, #7047). While this comment certainly has implications for Kellogg's, nowhere in the comment is there a hint of the writer's motivations behind their behavior.

One 'signee' to this online petition writes: "I will not be buying any Kelloggs [sic] Products in the future unless Kelloggs [sic] re-instates Micheal [sic] Phelps and offers an apology" (Stranahan, 2009a, #6368). This boycotter provides more information than the last, in the form of demands that must be met before they begin to purchase Kellogg's products again. There is, however, no mention of the motivation behind their behavior. We could infer through their use of the word apology that they believe Phelps was hurt by the aggressive actions of Kellogg's. But if we reached this conclusion we would have done so only on broad speculation and inference. There is simply not enough material provided to provoke an intelligent discussion of their motivation.

Another comment is even briefer but was marked by us as a possible quote for analysis. It reads, in full: "Complete overreaction to a national hero" (Stranahan, 2009a, #4732). What is present in this comment that is lacking in the first and second is a hint of the issues that motivated this consumer to boycott. There is more to analyze in the six words of this comment than there is in either of the preceding comments. Ultimately this quote was not selected because we found other comments that explored similar issues in greater depth. But the strength of this comment proves that a comment does not need to be long to be relevant. In general, however, longer comments provide more material for our analysis. When we examine longer quotes we are better able to make assertions based on existing research than on speculation.

2.3.2 Where did we find these Blog Posts?

We stated previously that personal blogs were rarely places of significant conversation. It is perhaps only natural that conversation occurs on more popular blogs due to their higher readership. For example, four blog posts on the Huffington Post received a total of nearly 1000 comments. One blog post from NORML earned over 300 comments, while another post received nearly 75. Posts on semi-popular personal blogs, on the other hand, generally failed to earn more than a few dozen responses. The posts and comments we will later analyze were overwhelmingly culled from popular blogs rather than personal blogs. This is not a reflection of the content from each of these sources: rather, popular blogs are better represented simply because there were more posts available for analysis.

Origin of Analyzed Blog Comments

	Pages	Total Number of Comments	Number Selected	Number Analyzed
The Huffington Post	4	970	81	18
NORML	4	384	30	9
Online Petition	1	7080*	337	7
Seattle-Post Intelligencer	1	70	9	6
420 Magazine	1	8	2	1
So Good	1	24	3	1

** The online petition includes 7080 signatures as of May 23rd, 2009. People who sign the petition may leave comments, and we estimate that half of the signees did so. Thus we estimate that we read 4000 comments.*

This table shows the origin of the comments we later analyze. It lists the total number of comments we found from the respective blogs as well as the number of comments that we selected for possible analysis. The last column of the table shows the number of the selected comments we actually analyze in this thesis. This table only illustrates the origin of the comments we chose to analyze. It does not

include data from every blog visited throughout the data collection process. While many blogs may not appear directly in our paper, we cannot understate their significance on our work. Reading through these posts, including those that failed to incite conversation among readers, helped us as Netnographic researchers to learn more about the boycotters studied.

We made daily visits to each of the following websites and blogs: NORML, the MPP, SSDP, Gawker, The Huffington Post, and The Seattle Post-Intelligencer. We also continuously utilized Google Blog Search and Technorati to discover the most recent or relevant blog posts. We visited most of the blogs that appeared in these results, though many were from smaller blogs with comparatively fewer comments than the pages of more popular blogs.

We found news of the boycott on small blogs dedicated to marijuana culture (DoseNation, xCannibus, Sweet Leaf Tribune) and on blogs that mainly deal with political commentary (TalkLeft, The Raw Story). Other small personal blogs dedicated one post to their acknowledgment of the boycott (The Well-Armed Lamb, catibrookeandjustin). With respect to these blogs and the dozens more we visited in our study of this boycott, we found greater communities and numbers of comments on larger blogs.

Previous findings of consumer behavior would suggest that it is only natural for bloggers to form a community that they can relate to and feel a part of (Kozinets, 1999). This is why more popular blog sites attract larger numbers of bloggers, respondents, and readers alike. In this way these communities become more influential and trustworthy (Technorati, 2008). Without the aid of Technorati or Google Blog Search, many boycotters surfing the net may fail to even find some of the less popular sites.

2.4 Effects of a Real-time Study

By studying boycotter behavior as a boycott takes place we are able to see the development and spread in real-time. We can easily monitor every change or trend in the boycott process. One benefit of studying a real-time boycott online is the

way we can see the date and time of every posted comment, and track participant interaction. We see the up-to-date information immediately. Every time a new thought is discussed, we are able to (if necessary) make adjustments to our research pattern. Studying an ongoing boycott over the Internet helps us efficiently manage time as the data in the blogs is accessible at anytime and from anywhere. It also eliminates the problem of trying to find and reach respondents.

CHAPTER 3 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Consumer Motivation Themes

Based on previous literature, we found prevalent themes that relate to the drivers of anti-consumption and boycott participation. We will elaborate on these themes as an underlying construct for our own findings. The three themes we address are: Self-Image, Consumer Resistance and Retaliation, and Brand Avoidance.

3.1.1 Self-Image

Belk suggests that “we may impose our identities on possessions and possessions may impose their identities on us” (1988: 141). Recent trends in research support the notion that people consume in a manner that maintains or enhances self-image (Belk, 1988; Corrigan, 2006; Aaker, 1999; Lee et al., 2009b). Consumers likewise seem to avoid certain brands that are not in line with their own values. Aaker highlights that “consumers express themselves, and construct their identities/ self-concepts through the brands they use” and so they “reject specific brands in order to avoid adding undesired meaning to their life” (Aaker, 1999; Lee et al., 2009b: 169).

Studies of self-image from different perspectives lead to the conclusion that “our consciousness of ourselves is largely a reflection of the consciousness which others have of us ... My idea of myself is rather my own idea of my neighbor’s view of me” (Corrigan, 2006: 67; Allport, 1924). This viewpoint suggests that consumers are also highly conscious of how they are perceived by others in the marketplace. In a

study conducted by Iyer and Muncy, the researchers created a scale to measure the anti-consumption attitudes of two particular groups: simplifiers and global impact consumers (2009). The study relates back to other constructs such as self-consciousness, self-actualization, and assertiveness, and highlights that "self-conscious consumers are concerned about how society views them and hence they make conscious decisions to do the right things by engaging in behavior that is very visible to the outside world" (ibid: 166). Therefore, consumers may feel the need to participate in a boycott in order to be accepted by a certain social group.

John and Klein suggest that boycotts are directly related with moral beliefs and self-representation (2003). The authors elaborate on this idea by detailing an "expressive, punitive and clean hands boycott," defining the concept of 'clean hands' as "the feelings of good conscious or moral superiority one can obtain from participating in a boycott" (ibid: 1203). The opposite, or 'dirty hands,' is the act of "supporting the egregious act, and would therefore generate dissonance (Festinger, 1957) with a positive view of the self" (ibid: 1204). A person who participates in a boycott gains the right to say about themselves "I am the sort of person who cares about others," and by doing so they advance and improve their own self-image (ibid: 1203).

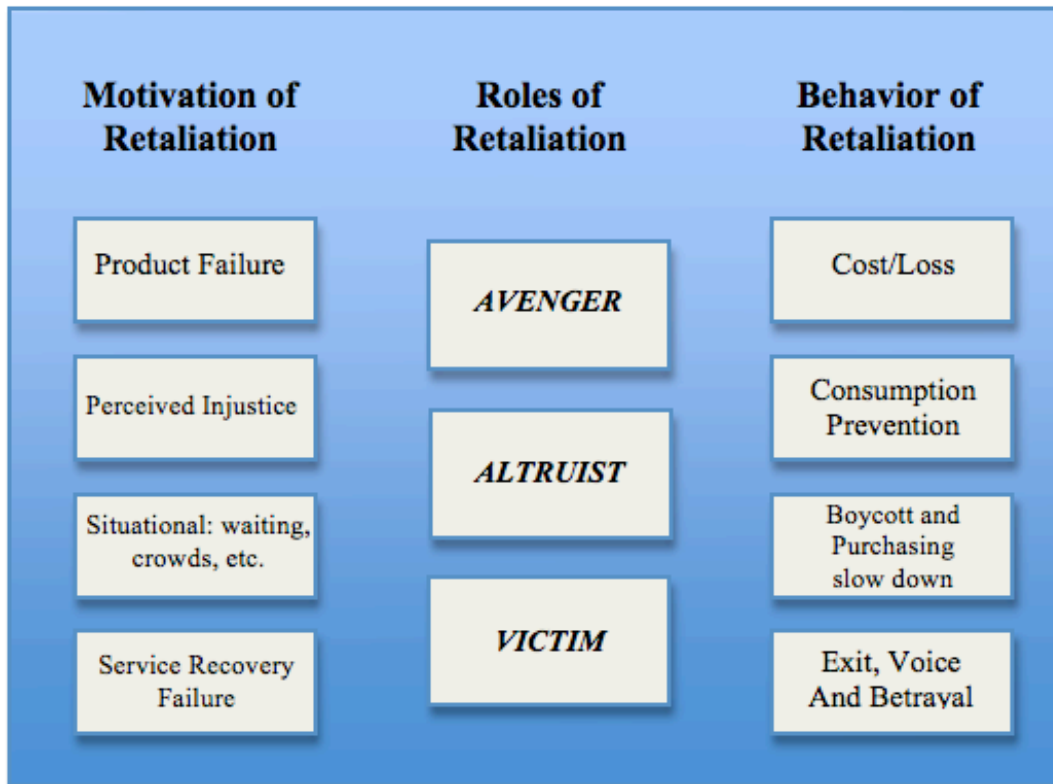
3.1.2 Consumer Resistance and Retaliation

Cherrier notes that consumers retaliate when they are faced with the marketing of "mass-produced meanings" (2009: 31). They feel the need to rebel against this consumer culture as it is something that they feel is beyond their control (ibid). Funches et al. reveal that "beyond simply 'getting even,' customers retaliate to teach the service provider a lesson or to save others from the same fate" (2009: 231). After France tested nuclear weapons in the Pacific Ocean, Australian consumers retaliated with a boycott of French brands and products, and even some questionably-related entities such as locally owned French bakeries. In the study conducted by Ettenson and Klein (2005), attitudes of Australian consumers were measured not once but twice: first during the boycott and then again one year later. The first study found that those customers who were angry towards the

French government did not let this affect “evaluations of product quality” of French products (2005: 207). However, results from the second survey suggested that “Australian consumers who remained angry with France denigrated the quality of French goods,” while only a year prior they admitted the superiority of the same products (ibid: 213). The implications of these findings show that consumers may begin to resist for one reason and evolve in their reasoning over time.

Funches, et al. use qualitative data to define their own categories for ‘behaviors of retaliation’ as: cost/loss, aggression and power, consumption prevention, voice, exit and betrayal and boycotting (2009: 232*). The study placed subjects into categories based on their ‘roles of retaliation,’ and labelled them the avenger, the altruist, or the victim (ibid). Some may seek revenge on an organization, while others simply feel victimized by the situation (ibid). These roles show the way that every consumer reacts and retaliates differently.

Roles of Retaliation



**(Funches, et al., 2009: 232; Re-creation of Fig. 1)*

The study infers that although boycotters are aware that their individual gestures may be largely insignificant, it is still a way to voice their dissatisfaction. “The positive emotional side of retaliation seems to come from a feeling of satisfaction or vindication ... Similarly, respondents identify feeling justified in their actions” (Funches et al., 2009: 237).

3.1.3 Brand Avoidance

The theme of brand avoidance specifically looks at the rejection of a particular brand. Although prior studies tend to indicate singular purposes for rejection, there are often multiple reasons that influence the decision to avoid a brand. And where consumer research has focused on why consumers choose certain brands, anti-consumption specifically looks at the reasons why people choose to avoid certain brands (Lee, Fernandez & Hyman 2009a: 145). “Lee, Motion, and Conroy present three types of brand avoidance: experiential, identity, and moral brand avoidance” (ibid: 146). They suggest that in the experiential category, avoidance occurs when consumer expectations are not met (ibid). In identity avoidance, “participants avoid brands that they perceive to be symbolically incompatible with their identity,” while moral avoidance occurs when “participants believe that certain brand management policies have a negative impact on society” (Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009b: 172).

McGinnis and Gentry discuss “avoidance of similarity [as] the intentional avoidance of commonly used products or brands, irrespective of whether these choices meet social approval” (2009: 192). They observe that “supporting the underdog appears in many cases to be a badge of honor, one that is somewhat devoid of defaming connotations” (ibid: 197). The study also suggests that some consumers prefer to choose products from larger companies while other reach for those of smaller players. One trend today is the movement of consumers from larger brands to these smaller players as a consequence of their rejection of these multinational corporations (Lee et al., 2009b).

Consumers are less inclined to avoid certain brands, however, if a substitute is not readily available, or if the cost of switching may be too high. Sen, et al. indicate that “a boycott is influenced by [a consumer's] preference for the boycotted product and the availability of substitutes for it (i.e., the costs of boycotting)” (Sen et al., 2001: 409). This gives support to the notion that the more attached a consumer is to a certain product, the less likely they are to boycott it because doing so would adversely affect them. “People boycott because they perceive the psychological gains of a boycott to outweigh the direct cost” (John & Klein, 2003: 1206).

Yuksel and Mryteza suggest that “negative information about a competitor is ineffective in mitigating the likelihood of forgoing” a product, finding instead that “unrelated positive information is the most effective of the tested techniques for reducing the likelihood of forgoing the product” (2009: 256). Their findings are encouraging for companies who may face a large-scale boycott. They seem to suggest that one of the best methods of dealing with boycotters is to in effect alter the company's image so that these boycotters are no longer angry.

We understand the three themes discussed above as pre-established motivations behind boycott participation. These theories are applicable to all boycotts. Every boycott is different, however, and thus sometimes more specific themes and categories are necessary. We will now define some of our own themes that relate specifically to the Kellogg's boycott.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS & INTERPRETATIONS

Reintroduction of Kellogg's Case

The egregious act that initiated this boycott was the February 2009 decision by Kellogg's to not renew their contract with Michael Phelps. This move by the company was seen by many as a response to the photograph of Phelps that was published and reproduced in newspapers and on websites all over the globe. Kellogg's, for their part, shifted between explanations, once stating that Phelps'

behavior was "not consistent with the image of Kellogg's" while later stating that the timing of their decision was "purely coincidental" (Sage, 2009; Thomas, 2009).

Individual consumers, especially those associated with so-called pot culture, began calling for a boycott of Kellogg's products. They relied heavily on blogging to spread the word of their involvement. Online petitions, YouTube response videos, and Facebook groups soon followed. Advocacy groups began to support the protest; some examples are the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws and the Marijuana Policy Project (Armentano, 2009; MPPstaff, 2009). News of the boycott appeared in USA Today and on CNN, respectively the widest-circulating newspaper and second largest news network by viewership in the United States (Associated Press, 2009b; CNN and Jeanne Moos, 2009; Ibarra, 2009; BurrellesLuce, 2009). Coverage in these national sources shows just how widespread the boycott became.

4.1 Analysis of Findings

Previous research indicates that individual boycotters may choose to participate for a variety of reasons. The Kellogg's case is especially interesting not only because there are a large number of potential explanations underlying the behavior, but because all participants were driven to boycott (even for different reasons) based on the same egregious act. With few exceptions, respondents did not state that their boycott of Kellogg's products began prior to the events surrounding Michael Phelps. Many respondents stated that they enjoyed Kellogg's products, and some even stated that they and/or their families were lifetime buyers of the brand's foods prior to the event. Given the severity of some of the comments, it is interesting to note that such disdain developed for the brand so rapidly. Moreover, the depth and breadth of these comments, found entirely on the Internet, demonstrates the power of this medium to generate boycott sentiment and reinforces the effectiveness of a Netnography study in the 21st century.

We have sorted a number of blog posts and responses based on the explanations and the opinions provided by the writers. After a careful and thorough review of all blog comments, we established three major themes that best reflected common

themes present within these posts. The three themes we established are: Evil Corporation, American Pride and Pot Culture. It is our hope that with this categorization we will demonstrate these boycotters are anything but homogeneous. Some demand the reinstatement of Phelps as a sponsor (instrumental boycott), for instance, while others vent their anger towards the corporate giant of Kellogg's (expressive boycott). We will provide an in-depth explanation of their behavior and an analysis of their reasoning.

Some boycotters who fall under the Evil Corporation theme believe that Kellogg's is only with its own profits and gains, without consideration for society, for the environment, for health issues, etc. The company, according to these writers, represents everything that is wrong about a large corporation. In addition to the motivation of Kellogg's as the Evil Corporation, we found respondents motivated by their feelings of American Pride or by their involvement in Marijuana Culture. Other themes may exist, but the findings of our Netnography show that these themes were the most common. We will first explore the responses of the boycotters motivated by their belief of Kellogg's as an Evil Corporation. We will then examine the motivations of boycotters in the two other themes: American Pride and Pot Culture.

A Note on terminology: The name of the blogger or respondent is after each comment (where provided). The name in parentheses is the author of the original blog post. If the blog page assigned a number to each post or comment, that number is included after the name of the author. Please consult the reference list for the addresses of these blog posts.

4.1.1 Evil Corporation

These respondents see the actions of Kellogg's as indicative and metaphorical for the actions of corporate America in general. They are not surprised by the actions of Kellogg's and overwhelmingly view the company as an evil corporation that is motivated only by money, greed, and a desire for positive publicity. These respondents are fueled by their contempt for corporate America and redirect these

feelings towards Kellogg's, which they view as representative of the problem and an acceptable target for punishment.

These respondents are directly boycotting Kellogg's but are also indirectly boycotting corporate America, using Kellogg's as a way to "convert an issue ... into one that is accessible to the consumer" (Ettenson & Klein, 2005: 202; Friedman, 1999). Because consumers cannot literally boycott corporate America, they use Kellogg's as a target for their outrage. The fact that these consumers are both directly boycotting Kellogg's and indirectly boycotting corporations means that their opinions may be stronger than other respondents.

Many of the respondents note their refusal to buy Kellogg's products in the future and/or their disposal of the Kellogg's products they previously owned. This seems to support the findings of Ettenson and Klein (2005) and their study of consumer opinions about French products in the wake of French nuclear testing. The study found that those customers who were angry toward the French government did not let this affect "evaluations of product quality" of French products (Ettenson & Klein, 2005: 207). Thus these respondents are admitting their previous or current consumption of Kellogg's products while they bemoan corporate America. Some note that they will miss buying the products or begrudgingly accept that they must now purchase the competition's product(s). Research would suggest, however, that because cereal is an inexpensive good there is not a huge penalty involved when switching brands. The availability of substitutes also means that this is an easy boycott to participate in. This reinforces Friedman's suggestion that the targets of many boycotts are companies that offer "common necessities and inexpensive luxuries" (Friedman, 1999: 215).

Results from Ettenson and Klein's (2005) second study, conducted one year after the initial study, found that people who were still angry with France "denigrated the quality of French goods," while only a year prior they admitted the superiority of these same products (Ettenson & Klein, 2005: 213). These findings could apply to Kellogg's. If boycotters remain upset with the actions of corporate America, they may begin to dislike Kellogg's products in addition to Kellogg's as a corporation (not to mention any other corporation they disagree with). If the boycotter has

found a suitable replacement for Kellogg's products, it may be very hard for the company to change the behavior of this individual.

Comments indicate that bloggers and respondents have started substituting other products for Kellogg's based on the evaluative taste of the product. The following comment appeared in a discussion on the website of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

"There are so many other products that taste just as good. A small reason like this to not buy Kelloggs will defently [sic] influence me the next time I go to the store. They should not have dropped Phelps" – caspain (Guzman)

The respondent admits that taste is a "small reason," even if it is one that will also influence behavior. Others provide different reasons. The following comments appeared as posts on separate pages of the blog The Huffington Post. As our findings show, many respondents justify their decisions with deep psychological explanations and reasons such as self-value and tolerance.

"I personally am not going to buy kelloggs [sic] cereals or other products any more for this very reason [Phelps]. They truly annoyed me with their self righteous nonsense. I regularly bought frosted flakes and raisin bran. Now I guess I'm sticking with General Mills" – jdlund (Uyger)

"I am the father of two young boys who eat A LOT of Raisin Bran. [Your] products that are no longer allowed in my house, period. You can be sure that my two son's [sic] would have consumed a great deal of your products in their lifetime, but they will learn that we do not do business with companies that are intolerant and choose to demonize a young man for his choice to use cannabis" –taintedone (Grim)

The above comments show that individuals are replacing Kellogg's products for other reasons than those that are directly related to the product, such as the taste and the price of the offering. These comments may indicate that the respondents are developing or have developed greater levels of aversion to Kellogg's or to corporate America (Ettenson & Klein, 2005). Respondents jdlund and taintedone

list self-righteousness and intolerance, respectively, as their reasons for participation in the boycott.

This type of behavior evokes the findings of Funches et al. and the way that retaliatory consumers assume the roles of the avenger, altruist, or victim. The study also notes that consumers retaliate against "perceived injustice ... to restore one's sense of justice" (Funches et al., 2009: 232). Each of the prior comments demonstrates the way that boycotters attempt to restore and reconfirm their own feelings of justice. The comments use words such as nonsense, demonize, and intolerant when describing the behavior of Kellogg's towards Michael Phelps.

These respondents are categorized as avengers because they want to "teach the service provider a lesson" through their boycotting (Funches et al., 2009: 236). Research shows that an avenger role is more common in situations where the consumer feels "they have a higher status than the offending service provider" and thus does not fear possible retaliation (ibid: 236). Because boycotting consumers will avoid Kellogg's products, there is absolutely no chance of retaliation by the company and thus the boycotter faces no risk. They are free to "punish or teach the service provider a lesson" (ibid, 236). The next comments show evidence of this behavior.

"It's obvious that boycotting Kelloggs [sic] isn't going to destroy the company, though it could make somewhat of an impact on sales it wouldn't be very significant to an already rich company. It's about making a statement that says, "We're unhappy with your poor decision." It's also about how you value yourself as a person. It's hard for me to give a company like Kelloggs [sic] my money if they would treat a person like this. They aren't worth it, and frankly, there are just as good products at a fraction of the cost anyway." – unregistered user #255212 (Guzman)

"I already AM boycotting Kelloggs [sic] and encouraging my friends to. It may not make enough difference to Kelloggs [sic], but voting with our dollars is all we have. There are other choices, products form companies

who do not live in the stone age nor engender fear among citizens for partaking in a victimless activity" – brewerkev (Guzman)

These comments, from a conversation on the website of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, are both from respondents who admit that the boycott may not be very successful or significant. Instead, one respondent says that he or she participates because of feelings of self-value as well as a rejection of the way that companies treat other people. This respondent is motivated by the symbolic nature of their participation ('making a statement') rather than a specific belief that the boycott will work. The second respondent agrees, saying that the only way for consumers to voice their opinions is to 'vote with their dollars.' These actions persist because some boycotters know that it can "give voice to their dissatisfaction," however unlucky their behavior is to bring about actual change (Funches et al., 2009: 235).

"Time to grow up Kellogs [sic], and realize that many Americans, including highly accomplished Olympians, smoke mariuana [sic]. I grew up eating your cereal and as of now I will never touch it again" – James Hendricks (Stranahan, 2009a, #6992)

"I have already dumped in the trash all Kellogg's products in my home. I am researching what other companies and products they own, and will do the same with them. I will not buy more – ever – unless they change their position on this matter" – Dmsmith (Nadalmann)

Many of these above respondents only imply that they view the actions of Kellogg's as indicative of the actions of the corporate world in general. Others are not so subtle and more directly link the actions of Kellogg's to evil corporations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these comments all appeared on the online petition to Kellogg's over the treatment of Michael Phelps.

"It's not only you Kellog's [sic]. It's the entire Corporate World. Hypocrites!" – Raoul (Stranhan, 2009a, #6729)

"Kelloggs [sic] company represents all that is wrong with America" – David (Stranhan, 2009a, #6952)

"Have you jerks ever made a mistake? Phelps is a decent person, unlike you corporate AH's [assholes] that think of us as just consumers [sic]. I'll never knowingly buy a Kellogg product" – Eric (Stranhan, 2009a, #6991)

These respondents demonstrate their moral brand avoidance of Kellogg's. Research indicates that consumers falling in this category act against the brand because they feel that it has a "negative impact on society" (Lee et al., 2009b: 172). These reasons may be more deep, profound, or developed than the feelings of consumers boycotting for other reasons.

Many respondents share the view of Kellogg's as corporately irresponsible. This is reflected in the following two comments. The first comes from a discussion on the website of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. The second appears on a thread on The Huffington Post.

"I think this is just a move on the part of Kelloggs [sic] to take away attention from the fact of the poisoned peanut butter they had to recall" – unregistered user #254819 (Guzman, 2009)

"Kellogg's is using Michael Phelps to divert attention away from the recent news that it has products involved in the Peanut Corp. Of America² salmonella recall. Makes 'em look like a responsible company" – Kravitz (Stranahan, 2009b)

In these statements, the respondents imply that Kellogg's used the publicity surrounding Michael Phelps to draw attention away from the recent news of the salmonella that affected their products. The undertones of sarcasm in the comment from the respondent Kravitz seems to imply that Kellogg's neglects their corporate

² The tainted peanuts in some Kellogg's products originated in the factory of a supplier named the Peanut Corporation of America, not at a Kellogg's-owned factory. Other companies were also affected by these products.

obligation to act in a responsible manner. To these respondents, the behavior indicates that Kellogg's would rather face the repercussions of dropping their spokesperson than to be held accountable for selling potentially health-threatening food products. They believe this is another example of a corporation behaving in a manner that places brand image above all else.

Other respondents make accusations about the acceptability of Kellogg's products. This stems from their belief that Kellogg's produces and promotes unhealthy foods (sugar-laden or with genetically modified ingredients) to their consumers. The first two comments below are responses to a blog post on the Huffington Post, while the third is a response to a post on the website of NORML.

"Kellogg's products are far from healthy. Their mass-produced and processed goop is filled with sugar, high-fructose [sic] corn syrup and food additives and dyes made for [sic] God knows what. Their legacy is diabetes, obesity and heart disease wrapped up and sold to people as being good for them. Phelps will miss the money, but in the long run, may be glad they parted ways" – kps888 (Nadelmann)

"This company should be boycotted for that reason alone [junk food], never mind being huge hypocrites that pander to the countries dietary challenged dumbled down families" – indywoman (Nadelmann, 2009)

"Kellogg [sic] uses monsanto's [sic] GMO [genetically modified] corn. Google the studies done on genetically modified corn and you'll wished you stopped eating their cornflakes a long time ago" – Pete P (NORML, 2009, #67)

In all of the above posts, respondents imply that Kellogg's produces and markets unhealthy foods and contributes to the proliferation of obesity among American consumers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). These respondents suggest that Kellogg's manipulates consumers into believing that their unhealthy products are 'good for them.' The respondents assume the role of an avenger because they want to "teach the service provider a lesson" (Funches et

al., 2009: 236). They assume the role of altruists through their boycotting by acting on behalf of the 'dumbed down families' and others who are affected by the poor health of Kellogg' products (ibid).

4.1.2 American Pride

Many bloggers view the actions taken by Kellogg's against Michael Phelps as a disgraceful attempt by the company to disrespect and blemish the legacy of an Olympic champion. They view Phelps as not only a champion but as an American hero, and the actions of Kellogg's may be seen by them as unpatriotic, unjustified, and even anti-American. They are dismayed at Kellogg's decision to punish Phelps for what was in their mind a personal choice that should not impact his image in swimming.

These bloggers and respondents are motivated by feelings of patriotism and national pride. They praise the Olympic achievements of Michael Phelps as events that brought pride and honor to the United States and identify very strongly with the swimmer. These emotions are crucial to consumer behavior and to the construction of loyalty and dissonance in the marketplace. In addition, boycotters are motivated by their opinions of what others think of them. As Allport states, "Our consciousness of ourselves is largely a reflection of the consciousness which others have of us ... My idea of myself is rather my own idea of my neighbour's view of me" (Corrigan, 2006: 67; Allport, 1924).

These boycotters "re-articulate the meanings of consumption toward justice, equality, and participation" and have "incorporated in their actions ... the desire to influence consumers' awareness and consumption lifestyles" (Cherrier, 2009: 186–187). It implies that these political boycotters are 'heroes' who can "distinguish between doing the wrong and doing the right in society" (ibid: 187). In the context of boycotting, this combination of national pride and personal responsibility may contribute to higher feelings of righteousness and a desire for action and resolution. These feelings are manifested in passages both large and small.

The respondents below refer to Michael Phelps either as their property or as a representative of America as a whole. The boycotter is placing these properties into something or someone else, and in this case the target is Michael Phelps. The first two of these four comments appeared as responses to a blog post on the website of NORML. The second two comments are from an online petition to Kellogg's that earned over 7000 signatures and was widely distributed across the blogosphere.

"Message sent [to Kellogg's]!! Hope that OUR (U.S.A.) Olympic Hero gets reinstated" – Dan (NORML, #20)

"As a 66 year old retiree with mild liberal leanings, I don't consider myself a "member of the cannabis community", but I am very offended by Kellogg Companies' [sic] immature and punishing actions against our greatest swimmer" – Mary (NORML, #33)

"I will go out of my way to not buy any of your products and tell everyone that I know to do the same; you do no [sic] treat our Favorite American in this manner" – Jesse Galvan (Stranhan, 2009a, #6954)

"Leave our Michael alone. He is a brilliant healthy athlete that should be respected. I will never even think about kellogg products" – C Taylor (Stranhan, 2009a, #6887)

Many of these expressive comments refer to Phelps as 'ours' – i.e. belonging to the country or to the people of the country – and thus these respondents may believe that Kellogg's is acting personally against them or broadly against the people of America. The respondent Mary, a self-described '66 year old retiree,' distances herself from the 'cannabis community' mentality that many NORML members may identify with yet still claims ownership of Phelps as the country's greatest swimmer. The bloggers and respondents are imposing a part of their identity on Phelps, because when they purchase a Kellogg's product sponsored by Phelps they are in effect purchasing part of Phelps (Belk, 1988; Corrigan, 2006; Aaker, 1999; Lee et al., 2009b). They are motivated by feelings of national pride and out of the

personal responsibility that 'they' were individually harmed or affected by the situation. The respondents seem to imply that Kellogg's acted against them and against the country just as much as the company acted against Phelps.

"Michael Phelps is an American Hero. He stood tall and made America proud at the Beijing Olympics. This is how America treats its heroes, we forget all of the hard work Michael Phelps did to achieve his task, we forget the pride we felt with the each gold medal, we forget how Phelps helped America to be competitive against a Chinese when they planned on winning all of the gold's [sic], we forget all of those things and hang a man for smoking a glass pipe at a college party. It is time that we as a country stand up for the rights of the individual, it's time we stand together with our neighbors and take collective control of our destinies. Imagine the weight of millions of emails calling for a change in policy. In this moment in America anything is possible just Google the email address of your [Congressional] representative and send him or her short email. It will take 10 minutes but then you have taken responsibility for change" – Sunflowerpipes (NORML, #141)

"they are turning their back on someone that has done more for the IMAGE of this country in the past 10 years than anybody else. During a time when we really needed it. Especially a person that has showed a work ethic, a discipline and a focus that most of us couldn't dream of" –kappa08 (Uyger)

"This is an outrage!!! Get with the times and apologize to a true American hero. Also, know your customer base you self-righteous fools. Until this is made right, I can guarantee I will never buy Kellogg's [sic] products again" – R. Anderson, (Stranahan, 2009b, #4036)

Two of these above respondents touch on the previously described issue of Kellogg's as an evil corporation or a corporate bully. When Sunflowerpipes writes "This is how America treats its heroes," the writer views the actions of Kellogg's as if they were the actions of the United States as a whole, suggesting that the behavior exercised by Kellogg's is both reprehensible and typically American. After

beginning the passage with a declaration that Phelps is a national hero and calling for the country to “stand up ... stand together,” the author instructs readers to contact their Congressional representatives. When the author writes “In this moment in America anything is possible,” they seemingly try to attach their call to action with the greater hope for change that came with the election of President Barack Obama. A similar claim is presented by R. Anderson, a respondent to the online petition of Kellogg's. The writer invokes the same explanation of self-righteousness felt by previous respondents who were motivated more by the view of Kellogg's as an evil corporation. The phrase "Get with the times" could again show evidence of a belief that Kellogg's is out of touch.

Respondent kappa08 shares this opinion, stating that Phelps was able to restore the image of the United States in a “time when we really needed it,” presumably referring to the reputation of the country during the presidency of George W. Bush. But with the arrival of a new president, Sunflowerpipes believes that with just “10 minutes ... you have taken responsibility for change” needed by the country. This comment again evokes the principle of 'clean hands' and the purported "feelings of good conscience or moral superiority" that some say comes with a boycott (John & Klein, 2003: 1203). The respondent is trying to distance themselves from others who may not perform this same action.

“Deffinitely [sic] called the company and told the reps that along with myself, everyone I know will be boycotting kellogg’s [sic] brand until phelps [sic] is re-instated. I hope we can get enough power behind this drive to make a change. . . . Congrats Phelps you made our country proud, now its time for us to return the favor” – Starry Eyed Surprise (NORML, #235)

Respondent Starry Eyed Surprise repeats the need for change mentioned by respondents Sunflowerpipes and kappa08, using words such as ‘power,’ ‘our,’ and ‘us’ to demonstrate the collective strength of a group. This reinforces previous suggestions that online communities are not comprised of merely passive but "more active and discerning" participants (Kozinets, 1999: 252). The response suggests that a successful boycott of Kellogg's and the change(s) it would bring can match the importance of Phelps' accomplishments and bring a similar level of

pride to all who are involved. They are motivated by national pride and believe that through their actions they can bring pride to the country. Iyer and Muncy would assign to these individuals the label of global impact consumers, "concerned about how society views them" and thus very aware of their actions and the opinions others will have of them because of their behavior (Iyer & Muncy, 2009: 166).

On his blog "So Good: An Absurd Look into the World of Food," a blogger named Jon Eick posts his opinions of food and of the food industry in America. His blog has been mentioned in the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and on CNN (Eick, 2009a). The industry publication Advertising Age lists his blog in their ranking of the Top 150 marketing blogs on the Internet; So Good has appeared as high as number 35 on this list (Advertising Age, 2009). On February 6th, Eick declared in a blog post that he plans to no longer eat cereal made by Kellogg's:

"There is no debate: Michael Phelps is the single most successful athlete in the history of the Olympic games. The man is, plain and simple, an American hero. . . . So how does a company like Kellogg's treat American heroes? By not renewing their contracts . . . Kellogg's fires American heroes. Are you patriotic Kellogg's? Do you love America? Then why are you taking money out of the pocket of an American hero? . . . There's plenty of other cereals out there. . . Be honest with yourself: you could live without Kellogg's. So do it. DO IT. Boycott Kellogg's. It's time to stand up for Michael Phelps, and stand up to American corporations who want to take money out of the pockets of American heroes just because when they are partying they prefer to smoke a plant instead of chugging a [beer]" – (Eick, 2009b).

This statement relates back to the idea that boycott targets are generally organizations that offer inexpensive commodities, such as Kellogg's cereals. This also means that switching costs are low as boycotters can find a trustworthy supplier offering similar goods.

Contacted via email, Eick writes that the image of Phelps as a national hero was a "tactic, which I used to draw added attention to, and support for, [marijuana

legalization]. The reason for my boycott lies firmly with what I believe is the absurdity of firing someone for smoking pot” (Jon Eick, personal communication, 29 Apr 2009). He calls the Phelps events a “wake-up call for Kellogg’s,” noting that the company’s “brand reputation took a big hit from online consumers” (ibid). Eick echoes the comments of many respondents when he says the events demonstrated that “marijuana users were able to flex their consumer muscles and reject the scapegoating [sic] of someone for marijuana use” (ibid)

Eick calls upon at least two main reasons for participation. While his main motivation is marijuana laws, he uses the image of Phelps as an American hero to increase his main motivations. Eick’s use of the words 'scapegoating' and 'absurdity' may function as a way for him to exert his sovereignty over Kellogg’s, and at the same time gain the "good conscience or moral superiority" that comes with clean hands (John & Klein, 2003: 1203).

4.1.3 Pot Culture

Some respondents are motivated by their involvement in and affiliation with so-called marijuana culture. In most cases they appear to have no prior ill opinions about Kellogg’s, and in some humorous occasions they even suggest a link between the high sugar foods produced by the company and the food desired by smokers of marijuana. Much like the respondents who are motivated by feelings of American Pride, those who announce their affiliation with marijuana culture frequently draw upon group dynamics and mentality. They are in many ways just as optimistic for change as the respondents motivated by American Pride. The common thread in complaints from these respondents is their self-association with marijuana culture and their self-identification as smokers of the drug. Their rejection of Kellogg’s draws heavily from the concept of self-image and the consumer’s need to disassociate his or herself from any product that does not fit in with their values or beliefs. Because Kellogg’s publicly announced that the behavior of Michael Phelps was not in line with their corporate image, these boycotters view Kellogg’s as a company that does not approve of their own personal lifestyle choices – smoking marijuana. The respondents followed by rejecting the Kellogg’s brand.

The activity on the web sites of organizations such as NORML suggests that their choices are based on political drivers – defined by Sandikci and Ekici (2009) as a political brand rejection (Lee, et al. 2009a) . Regardless of their level of political involvement, these respondents feel an affinity towards marijuana culture and its system of beliefs. They feel that they “own” marijuana culture just as those motivated by American Pride feel that Michael Phelps is their own. The respondents feel that Kellogg’s mistreated Michael Phelps, and in some places even call him a victim. They view the actions of Kellogg’s as an indictment of marijuana culture. Because so many of the respondents feel strongly about marijuana culture, they see Kellogg’s as a force that is challenging a meaningful part of their lives.

The very fact that these boycotters feel misunderstood by Kellogg's is a tremendous source of motivation for them. Even a casual analysis of blog posts and comments shows that boycotters motivated by their affiliation with marijuana culture are most frequently the boycotters calling for grand, sweeping action and reform. According to the work of Funches et al. (2009), "when [a consumer's] self-efficacy is low, defending the little status [they] possess can be a powerful source of motivation (Funches et al., 2009: 236; Aquino and Douglas, 2003). The consumers feel "threatened," and thus "over-react in their retaliatory efforts" (ibid). These boycotters may feel that Kellogg's is simply the most recent offender in a long line of companies who do not understand and appreciate the views and the politics of marijuana users. The respondents below express their beliefs that marijuana users must unite and demonstrate their power if they want change to happen. The first three comments appeared as posts on the web page of NORML, while the fourth came from the web site of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. The last comment appeared on a message board of 420 Magazine, an online community for marijuana users.

“It’s time for marijuana users to assert ourselves as a valuable consumer demographic – that’s the only way for underrepresented groups to get any voice in this country!” – Caitlin (NORML, #43)

“excellent job NORML [for announcing their support of the boycott]. i [sic] agree its time that cannabis consumers assert themselves as a purchasing

power. avoiding all companies who opt to do us harm. consumption boycotts create change. diamond boycotts really hurt south africa [sic]" – Mernahuana (NORML, #72)

"SENT! THIS IS WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE A CHANGE. NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER. THANK GOD FOR THE INTERNET TO HELP KEEP US ON THE SAME PAGE. GOOD JOB NORML!" – SCOTT (NORML, #88)

"Phelps is just another victim of the U.S. War on Drugs. Of course I'll boycott Kellogg's. How else do we make our voices heard?" – Unregistered User #254789 (Guzman)

"Right on! Good job on the boycott, 420 [marijuana] community! The voice of the ppl [people] can make a difference!" – tricole (Ganjarden, #2)

The opinions of these respondents concentrate on the perceived lack of 'voice' given to marijuana users and pro-marijuana organizations in the United States. When User #254789 calls Phelps a 'victim,' the identity of the perpetrator is not clear: is Kellogg's or the United States to blame? Is Kellogg's an accessory to the crime or the root of the crime? The respondent Caitlin is clearer in her comments as she calls for marijuana users to assert themselves as valuable in the marketplace. She directly characterizes the collective users of the drug as an "underrepresented group [in need of] voice" in America and there evokes historical struggles of groups fighting for the rights they believe they are lacking. Her behavior clearly draws on the topic of consumer sovereignty and the need for consumers and consumer groups to demonstrate their individual and combined power in the marketplace. Many consumer groups share this need for assertion of power, but these comments seem to imply that marijuana users especially crave this power due to the way they have been treated in the past. These comments, as well as the next following two, confirms Funches, et al. (2009) belief that groups with lower status than others are motivated to action by this deficit.

“I would really like to see how much of a difference we make by not buying their products. You know if all the smokers of the world did this it would be awesome” – SummerBrooke (NORML, #80)

“Even though I quit eating cereal for breakfast long ago, my pantry will get a look over to see if any other of their products are being bought. If I find anything from Kellogg then I will find a substitute. I imagine pot smokers make up a disproportionately large segment of their adult market. Those people need to start voting with their wallets. Start with Kellogg. Lets all demonstrate some marketing muscle, NOW!” – PatD (Guzman)

The content of these comments is very similar to the previous five comments save for one distinction. These respondents seem less concerned less with issues of right vs. wrong than with discussions of the economic impact of their participation in the boycott. While still motivated by the belief that they are underrepresented and mistreated, they are also interested in getting even with the company in the economic sense of the word. PatD’s assertion that these customers should ‘Start with Kellogg,’ presumably implies that this is the beginning of a greater movement by marijuana consumers. The comments seem supported by declaration of the earlier respondent Mernahuana to avoid “all companies who opt to do us harm” in order to bring about change.

Some respondents were not content simply voicing their opinions over the Internet. Through a post on NORML's website, we discovered and contacted a woman named Melanie. She maintains a website (<http://www.makepotlegal555.org/>) where she advocates for the legalization of marijuana. Melanie used the blog of NORML to publicize a protest she staged outside a Kellogg's factory in Omaha, Nebraska (marketplace-oriented boycott). In our email correspondence with Melanie, she expressed disappointment in the lack of results from the protest. The February 19th gathering drew only seven individuals, who carried "highly visible signs [that] said things like: Boycott Kellogg's for Phelps; Pot: Safer than Sugar; Pot is NOT Dangerous; Kellogg's Judgement [sic] Flawed." (Melanie, personal communication, 25 Apr 2009) The group received "lots of honks and thumbs-up" from passersby, but despite this

Melanie believes that support for the boycott no longer exists (ibid). She writes that "Phelps did not show support for the boycott" and that "Phelps did nothing about the support given to him" (ibid; ibid, 15 Apr 2009). Expressing some disappointment, Melanie writes:

"But I do like a good boycott because they generally work. The company must endure some shame and usually a drop in sales, and many times they go ahead and make the changes requested. This is very empowering to those who participated, and it helps keep other companies on their toes. This time though, from what I understand, no one seemed to care and no changes were made. But, a boycott is a nice opportunity to get some education going about what can be improved, and that always helps!" – Melanie, personal communication, 15 Apr 2009.

Melanie is here a perfect example of the way that boycotters provide justification for their behavior. She distances herself from the 'failure' of the boycott by describing the effort she exerted to make it work. She implies that Phelps failed to do his part to help the boycott succeed. It appears that Melanie is a true believer in the power of boycotts, claiming that they 'generally work' and saying that they are an opportunity to improve the education of people who may not be aware of the boycott. She believes that any result occurring due to the boycott is an 'empowering' victory, especially when the sales of the company drop and when the company faces 'shame.' And in fact, even when she says that this particular boycott failed to make changes, educational progress was made – "and that always helps!" (ibid).

This behavior draws highly on the theories of consumer resistance and retaliation. Funches et al. (2009) writes that consumers retaliate "to teach the service provider a lesson or to save others from the same fate," as well as through their desire to 'get even' with the company (Funches et al., 2009: 321). There are elements of both of these explanations in Melanie's thoughts. Absent to her perceived lack of shame, she nevertheless writes and implies that the education provided by the boycott helped to "save others" from the fate of dealing with a company that does not understand the beliefs of marijuana users (ibid). Her motivation marks her as

an altruist even though many boycotters involved in pot culture are more accurately labeled as victims.

The perceived struggle between these marijuana users and Kellogg's is a particular manifestation of Bourdieu's (1984) theories of the opposing forces of the old and the new (Corrigan, 2006: 31). Many respondents are critical of the Kellogg Company's views on marijuana. They argue that Kellogg's, as a sponsor, did nothing when Phelps was convicted in 2004 of driving while drunk; they believe this action is much more dangerous than smoking marijuana (Associated Press, 2004). These boycotters are in a struggle for "acceptance of their subversive ideas" (ibid: 31). The company's view of marijuana is outdated and representative of a bygone era, say these respondents, and in their opinion there is nothing particularly subversive about their beliefs. Marijuana is an important way for these respondents to communicate social meaning and to create social distinction (ibid: 32).

Our evaluation of these comments serves as a way to examine the variety of motivations behind boycotting behavior. The Internet is full of discussion about the Kellogg's case. We feel that the selected comments are the most relevant to support our analysis. In the next and final chapter we attempt to summarize and elevate our findings.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

5.1 Summary

Our research shows that groups of boycotters are motivated to action for different reasons yet by one egregious act. We gained an insight into these key drivers of behavior by observing and studying the raw emotions of boycotting consumers in real-time. After reviewing the data we established three themes of behavior that we felt were the most common and then assigned individual boycotters to one of these themes. Some participate because they believe that the actions of Kellogg's are indicative of a careless, evil corporation. Some are motivated by feelings of

American Pride – they believe that Phelps is an American hero and that Kellogg's should not have acted against him. Others are motivated by their involvement in marijuana culture and the importance it has in their lives.

Different factors motivate each of these groups – and, naturally, each individual boycotter – to participate. Those who boycott based on their feelings of Kellogg's as an evil corporation view the actions of the company as representative of Corporate America in general. They are motivated to boycott the brand because they feel it negatively impacts society. Those who invoke feelings of American Pride imply ownership of Phelps and feel that the actions of Kellogg's damaged a national hero. Boycotters in this group show higher feelings of righteousness and a desire for action and resolution. Finally, people motivated by marijuana culture feel that Kellogg's acted against a meaningful part of their lives. They wish to assert the purchasing power of their culture because they believe that other companies have in the past only ignored them.

We were able to draw similarities and links between our three chosen themes and the three themes outlined in the theoretical framework – Self-Image, Consumer Resistance and Retaliation, and Brand Avoidance, giving support to previous literature findings in this study field. However, our three themes – Evil Corporation, American Pride and Pot Culture – are also parallel to some of the more traditional views of consumer movements and ideologies, and are, in many ways, just as complex.

Boycotters motivated by their feelings of Kellogg's as an Evil Corporation believe that the company and its policies "have a negative impact on society" (Lee et al., 2009b: 172). The actions of Kellogg's are seen as indicative of "corporate irresponsibility," representative of a "power imbalance" between the consumers and the organization (ibid). These cynical boycotters are tired of mistreatment by corporations they see as too powerful. The actions of Kellogg's are simply another affront to their morals. They wish to retaliate against Kellogg's as a way to teach the company a lesson and "restore [their] sense of justice" (Funches et al., 2009: 232). By doing so, they not only punish Kellogg's but validate their own superior morals.

Other boycotters are motivated by their feelings of American Pride and are influenced by patriotism and nationalism. They believe that, despite individual differences, they are Americans: "belonging to a single, politically and spatially bounded ... group" (Sandikci & Ekici, 2009: 214; Horowitz 1985). To these boycotters, Michael Phelps is a national hero; his Olympic achievements are cause for pride in all Americans. When Kellogg's acted against Phelps, these boycotters believe, they not only acted against a national hero but against the entire country. Some, through their claims of ownership of the accomplishments of Phelps, even appear personally hurt by Kellogg's.

They are motivated by their collective identity as Americans, so perhaps it is only natural that these boycotters share their thoughts in online communities (Smith, 1987). Above all, these boycotters are motivated by the idea that through their actions they will make their country proud. When bloggers invoke feelings of American Pride, they are in fact communicating much about who they are and how they want society to perceive them. This clearly references the ideology of nationalism, defined as "the yearning for, and acceptance of, the norm of a nation" (ibid: 28). When compared to boycotters from the other two themes, these participants appear more willing to reconcile with Kellogg's.

Boycotters who self-identify with marijuana culture are driven by their desire for the acceptance of their lifestyle. They engage Kellogg's in a power struggle between their views and the views of the company, a confirmation of Friedman's observation that boycotts emerge from the "powerless elements of society" (1994: 214). These boycotters wish to "throw off the economic, political and ideological yoke of the oppressor" (Birch & Cobb, 1985: 1). The only way to achieve this liberation is by working together. Individual boycotters motivated by feelings of Kellogg's as an Evil Corporation tended to draw attention to their own actions, for example by describing how they threw away all of their Kellogg's products. By contrast, boycotters motivated by involvement in marijuana culture believe they must work together against the oppressive views of Kellogg's and other companies that disagree with their lifestyle. Doing so is the only way to achieve this goal. Together, they dream of 'liberation' from oppression and work "in the direction of social change" (Pottenger, 1989).

5.2 Limitations

Every researcher naturally faces limitations that can impact results. We were lucky enough to witness a current and ongoing boycott in real-time. This was a high-risk project because any unforeseen event affecting public perception of Kellogg's could have potentially compromised our data. As such we were unable to control every variable that could impact our findings.

The Internet is a huge place; there is always the possibility that we were unable to find other communities where people discussed their decision to boycott Kellogg's. We do not believe, however, that our methods failed to find a relevant community of any meaningful size. The blog search tools we utilized – from Google Blog Search to Technorati to simply following the path of links from one page to another – consistently brought us to credible communities, organizations, and other pages that were visited by many thousands of people.

Despite its strengths, a Netnography is not without flaws. One of the dangers of relying on comments from individuals that we never physically met is the possibility that these respondents are using the anonymity of the Internet to exaggerate or to lie about themselves or their involvement with the boycott. This is more of a problem with bloggers grouped as 'tourists' than with bloggers who are contributing members of a community. We must trust that bloggers and respondents are truthful in their words. One limitation of our findings is our inability to confirm the identity of many of our sources.

This study faces issues of generalizability. We examined boycotters from one specific country boycotting the actions of one specific company. There is no guarantee that consumers from other countries would behave the same way, just as there is no guarantee that consumers would boycott a different organization in the same manner.

When NORML announced their boycott of Kellogg's on 4 February 2009, the organization stated that the boycott would last until the reinstatement of Phelps or for a period of three months (Armentano, 2009). NORML thus ceased its boycott

on 4 May 2009 (ibid). Despite this development we are unable due to time constraints to revisit this organization and these boycotters at a later time. With more time, we may have been able to re-examine their views and chart the rise and fall in their level of participation with the boycott. An example of one study that performed this second observation is Ettenson and Klein's research into the boycott of French products in Australia, where consumer emotions were tracked once and then again one year later (Ettenson & Klein, 2005).

5.3 Implications

We believe that the importance of the Netnography research method will only grow as consumers continue to reach for the Internet to share their opinions and exchange ideas. Using this particular method helps marketers better understand groups of consumers and their behavior. Companies should make the examination of their online reputation a routine part of their research activities. The information available on the Internet provides a way to consider the unfiltered opinions of these consumers. Companies can also learn about anti-consumption and use these findings to make appropriate changes in the marketplace. "It is important for anti-consumption lobbying to consider how and why individuals resist particular consumption practices, who those individuals are, and the meanings they give to their participation" (Cherrier, 2009: 189). Blog tracking facilitates this practice.

Even when particular boycott groups (e.g. Pot Culture) do not align with a company's public image, the company should acknowledge their existence and voice. Though the company does not wish to give in to the demands of these boycotters, responding to their negative sentiment may help diffuse a boycott situation. Anger is an emotion that may escalate if left untreated, and may "translate into different types of consumer protest," as we addressed in our theoretical framework (Tyran & Engelmann, 2005: 2). Companies must therefore know what their consumers want and what they do not want. Holt expresses the notion that "popular brands, even from those companies that have been extremely loyal to the marketing concept, are realizing anti-brand sentiment from consumers in the postmodern era" (McGinnis & Gentry, 2009: 191; Holt, 2002). Negative word

of mouth is more influential than positive, so this certainly has implications for boycotts (Kotler, 1997). "Understanding the cognitive, emotional and behavioral processes that result in anti-consumption outcomes will enable marketers to devise strategies to pre-emptively avoid, pro-actively influence, and/or reactively mitigate those outcomes" (Lee et al., 2009a: 147). An appropriate crisis management plan is a way for companies to prepare for such events.

Marketers can benefit from a Netnography as it facilitates trend spotting in consumer behavior. Spotting trends helps companies react to changes in the marketplace before their competition can do so. Companies should remain proactive to anticipate these changes and address problems before they escalate.

Kellogg's Counterattack

In the previously mentioned study of French companies in Australia following nuclear tests by the French government, Ettenson and Klein suggest that companies should participate in "highly visible and socially responsible corporate actions" to distance themselves from the offending actions (2005: 218). Some recent actions made by Kellogg's suggest that the company is attempting to counteract the boycott in such a way. In March, a food bank in San Francisco received a donation of over 1,800 kg of cereal boxes bearing the image of Michael Phelps (Nevius, 2009). Kellogg's did not publicly announce or claim responsibility for the donation.

On April 27th, Kellogg's announced that they would donate "an entire day's worth of cereal production to Feeding America, a hunger relief food-bank network" (York, 2009; Close-Up Media, 2009). The gift amounts to 55 million servings of cereal and is valued at \$10 million USD (ibid). The CEO of Kellogg's, David Mackay, called the donation "unprecedented," while Vicki Escarra, CEO of Feeding America, called cereal "nutritious" and described the act as a "tremendous example of corporate America stepping forward to help the nation in a time of great need" (ibid). The language used by Escarra utilizes many of the same appeals that bloggers used when writing about the Kellogg's case: the donation is not only tremendous and forward but a corporate act that helps the nation.

The discrepancy between these two donations could indicate the control that Kellogg's is attempting to exert on their image. Yuksel and Mryteza suggest that providing consumers with "unrelated positive information" is the most effective way to stop the spread of boycott sentiment (2009: 256). Kellogg's may have timed these donations to counterattack the overwhelmingly media-oriented attack on their corporate image. Boycott targets often attempt to restore their image with help of the media by publicizing any positive actions made by the company. This does not necessarily mean giving in to the specific demands of the boycott. It is noteworthy that Kellogg's did not choose to publicize their first food bank donation but that they, along with benefactor Feeding America, publicized the second. There are number of explanations behind this. Perhaps Kellogg's believes enough time has elapsed since the Michael Phelps events. Kellogg's may also believe that issuing a joint statement with Feeding America grants Kellogg's more credibility than if either company was to make an announcement by themselves.

5.4 Future Research

With few exceptions, the boycott of Kellogg's occurred largely in media channels and did not rely on marketplace-oriented tactics such as picketing, marching, or demonstrating. A boycott that relies more heavily on those tactics may provide dramatically different results from a Netnography.

Future researchers could examine a current boycott for a longer period of time than the three-week observation period of this study. A longer data collection period, especially if paired with a boycott that is more widespread, could provide better results about the way that consumer behaviors and motivations change over the course of the boycott. Future research could explore how corporate actions (e.g. the donation of cereal by Kellogg's) lead to these changes in behavior.

We may not have uncovered all of the possible themes due to our short observation period. Studying a boycott for longer may help other themes surface. Perhaps, for some groups of boycotters, egregious actions "[lead] to a firm's product being excluded from [their] consideration set," while for others these

actions are "traded off against product attributes" (Klein et al., 2004: 108). Deeper examination of these consumer groups may provide more detailed data to better understand the long-term implications of boycott behavior. The Netnography approach is perfectly suited to such an evaluation because researchers can observe the evolution of behavior over time.

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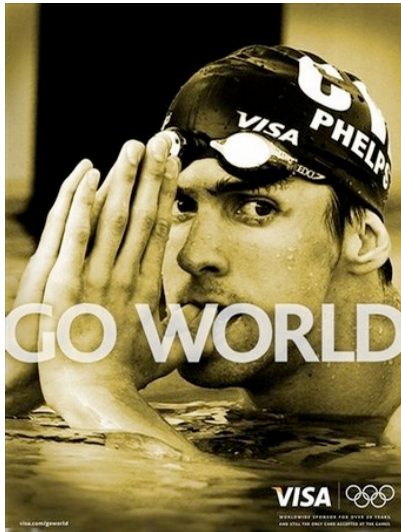
APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The image of Phelps smoking from a marijuana pipe (Published in News of the World, February 01, 2009).

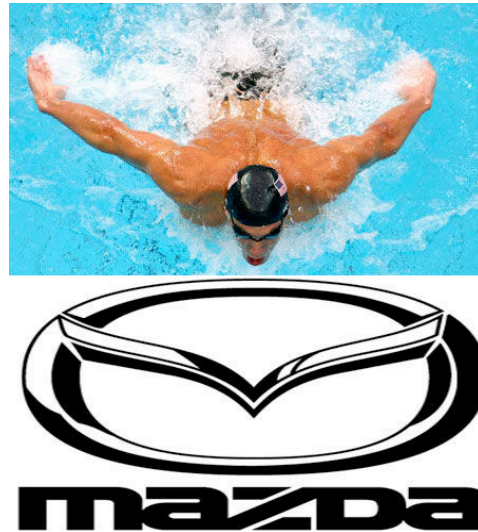


Appendix 2: Phelps' four other professional sponsors: Visa, Mazda, Speedo and Omega

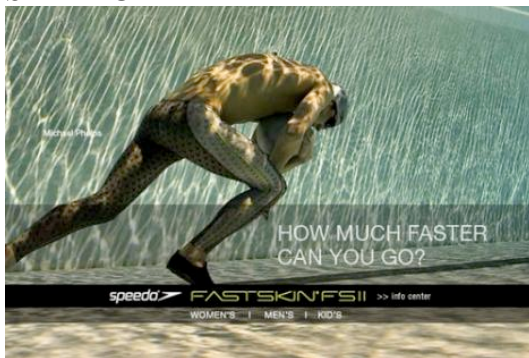
VISA



MAZDA



SPEEDO



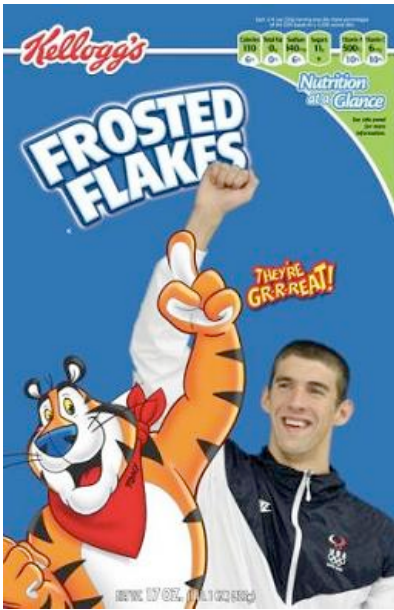
OMEGA



Appendix 3: Kellogg's Logo



Appendix 4: Michael Phelps featured on the box of Frosted Flakes and Corn Flakes brand cereals prior to the release of the image in Appendix 1



Appendix 5: NORML Logo



Appendix 6: Marijuana Policy Project (MPP) Logo



Appendix 7: Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP), Stop the Drug War, and the Drug Policy Alliance Network Logos



Drug Policy
Alliance Network

Reason. Compassion. Justice.