

Students Perception of Management Study Program UNP Kediri Towards KFC's Brand Image After the Boycott

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Abstract

Research aim : This study examines how students of the Management Study Program at Nusantara PGRI University Kediri interpret the KFC brand image after the boycott and the role of digital media in shaping these perceptions.

Design/Method/Approach : This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method through in-depth interviews with six students who were exposed to the boycott issue and had experience consuming KFC.

Research Finding : The results show that the boycott decreased the level of trust of students in the KFC brand image, while the assessment of product quality remained relatively unchanged. Students' perceptions were more influenced by digital narratives, public opinion pressure, and moral considerations than direct consumption experiences.

Theoretical contribution/Originality : The novelty of this study lies in understanding brand image as a dynamic social construction in the digital space, especially in the context of social issue-based boycotts among young consumers.

Practitioner/Policy implication : Practically, this finding emphasizes the importance of adaptive brand image communication strategies, sensitive to social values, and responsive to the dynamics of public opinion in the digital era.

Research limitation: The limitation of this research lies in the scope of informants so that further studies need to involve more diverse respondents and explore communication strategies and brand loyalty in dealing with social issues.

Keywords: boycott; brand image; KFC; digital media; consumer perception

1. Introduction

The development of digital media has changed the way consumers perceive and evaluate brands. In this hyper connected information age, brand image is no longer solely shaped by the quality of a product or service, but also by the flow of information, public opinion, and social issues circulating in the digital space. Social media serves as a primary means of exchanging meaning, where consumers not only receive information but also construct collective judgments about brands based on narratives that develop online[1].



Figure 1. KFC Outlet Closure
(source: Instagram Winnews, 2025)

In Indonesia, the fast food industry recognizes KFC as an international brand that has long dominated consumer preferences thanks to its massive online promotional and communication strategies. However, this popularity makes it vulnerable to waves of social protest, especially when linked to sensitive issues such as alleged cooperation with Israel, which has sparked a boycott since the conflict escalated in October 2023. This rejection movement spread widely through digital platforms, evoking an emotional response among the younger generation, especially students, who saw it as a form of moral solidarity. The real impact was seen in the closure of 47 KFC outlets in 2024 (from 762 to 715 units), 19 more outlets will be added by 2025, with a loss of Rp 557.08 billion in the third quarter of 2024 and a reduction of 2,274 employees (Finance.detik.com, 2025). The boycott is not only understood as an economic measure, but also as an expression of morality and social solidarity. A brand's reputation is now influenced by the clash between direct consumer experience and evolving public opinion[2].

This shift in perception is the crucial background for this research. Given that students are a group that actively voices their opinions, critically evaluates information, and plays a strategic role in shaping public opinion, the researchers believe it is crucial to understand how this group interprets KFC's image following the boycott. Furthermore, students are digital consumers who frequently use social media, making them highly susceptible to the flow of information on current issues. This research seeks to explore the extent to which the boycott impacted students' perceptions of KFC's reputation[3].

The selection of students from Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri as the research subjects was not without reason. Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri (UNP Kediri) is one of the leading private universities in Kediri City, with a large student population and diverse backgrounds. This university is known as an institution that actively encourages students to think critically, have social awareness, and be able to analyze emerging phenomena in society.

With these characteristics, UNP Kediri students are a relevant group to assess an issue that impacts brand image, especially the boycott issue that has received widespread attention in the public sphere. To be more specific, the informants for this research were chosen students from the Management Study Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, because Management students have basic knowledge related to consumer behavior, marketing, and brand image, so their views are considered more comprehensive in assessing this phenomenon[4].

With this background, this study aims to analyze the perceptions of students of the Management Study Program of UNP Kediri towards the image of KFC after the boycott. This objective is achieved by exploring students' understanding of how the boycott affected KFC's reputation, both emotionally, rationally, and in terms of consumption preferences. This study also assesses how students as young consumers respond to digital information regarding the issue and how it influences their decisions to continue or not to choose KFC products. In addition to providing a complete picture of student perceptions, this study is expected to provide evaluation material for KFC managers in designing more effective communication and marketing strategies to restore the image after the boycott. The results of the study can be used as a basis for developing a communication approach that is more sensitive to the social, cultural values, and preferences of the younger generation.

Several previous studies have shown that the dynamics of the KFC boycott are influenced by a combination of moral, social, and consumer perception factors. Findings by Kanigara Tarisananda Paramesthi and Leonita Kusumawardhani revealed that consumer participation in the boycott was generally driven by ethical reasons and solidarity with Palestine, although quality, taste, and price remained the main considerations that maintained consumer interest[3]. Research by Nurul Azizah and her colleagues confirms that social media movements can encourage involvement in boycott actions, but their impact on purchase intention is only significant when brand image is negatively affected, making brand image a key element in purchasing decisions[5]. Meanwhile, Sindi Marantika's study shows that although most respondents still make purchases based on taste, many of them are aware of and participate in the boycott movement based on moral motivations, and show doubts about KFC's image due to negative news coverage[6]. Overall, these three studies emphasize the importance of companies understanding consumer perceptions, managing brand image, and formulating appropriate communication strategies amidst the increasing influence of social movements in the digital media era.

Critically, previous research shows an interesting contradiction even though moral and solidarity factors drive boycott participation[3]. Its influence on purchasing behavior is often weakened by loyalty, taste, or price[5]. However, these analyses are largely general in nature, targeting a broad range of consumers, without distinguishing specific segments such as critical and management-based students, and lacking in exploring post-boycott perceptions in Indonesia's digitally intensive context. This limitation creates a significant research gap: the

absence of an in depth study of students' perceptions, as young, active consumers on digital media, regarding KFC's image transformation after the peak of the boycott. This study addresses this gap through a qualitative phenomenological analysis of Management students at Nusantara PGRI University in Kediri, providing new empirical evidence for the field of marketing management regarding brand image dynamics in the era of online social movements, while also providing recommendations for adaptive image restoration strategies for transnational brands in emerging markets like Indonesia.

Brand image is the image or impression that arises in a consumer's mind when considering a product. This image is formed through the experiences, beliefs, and associations consumers have with the brand. Various analytical techniques are used to understand this perception, such as multidimensional scaling and projection techniques. To build a strong image, a brand identity must be clear because consumers tend to choose brands with distinctive and easily recognizable characteristics[5]. Previous studies by Marantika have shown that boycotts can negatively impact brand image, particularly when the boycott is rooted in sensitive social and political issues[6]

A boycott is a collective action taken by the public to stop purchasing or using a product as a form of rejection of the behavior or policies of a particular company or group. This action arises as a form of protest when the public perceives a violation that goes against moral values or humanitarian principles. One form of boycott that is widespread in various countries is the rejection of products associated with support for Israel. This action is rooted in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, where the Palestinian territories are subject to military occupation that has had serious impacts on its residents[7].

The latest escalation peaked in October 2023, sparking a major wave of violence and a drastic increase in the death toll. By 2024, international reports indicated that more than thirty five thousand Palestinians had died as a result of the ongoing attacks. This surge in casualties sparked a wave of global sympathy and pressure from those deemed involved, including a boycott of KFC products[8]. However, Fakriza's research indicates that brand loyalty can moderate the negative impact of a boycott, so that consumers who have high loyalty will continue to buy products even if a boycott occurs[9].

1.1. Statement of Problem

Based on the background explained above, this research was specifically conducted to answer the research problem formulation, namely:

1. How do students perceive KFC's brand image after the boycott?
2. What role does digital media play in shaping students' perceptions of KFC after the boycott?
3. Do students continue to purchase KFC products after the boycott?

1.2. Research Objectives

Based on the problem formulation above, the objectives of this research are:

1. To gain an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions of KFC's brand image post boycott.
2. To gain an in-depth understanding of the role of digital media in shaping students' perceptions of KFC post boycott.
3. To gain an in-depth understanding of whether students continue to purchase KFC products after the boycott.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach as a basis for understanding social phenomena related to students' perceptions of KFC's image post-boycott. A qualitative approach was chosen because it can describe respondents' views, meanings, and experiences in greater depth, resulting in insights that cannot be achieved through quantitative methods. The main focus of this study is to explore how students interpret the boycott issue from a personal and social perspective in the context of brand consumption[10].

The type of research used is phenomenology. Phenomenology is understood as everything present in human consciousness, whether a construct of the mind or a reality that can be experienced. Phenomenology then seeks to explore and uncover the meaning of an individual's life experience of a particular event, concept, or situation, including how they view themselves and the world around them. This approach places real experience as the primary source in understanding reality, so a method is needed that can present phenomena as they appear without distortion[11]. Therefore, phenomenological researchers are required to let go of various assumptions, prejudices, and previous theories in order to clearly capture the essence of the phenomenon. The essence of phenomenology is the process of interpretation to understand the fundamental structure of an experience, with an emphasis on the uniqueness and essence of the phenomenon being studied. This research was conducted on students of the Management Study Program at Nusantara PGRI University in Kediri. Students were selected because they are considered to have academic knowledge of marketing, brand image, and consumer behavior, thus able to provide a more comprehensive perspective. In addition, students are a group that actively interacts with digital media, so they are more quickly exposed to information related to boycotts and issues that influence public perception of certain brand[12].

This study uses primary data obtained directly from information sources as well as secondary data derived from indirect materials such as books, journals, literature, websites and other supporting materials. In determining informants, researchers ensure that the selected individuals meet certain criteria including the 5R principles according to Kamayanti which include Relevance, namely the relevance of informants to the research focus Recommendation,

namely suggestions from trusted parties in determining informants Rapport, namely a good relationship between researchers and informants so that information can be explored more deeply Readiness, namely the willingness of informants to be interviewed voluntarily and Reassurance, namely the guarantee that informants are able to provide honest answers without engineering[13].

The researchers selected six informants. These informants consisted of one first-year management student, two second-year management students, one third-year management student, and two fourth-year management students, who were able to provide rich information to support the analysis of the phenomenon being studied. Informants were selected based on their understanding of the boycott issue and their experience as users or observers of the KFC brand.

Informants were selected with specific criteria, namely students of the Management study program at Nusantara PGRI Kediri University, grades 1 to 4, who have taken courses in Consumer Behavior, Introduction to Management, and Introduction to Business, actively use social media, follow the development of boycott issues, and have experience purchasing KFC products. In addition, informants are expected to be able to provide objective personal reflections on the change in KFC's image after the boycott action, so that the information obtained is not only descriptive, but also contains in-depth critical analysis.

Table 1. Informant Data

Name	Category	Description
AP	1st Grade Students	Informant 1
MI	2nd Grade Students	Informant 2
TS	2nd Grade Students	Informant 3
SY	3rd Grade Students	Informant 4
ES	4th Grade Students	Informant 5
OV	4th Grade Students	Informant 6

Source : Author's Primary Data, 2025

The respondent profiles illustrate the diversity of student perspectives on the KFC brand. The majority of informants are active social media users, making them easily exposed to information about the boycott issue. They also possess a basic understanding of brand image and consumer behavior from management courses, allowing their views to provide a more in-depth perspective on the impact of a boycott on a brand's reputation.

Data collection was carried out through semi structured in-depth interviews[14]. This method was chosen because it allowed the author to flexibly follow the interview flow without losing the focus of the research. Interviews were conducted one on one to obtain more in-depth information. In addition to the interviews, the researcher also took field notes during the data collection process. These field notes helped enrich the analysis, particularly in understanding the emotional atmosphere and intensity of informants' opinions when discussing the boycott issue. Digital documentation, such as screenshots related to the boycott issue, was also used as supporting material in the data interpretation process.

To ensure the accuracy of the information, researchers applied source triangulation techniques by comparing statements between informants to achieve data consistency. Triangulation is necessary so that research results are not based solely on a single point of view, but rather come from various complementary perspectives. The application of triangulation helps increase the validity of the findings and enriches the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon being studied[15].

The data validity technique in this study uses source triangulation to verify and compare data obtained from interviews. The interview questions are as follows:

1. How do students perceive KFC's brand image after the boycott?
2. What role does digital media play in shaping students' perceptions of KFC after the boycott?
3. Do students continue to purchase KFC products after the boycott?

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three core stages. The first stage, data reduction, emphasizes the process of sorting, summarizing, and concentrating important information while eliminating unnecessary elements[16]. The second stage, data presentation, focuses on organizing the data reduction results into a neat, easily understood format. The final stage, drawing conclusions, involves interpreting the overall findings to produce understanding and conclusions that align with the research objectives[17].

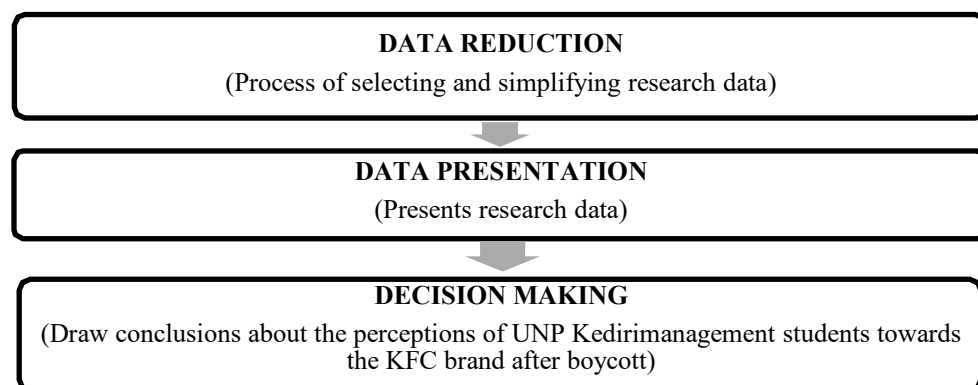


Figure 2. Stages of Data Analysis
Source : Author Primary Data, 2025

3. Results and Discussion

The data analysis in this study was conducted through three systematic stages: data reduction to filter relevant information, presentation of data in narrative and tabular form, and drawing conclusions to answer the research questions. Based on in-depth interviews with six informants from the Management Study Program at UNP Kediri, three main themes were identified that represent the post boycott KFC brand image phenomenon. The interview results obtained based on the research questions are compiled and presented in the following table:

1. To find out students' views on KFC's brand image after the boycott. Question: How do students perceive KFC's brand image after the boycott?

Table 2. Interview Responses Regarding Student Perceptions of KFC's Brand Image Post-Boycott.

Description	Answer
Informant 1	Waduhh pie ya mbak lek menurutku sih, citra KFC maleh sedikit menurun gara-gara isu boikot sing meresahkan terus ya garai ga nyaman, tapi asline kualitas makanannya sekonsisten. Meaning: I think KFC's image has declined a little because of the boycott issue that is unsettling and causes discomfort, but the quality of the food is still consistent.
Informant 2	Menurutku citra KFC berubah, tapi ga sepenuhnya buruk, ngono kui biasane garai ngerusak kepercayaan e pelanggan mbak. Meaning: I think KFC image is changing, but not entirely bad, it usually makes customer trust damaged.
Informant 3	Setelah terjadinya boikot, aku merasa citra KFC menjadi berbeda soale kan banyak komentar negatif yang beredar terutama di sosial media. Meaning: After the boycott, I feel that KFC image has become different because of many negative comments circulating, especially on social media.
Informant 4	Beyuhhh itu dulu ruame banget ya kak, beberapa influencer sama artis juga banyak speak up tentang isu itu. Tapi menurutku citra KFC ga berubah banyak kualitas e masih sama, cuma isu boikotnya tok sing ramai. Meaning: Beyuhhh that used to be very rude, some influencers and artists also spoke up a lot about the issue. But in my opinion, the image of KFC has not changed, many the quality is still the same, only the boycott issue is crowded.
Informant 5	Lek aku saiki kurang percoyo mbe KFC, opo meneh sing jual produk ayam saiki kan akeh terus yo enek sing jauh lebih murah hargane daripada KFC, meskipun KFC dikenal banyak orang tapi aku kurang percoyo ae saiki rasane. Meaning: If I don't believe in KFC now, especially now that they sell a lot of fried chicken products and some are much cheaper than KFC, even though KFC is known by many people, but now I don't believe it.
Informant 6	Goro goro berita viral boikot kae aku wes ga percoyo maneh mbe KFC, opo meneh saiki barang akeh toko KFC sing tutup.

Meaning:

Because of the viral news of the boycott, now I don't trust KFC anymore, especially now that many KFC outlets are closed.

Source: Author Primary Data, 2025

Based on Table 2, Informants 1, 2, 5, and 6 expressed doubt and loss of trust due to social issues and store closures. Informants 1 and 4 emphasized that the taste and quality of the chicken remained consistent and unchanged. Informant 3 highlighted the numerous negative comments on social media that changed his view. The findings in the table above indicate a deconstruction of the KFC brand image in the eyes of UNP Kediri Management students. Functionally, respondents acknowledged that the product's physical attributes, such as the taste and texture of the fried chicken, did not experience a quality degradation. However, emotionally, there was a shift in perception from a brand with a positive reputation to an entity fraught with social controversy. This indicates that the brand image no longer stands firmly on the foundation of product quality alone, but is highly vulnerable to the impact of emerging ethical issues in society.

This decline in brand image has an impact on weakening loyalty, where students are starting to be skeptical about the existence of KFC outlets[18]. The emergence of discomfort and loss of customer trust, as expressed by the majority of informants, confirms that young consumers' perceptions are heavily influenced by a brand's social integrity. In this context, brand image is viewed as a dynamic asset its success in maintaining a market share among academics now depends heavily on the company's ability to restore its moral reputation in the public sphere.

2. To determine the role of digital media in shaping students' perceptions of KFC post-boycott.
Question: What is the role of digital media in shaping students' perceptions of KFC post boycott.

**Table 3. Interview Responses Regarding the Role of Digital Media
In shaping students perception of KFC after the boycott.**

Description	Answer
Informant 1	Media digital e bebas to mbak? Aku pake e mek WhatsApp, Instagram, mbe TikTok, menurutku medsos iku peran e besar kak, soale aku tau info info semua iku dari medsos, jadi FYP iku sing bentuk pandanganku terhadap isu boikot. Meaning: Digital media is free, right? I only use WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok applications, I think social media plays a big role, especially since I know all that information from social media. So the veranda that appeared formed my view on the boycott issue.
Informant 2	Pie yo lek menurutku, media digital gae isu boikot cepet nyebar dan iku cukup memengaruhi caraku menilai citra KFC. Meaning: What if in my opinion, digital media makes the issue of boycotts spread quickly and it quite affects the way I assess the image of the KFC brand..

Informant 3	Hmm karena Saya sering melihat konten tentang boikot di FYP TikTok dan Instagram, persepsi saya terhadap KFC jadi ikut berubah mengikuti arus informasi sing ada nde sana dek. Meaning: Hmm because I often see content about the boycott on the TikTok and Instagram homepages, my perception of KFC has changed along with the flow of information on the deck.
Informant 4	Apa ya kakk, hmmm menurutku si Media digital memudahkan aku mendapatkan informasi, entah iku positif maupun negatif, sehingga penilaianku terhadap KFC setelah boikot lebih banyak dibentuk oleh apa sing tak lihat secara online. Artinya: Meaning: What is it, hmmm I think digital media makes it easier for me to get information, whether it is positive or negative, so that my assessment of KFC after the boycott is more shaped by what I see online.
Informant 5	Pie ya dep lek aku no gampang terbawa arus e hehehe (disampaikan sambil tertawa) aku sering ndeloki komentar e wong wong sing nde TikTok iku lo maleh terbawa arus. Meaning: How about dep, if I'm easily carried away by the current hehehe (conveyed while laughing) I often see people's comments on TikTok so I'm carried away by the current.
Informant 6	Banyak hal viral sing gampang masuk nde media digital. Opo meneh saiki enek TikTok dadi enek opo ae gampang FYP, nah terus isu boikot iku aku ngertine yo teko media digital, dan mergo iku aku mbe cah cah sering ngomongne hal hal sing viral termasuk Boikot KFC. Meaning: Many viral things easily enter digital media. Especially now that there is TikTok so if there is anything easy to enter the homepage, then the boycott issue I also know from digital media, and because of that my friends and I often talk about viral things including the KFC boycott.

Source: Author Primary Data, 2025

Based on Table 3, Informants 1, 3, and 6 mentioned TikTok's For Your Page (FYP) feature as the primary source of boycott information. Digital media acts as a shaper of subjective reality. Informants 2 and 4 felt that the massive and rapid flow of information influenced how they judged the brand. Informant 5 admitted that reading other people's comments led him to be swept away by the flow of opinions. The data shows that digital media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, act as information gatekeepers that dictate students' perspectives on the boycott issue. This data indicates that social media is the primary engine that shapes students' perspectives. Through algorithmic systems such as TikTok's FYP, boycott news is disseminated continuously until it becomes unavoidable information in their daily lives. As a result, students no longer judge KFC based on what they see or feel, but rather trust viral opinions. This situation often makes the actual facts less important than popular issues that are being widely discussed online.

Digital media, more than just a means of spreading news, has also become a gathering place that triggers social pressure. Students' eagerness to jump on the bandwagon after seeing others' comments demonstrates how easily their personal opinions are swayed by online consensus. This culture of shared opinions has led to KFC's reputation now being collectively determined by internet users. For management students, this phenomenon is clear evidence that

control over a company's image has slipped from management's hands and is now entirely controlled by a rapidly evolving digital community.

3. To find out if students continue to buy KFC products after the boycott issue. Question:
After the boycott issue, do students continue to buy KFC products?

Table 4. Interview Responses Regarding What Students Are Continue to buy KFC products after the boycott issue.

Deskripsi	Jawaban
Informant 1	Tetep beli se mbak tapi cuma sesekali tok. Soale nde TikTok katane gaboleh beli iku to, cuma lek wes puengen banget baru beli. Meaning: I still want to buy it, but only once in a while. The problem is that on Tik Tok he said you can't buy it, right, only if you really want to buy it.
Informant 2	Aku wes stop ga beli mbak, soale adewe kan muslim dadi sebaik ndukung Palestina meskipun ga ngerti iku isune bener opo ga, nek aku lebih baik menghindari. Meaning: I have stopped not buying, because we are Muslims so we should support Palestine even if I don't understand whether the issue is true or not, if I better avoid it.
Informant 3	Saya memilih berhenti sementara membeli KFC sampai situasi lebih jelas, takutnya kalau beli terlalu sering dikira ikut menyebarkan dukungan. Meaning: I chose to stop buying KFC while I was in the middle of a more clear situation, for fear that if I bought too often, I would be thought to be spreading support.
Informant 4	Aku si jarang kak, aku beli pas temen temen ngajak beli aja, biasanya pas ada promo gratis ongkir, kalau ga gitu biasanya kalau ada produk baru kita tertarik sih. Meaning: I rarely buy it, I buy it when friends invite me to buy, usually when there is a free shipping promo, if not, usually if there is a new product we are interested.
Informant 5	Lek aku panggah beli tapi yo ga mesti beli iku, cuma lek pas puengen buangett dan tidak bisa ditahan baru beli. Meaning: If I keep buying but don't always buy, it's only when I really want to buy and can't be held back.
Informant 6	Hmm aku si wes ga beli KFC sama sekali soale ga pengen mendukung perusahaan sing kena boikot, aku biasane beli ayam nde pinggir dalan iku. Meaning: Hmm I don't buy KFC at all because I don't want to support companies that are affected by the boycott, I usually buy chicken on the side of the road.

Source: Author Primary Data, 2025

Based on Table 4, Informants 2 and 6 stopped purchasing due to religious principles and support for Palestine. Informants 1, 4, and 5 continued to purchase only when they "really wanted" or when there was a promotion, but their frequency decreased. There was a shift from loyalty to limited impulse buying. Informant 6 switched to local products (streetside chicken).

The results of data reduction indicate a change in behavioral patterns from routine consumption to situational consumption or a complete cessation. Data on these shopping habits demonstrate a significant shift in consumption patterns. Purchasing decisions are no longer simply about seeking taste satisfaction or affordable prices, but have shifted to considerations of principled values. The decrease in the frequency of visits or the complete cessation of purchases at KFC is not due to dissatisfaction with the quality of the fried chicken, but rather a tangible form of moral responsibility and concern for humanitarian issues. Among the Management students of UNP Kediri, shopping activities have become a means to demonstrate partisanship and attitudes towards emerging global issues.

This phenomenon has spontaneously fueled a surge in support for the people's economy. Declining interest in international brands has automatically allowed local street-side fried chicken vendors to thrive as a preferred product. Shopping patterns have become much more selective and highly dependent on specific situations, with purchases occurring only when urgently needed or influenced by a social circle, but at significantly lower volumes than before the boycott. This reality demonstrates that strong negative sentiment within society can undermine long-established consumption habits.

Furthermore, this study revealed that digital media plays a significant role in shaping the perceptions of KFC by Management students at UNP Kediri. Information about the boycott spread rapidly through social media, online videos, and discussion forums, leading students to base their judgments on the brand based on information circulating online rather than on direct experience with the product. This finding aligns with Nurul Azizah et al. (2025), who stated that digital media is a key channel for influencing consumer perceptions and can rapidly alter brand image. These results demonstrate the need for appropriate communication strategies to maintain brand reputation in the digital information era.

The role of digital media, especially visual platforms like TikTok, has proven to be a major determinant in changing student perceptions. Students tend to engage in collective information digestion, where they no longer judge KFC based on their own taste buds, but rather on viral narratives. The phenomenon of "carried away by the current" mentioned by informant 5 confirms the theory of Nurul Azizah et al. (2025) regarding the role of digital media as a channel for fast-track image shifting. For management students, this suggests that future marketing strategies should focus more on digital sentiment management than simply conventional advertising.

The students' decision to reduce or stop purchasing KFC reflects a shift from seeking the best price and taste to seeking value alignment. Although Fatma Adila et al. (2025) stated that loyalty can mitigate the impact of boycotts, these findings suggest that for a critical young generation, such loyalty is very fragile when faced with humanitarian issues. The shift in consumption to local vendors (informant 6) indicates economic nationalism triggered by global issues.[2].

This research successfully verified that the boycott had damaged the foundation of trust in KFC by UNP Kediri Management students. Digital media acted as a catalyst, amplifying this negative sentiment, ultimately shifting consumption patterns from loyalty to skepticism. KFC's recovery strategy requires a more transparent and socially value-driven approach to win back the hearts of student consumers.

The impact of the boycott on the purchasing behavior of students in the Management Study Program at UNP Kediri also varied. Some informants reported reducing the frequency of purchases or stopping altogether, while others continued purchasing, considering brand reputation and public opinion. This supports Fatma Adila et al. (2025), who stated that brand loyalty can moderate the negative impact of a boycott, allowing consumers with high attachments to continue purchasing. These findings suggest that negative perceptions arising from moral or social considerations can influence purchasing decisions, even if they do not completely stop consuming a product.

Data analysis also revealed a close interaction between the boycott, brand image, and the perceptions of Management students at UNP Kediri. The boycott acted as an initial trigger that elicited emotional and rational responses, influencing how students perceived KFC. The brand image, impacted by negative opinions, then translated into individual perceptions and purchasing decisions. This aligns with research by Marantika et al. (2025), which emphasized that changes in consumer perception occur through a complex interaction between social factors, digital information, and personal experiences with the brand.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of companies understanding young consumers who are critical, digitally active, and socially aware. The findings provide strategic implications for KFC management in designing socially sensitive communications, maintaining brand reputation, and adapting marketing strategies in the digital age. This study also provides a novel contribution by highlighting university students as active digital consumers, offering deeper insights into the impact of boycotts on brand image and consumer behavior in Indonesia.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the widespread boycott phenomenon in the digital realm has brought about a significant transformation in the perspectives of KFC brand image among students of the Management Study Program at UNP Kediri. Trust and purchase intention were the most significantly impacted dimensions. Although the product's functional qualities, such as taste and texture, were deemed consistent, the strong flow of opinions and moral narratives on social media have shifted the standards for brand assessment. Brand assessment is no longer solely based on physical utility, but also through the attachment of social meaning, ethical values, and accompanying religious principles. In this situation, perceptions are no longer built

solely on personal consumption experiences, but rather the result of collective construction triggered by digital interactions and the pressure of public opinion.

The originality of this research lies in revealing the character of college students as a reflective group of digital consumers, where brand choices are seen as a representation of their identity and life values. Through a phenomenological lens, this study enriches the marketing management literature by emphasizing that brand reputation in the information age is highly dynamic and susceptible to changes in social structures in cyberspace. These findings provide strategic implications for global brand managers to be more adaptive in developing transparent communication patterns. Higher sensitivity to sensitive issues and aligning marketing strategies with social norms are key for companies, especially when dealing with massive digital social movements.

This study certainly has several limitations that need to be considered. The small sample size of informants, consisting of only six Management students at UNP Kediri, means these findings cannot be considered representative of the views of all students in Indonesia or the general public. The perceptions found were strongly influenced by their management educational background and the social environment in Kediri City. Furthermore, because this study was conducted when the boycott issue was still hot and viral on digital media, it is possible that informants' responses were heavily influenced by momentary emotions or the pressure of public opinion that was high online at the time. Future research is expected to involve more informants from different study programs and regions to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

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The AI application serves as a tool Monica Audio to Text was used to convert audio data into written text to expedite the data documentation process. The converted results were then checked, adjusted, and reconfirmed by the author to ensure they accurately reflected the source content. Paraphraser.io was used as a tool to improve sentence structure and readability. This tool was not intended to generate scientific arguments, but rather to assist with editorial restructuring. All paraphrases were manually evaluated to maintain meaning and academic context. PlagiarismChecker.co was used as an initial review tool to identify potential similarities between the text and other publications. This tool serves as support in maintaining the authenticity of the manuscript, while the final determination regarding revisions and compliance with publication ethics is made entirely by the author. Semantic Scholar was used in the literature search phase to assist in identifying publications relevant to the research topic. The process of selecting sources, assessing the quality of references, and integrating theory into the discussion was carried out independently by the author. It is important to note that the AI-

generated content is not copied verbatim but has been thoroughly reviewed, edited, and curated by the author to ensure the accuracy, authenticity, and integrity of the information contained within. Individual judgment and decisions contributed significantly to the interpretation and validation of this AI output. Therefore, the final results presented represent a collaboration between humans and AI.

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