

Contemplating Media Globalisation on World's Issues: A Case of Malaysian Responses to the Tufan al-Aqsa's Gaza Crisis

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss how the role of media globalisation shapes Malaysian consumers to show their Muslim identity while the international class of regional crisis happens or even reaches Malaysia. One of the events which have always been in the radar is the conflict between Israel and Palestine. It has been a focus worldwide on Gaza after the Tufan al-Aqsa started on 7 October 2023. The media has exposed the issue from different perspectives, including those who support or accuse Hamas in this recent conflict. However, Hamas is still being labelled as a terror organisation by the West. This article will choose McDonald's and HP as examples to discuss why the boycott campaign against McDonald's but not HP products, gain support from the people soon after the outbreak of the Gaza conflict in 2023. This is especially how media globalisation accelerated the fast-growing boycott campaign in Malaysia.

Keywords: Media globalisation, Gaza crisis, Malaysia, boycott, responses

Introduction

Social media has become a widely used platform for communication with our loved ones, acquaintances, and even foreign friends. It has made our lives more efficient and helped us bridge the gap between distances and time. This has accelerated the process of globalisation in the modern world, which has been developing since the last century. With the rise of the internet and its impact on society, people have started to realise the effects of globalisation on their daily lives. Lior Gelernter and Motti Regev commented that the internet has already changed our social structure, especially with the emergence of social awakening movements in the first two decades of the 21st century.¹

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed our lifestyle drastically, and we have become heavily reliant on the internet for social contact and commercial activities. The pandemic has created a new norm of globalisation, and we may not be able to return to the situation before it. This article aims to analyse the role of media globalisation in the national boycott campaign that happened in Malaysia during the Gaza crisis.² It will also discuss why people are more likely to participate in boycott campaigns against fast-food chains like McDonald's or food-related products, but they cannot beat down high-value technologies like HP. It is important to note that this article does not aim to argue the continuity of the conflict. Instead, it aims to provide an overview of the formation and conditions of the boycott campaign after the Gaza conflict, and what we can learn from it.

Background of the Gaza Crisis in 2023

The crisis in Palestine has been there for more than a century, which led to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It was earlier given the support as stated in Balfour Declaration 1917 by British Government to establish 'a national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine. For the Jewish, it is a victory but for Palestinians they regarded it as 'nakba' or catastrophe. Since then, the conflict between Israel and Palestine has never ended.

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¹ Lior Gelernter and Motti Regev, "Internet and Globalization," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Globalization Studies*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (Routledge, 2010), 64–66, 68–69.

² Charis Vlahos and Dimos Chatzinikolaou, "Mutations of the Emerging New Globalization in the Post-Covid-19 Era: Beyond Rodrik's Trilemma," *Territory, Politics and Governance*, (Routledge, 2021), 855–875.

The Hamas-led attack on Israel in 2023 is a significant event that has garnered global attention. Tensions escalated from late September, with the conflict intensifying in October. The use of incendiary balloons by Hamas to target Israel is considered a serious threat, leading to widespread harm.³ On 7th October 2023, Muhammad Deif declared war on Israel, citing Israeli desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque an important Islamic site⁴ (Ibrahim Dahman and Abeer Salman, October 2023). This declaration marked the beginning of the Gaza crisis at the end of 2023 and remains unresolved. The Israeli government's extensive military operations have devastated almost all of Gaza Strip, making it increasingly uninhabitable for its residents as reported by Al-Jazeera.⁵ As the battle rages on in Gaza, casualties continue to mount.

Hamas achieved a notable attention that will undoubtedly feature prominently in annual world reviews. In response, despite knowing that destroying Hamas would be incredibly challenging given its size and capabilities, the Israeli government continues its retaliatory attacks against Gaza and expresses intentions to eliminate Hamas entirely.⁶ Their efforts included seeking military cooperation with America; however, America's support for Israel was not as strong this time due to concerns about an overreaction towards Palestine. These events have stirred misunderstandings and tensions globally. Ultimately such actions may fuel anti-Israel campaigns rather than aiding resolution efforts.⁷ It is evident that there is a misunderstanding about the Israel-Palestine conflict on social media. Some people who support Palestine or sympathise with their cause have faced consequences such as being fired from their jobs.⁸ This could escalate the already existing anti-Israel campaigns and is not helpful towards resolving the conflict.

The recent Gaza conflict has spread rapidly throughout the world, causing polarisation. This is largely due to the globalisation of media, which was made possible by the successful technological revolution of the 20th century. Once communication tools were transformed into digital and virtual forms, they gained an explosive power to influence politics, economy, and society. Any medium that can shorten the distance between humans and enable closer communication or interconnectedness can be considered a successful form of globalisation.⁹

Uniqueness in This Gaza Conflict

The primary focus of this conflict was not just the use of advanced biotechnological warfare, but also the ability of the disadvantaged side to overcome their superior opponent, which garnered global astonishment and particularly resonated with Islamic nations. Additionally, supporters of Palestine believed that the Israeli government did not demonstrate genuine efforts to bring an end to the war. Israel faced allegations of perpetrating genocide in Palestine, leading pro-Palestinian civil groups to take their case to the International Criminal Court in November.

On January 12, 2024, South Africa declared its assessment of the Gaza crisis as a genocide due to systematic extermination against Palestinians in Gaza Strip.¹⁰ In response, Israel refuted claims of genocide at the International Court of Justice in January 2024 by stating that they were necessary for

³ Ibrahim Dahman, Kareem Khadder, and Hadas Gold, "Israel Strikes Gaza Targets after Incendiary Balloon Sent across Border," *CNN*, September 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/23/middleeast/israel-strikes-gaza-incendiary-balloon-intl-hnk/index.html> (retrieved January 12, 2024).

⁴ Ibrahim Dahman and Abeer Salman, "Hamas Military Chief: If You Have a Gun, Get It Out," *CNN*, October 2023, https://edition.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/al-aqsa-storm-militants-infiltrate-israel-after-gaza-rockets-10-07-intl-hnk/h_c7a07e2fe8df32f9707ad702ce9808eb (retrieved January 12, 2024).

⁵ "Israeli Bombardment Destroyed Over 70% of Gaza Homes: Report," *Al Jazeera*, December 31, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/31/israeli-bombardment-destroyed-over-70-of-gaza-homes-media-office> (retrieved January 13, 2024).

⁶ Loveday Morris, "Israel Has Vowed to Destroy Hamas. Yet the Group Remains Largely Intact," *The Washington Post*, December 5, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/12/05/israel-military-offensive-hamas-destruction-gaza/> (retrieved January 12, 2024).

⁷ "US Says Does Not Support Israeli Reoccupation of Gaza after War," *Al Jazeera*, November 7, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/7/us-says-doesnt-support-israeli-occupation-of-gaza-after-war> (retrieved January 13, 2024).

⁸ Monica Torres, "Here Are Your Rights at Work If You Post about Supporting Palestinians," *HuffPost*, 2023, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/palestinians-israel-social-media-job-firing_1_654bca09e4b0e3ecaf8bf964 (retrieved January 14, 2024).

⁹ Lior Gelernter and Motti Regev, "Internet and globalization," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Globalization Studies*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (Routledge, 2010), 63-75.

¹⁰ Mike Corder and Raf Casert, "South Africa Tells UN Court Israel Is Committing Genocide in Gaza as Landmark Case Begins," *AP News*, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/world-court-israel-genocide-gaza-south-africa-774ab3c3d57fd7bcc627602eaf47fd98> (retrieved January 14, 2024).

Contemplating Media Globalisation on World's Issues: A Case of Malaysian Responses to the Tufan al-Aqsa national security defence and asserted their right to self-defence.¹¹ Consequently, people of various background have been organising large-scale rallies around world since October including countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Britain, France, Switzerland and Jordan.¹²

According to academic definitions, genocide involves the use of state power to pursue “extermination” against ethnic, religious, or social groups in the context of ethnic conflicts.¹³ Bringing a lawsuit against a country or national leader for committing genocide requires extensive evidence. An illustration can be found in Omar Al-Bashir, who has been charged by the International Criminal Court for genocide in Darfur.¹⁴ However, successfully prosecuting a country or national leader for genocide depends on their national power and economic influence in the world.

The prolonged Palestinian-Israeli conflict stems from an unsolvable territorial dispute between Palestinians and Israelis that was exacerbated by imperialist interventions over Palestine during the 20th century. This was further complicated by neglecting local opinions and wrestling diplomacy among global powers before and after two world wars. These factors stimulated Jewish nationalism as well as Palestinian nationalism related to land ownership in Palestine.¹⁵

The religious significance of Jerusalem is one of the main reasons for the ongoing conflicts between two sides. Muslims are obligated to pray five times a day, and the Prophet Muhammad’s Night Journey from Mecca to Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the fact that Al-Aqsa Mosque used to be the first qiblah before praying to Mecca, are important parts of Islamic teachings that Muslims follow today.¹⁶ Gaza is also considered a holy city by Muslims because the great-grandfather of Prophet Muhammad, Hashim, is buried there. The construction of As-Sayid Hashim mosque in Gaza city is a commemoration of Hashim’s contribution to the birth of Prophet Muhammad, despite the fact that Prophet Muhammad never met him.¹⁷ Islam teaches people to love their parents and family, so apart from that Gaza has a significant religious value for Muslims.

The situation in Palestine and its dependent territories, including Gaza Strip, is complex and involves religious, historical, political, economic, and geopolitical factors. The struggle for living space can be explained through political speculation. Israel has attempted to separate Palestinians into two zones, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, to maintain their regime. Israel controls other parts of Palestine, either through settlements or by obtaining territories through wars in the 20th century. This has gradually limited living space for Palestinians, making it harder for them to resist Israel.

In today’s digital age of globalisation, accessing news and information has become easier than ever before. With the help of computers and smartphones, people can quickly learn about the latest happenings around the world. Whenever an updated condition is spread through newspapers or social media, people are curious to know about the progress of Palestinians in their struggle for an independent state or whether the Israeli government has taken any action to retaliate against counter-attacks. The dissemination of information in the form of word or video footage is now instantly available to people across the globe. In some instances, journalists and witnesses challenge the age-old censorship laws to see whether graphic and violent photos or videos are allowed to be forwarded based on the principles of freedom of speech and humanitarian rights. However, the stance of newspapers, radio stations, and online news platforms is critical in determining what kind of information is shared with the audience at that moment and how it is presented. These platforms have a significant role to play in shaping public opinion and influencing the decisions of people.

¹¹ Christian Edwards, “Israel Denies Genocide Accusations at Top UN Court, Say War in Gaza Is Self-Defence,” *CNN*, January 12, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/12/middleeast/icj-israel-gaza-hamas-genocide-hearing-hague-day-two-intl/index.html> (retrieved January 14, 2024).

¹² “Pro-Palestine Protest Held Around the World as Gaza War Nears 100 Days,” *Al Jazeera*, January 13, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/13/pro-palestine-demonstrations-around-the-world-as-gaza-war-nears-100-days> (retrieved January 14, 2024).

¹³ James Hughes, “Genocide,” in *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff (Routledge, 2011), 122–123.

¹⁴ “Al-Bashir case—the prosecutor v. Omar Hassan Ahmad Al-Bashir ICC-02/05-01/09”, International Criminal Court <https://www.icc-cpi.int/darfur/albashir> (retrieved on 22nd January 2024)

¹⁵ Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, Kashif Latif, Mohd Nazari Ismail and Mohd Nazrid, “Palestine Conflict: An Another Perspective from the Realm of Confiscation of Land and Legitimization,” *The Journal of Social Sciences Research*, Special Issue 2 (2018): 367–375.

¹⁶ Fadi Al-Rabi, “Islamic Jerusalem—The First Qiblah,” *Journal of Islamic Jerusalem Studies* 10 (2009): 1–26; Vincent Lemire, Katell Berthelot, Julien Loiseau and Yann Potin, *Jerusalem—History of a Global City* (University of California Press, 2022), 100.

¹⁷ Ziad M.M. Shehada, “The Historical Review as a Reference for the Islamic Heritage Restoration (Case Study: As-Sayyid Hashim Mosque),” *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2020): 13–23.

The online debate war over the Gaza crisis is another example of how the internet has become a strategic battleground for both pro-Israeli supporters and sympathisers. Both sides are struggling to persuade more people to join their cause, and the globalised internet technology has made it easier for them to do so.¹⁸ According to Helga Tawil-Souri, this boycott campaign in Malaysia is just one instance of the globalised internet debate that has emerged since the rise of the internet.¹⁹ It demonstrates how the online world has become a platform for strategic warfare between Israel and Palestine.

Why Does It Matter to the Malaysians?

In fact, the matter is of importance not only to Muslims in Malaysia, due to the country's religious identity and political changes. Malaysia is known worldwide for its multicultural society. Historically, due to its strategic location in Southeast Asia, many merchants and preachers - regardless of whether they were Buddhists, Muslims or Christians - came across the Malacca Strait from the Middle East and South Asia to engage in business activities or religious preaching. Coastal Chinese in China also navigated around the South China Sea for trading. Thus, the early form of globalisation was already present in the Malay world before the Great Voyage in the 15th century.²⁰

The arrival of Islam in the Malay world not only spread religion but also changed the religious landscape and led to the rise and fall of Muslim dynasties. Afterward, the arrival of European imperialists began their colonisation of Southeast Asia and also brought cultural shock to the locals. Thus, the cultural resistance campaign took root in the Malay world since the arrival of European imperialists because they were afraid of the cultural erosion and the loss of Islamic inheritance to the next generation. This tragic history deeply affected the local people, especially those who are familiar with colonial history or unable to adapt to modern lifestyles.²¹

During the late Qing period, particularly in Fujian and Guandong, a large number of Chinese people migrated from coastal China provinces to Southeast Asia, including Malaysia. This led to a significant increase in the overseas Chinese population in the region. Along with the Chinese, Arabs, Indians and Europeans also migrated to Southeast Asia for reasons such as trade, preaching religion, and seeking a stable environment. However, the influx of foreigners in the late 19th century resulted in some sorts of social instability, economic conflicts, and political struggles with the Malay rulers.²²

In the 20th century, the modern Islamic ideology underwent significant changes in the Islamic world. After World War II, many Islamic scholars and leaders sought a better way of establishing an Islamic state in Malaysia, taking inspiration from nationalism.²³ The rise of Islamic revivalism (Al-Tajdid Al-Islami) in the mid-20th century provided religious leaders with the ideal opportunity to explore the foundation of a new state, aided by the ideology of returned students from the Middle East. This resulted in the rise of the Islamic party in Malaysia, Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, which called for the institutionalisation of Islamic politics throughout the country to respond to the increasing challenges of Islamic life.²⁴

Parti Islam Se-Malaysia continues to be influential in the northern states of the Malay Peninsula, including Kelantan, Kedah, Perlis, and Terengganu. During Mahathir Mohamad's first term as Prime Minister in the 1980s, he initiated a reform to institutionalise Islam in Malaysia.²⁵ This led to the

¹⁸ Helga Tawil-Souri, "Digital Occupation: Gaza's High-Tech Enclosure," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 2 (2012): 27–43. See also Mohamed Buheji and Dunya Ahmed, "Keeping the Boycott Momentum—from 'WAR on GAZA' Till 'Free-Palestine'," *International Journal of Management (IJM)* 14, no. 7 (2023): 205–229.

¹⁹ Helga Tawil-Souri, "Digital Occupation: Gaza's High-Tech Enclosure," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 2 (2012): 27–43.

²⁰ Julia Zinkina, "A Big History of Globalization—The Emergence of a Global World System," in *A Big History of Globalization*, ed. Julia Zinkina et al. (Springer, 2019), 58–67.

²¹ William Daniel Myer, "Islam and Colonialism: Western Perspective on Soviet Asia" (PhD dissertation, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1999), 73–75. See also Syaimak Ismail, Muhammad Saiful Islam, Noor Syahidah Mohamad Akhir and Azhar Abdul Rahman, "Diplomatic Ties Between the Ottoman Empire and the Malay Sultanate from the 14th to the 19th Centuries," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 19, no. 1 (2024): 93–103.

²² Mohd Fahimi Zakaria and Ashlah Ibrahim, "Chinese Civilization in Malaysia: History and Contribution," *Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2022): 1–6.

²³ Ahmad F. Yousif, "Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia: An Islamic Response to Non-Muslim Concerns," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21, no. 4 (2004): 30–51.

²⁴ Khairudin Aljunied, *Islam in Malaysia—An Entwined History* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 153–154.

²⁵ Julian C.H. Lee, *Islamization and Activism in Malaysia* (ISEAS Publications, 2010), 15–16.

Contemplating Media Globalisation on World's Issues: A Case of Malaysian Responses to the Tufan al-Aqsa creation of Islamic institutes such as Jabatan Kemajuan Agama Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) and International Islamic University Malaysia (UIAM), which were integrated into public governance. Mahathir Mohamad was aware of the potential threats posed by global Islam to Malaysia, and he sought to prevent the Islamic revivalism from destabilising the country's social stability.

Under Malaysia's constitution, Malays enjoy certain privileges that ensure a stable life. This has led to an improvement in the education level and economic condition of Malays. However, in the age of information explosion, a lot of new ideologies were introduced to Malaysia through newspapers, television, and computers, which posed a challenge to Mahathir's governance.²⁶ Mahathir aimed to prevent Islamic revivalism from affecting social stability while prioritising the Malays and emphasising the role of the central government. Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, which inherited the religious politics from Muslim Brotherhood, became the only opposition party that struggled for an ideal Islamic state.²⁷

Subsequent prime ministers followed Mahathir's approach but made some changes to adapt to the changing environment. The differences between UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia lie in their backgrounds and nature. UMNO is an officially endorsed party that advocates Malay Muslim nationalism, while Parti Islam Se-Malaysia is an opposition party that advocates for a full implementation of Islamic government, by respecting democracy to make it compatible with the multi-racial society in Malaysia.

After the 21st century, the influence of urban and rural Malays in society has increased significantly. Successful urbanisation in the west coast, channelised by the Titiwangsa Mountains geographically, has led to a natural movement of people. However, in Sarawak and Sabah, autonomous constitutions have resulted in a different situation. Urban Malays have benefited from the improving economy and become more open-minded, while rural Malays have remained in their villages or kampong. Long-term poverty and living in less developed areas have made them more conservative. This can be seen in election results, which show that development affects voters' decisions.

Undoubtedly, the urban Malays have benefited from the improving economy and have become more open-minded. On the other hand, rural Malays who live in less developed areas and have been trapped in long-term poverty tend to be more conservative. This is evident from the recent election results, which showed that development can impact voters' decisions.²⁸

We should also take into account the growing number of internet users in Malaysia. According to studies, the number of internet users in Malaysia has been steadily increasing in recent years, with an internet penetration rate of 92.7% in 2022. Almost three-fourths of these users are social media users. This may be due to their ability to speak English or use Latin writing, which makes it easier to use smartphones.²⁹

At the same time, popular newspapers in Malaysia such as *Berita Harian*, *Utusan*, *Sinar Harian*, *Harakah*, and *Harian Metro*, which have been digitalised for almost three decades, represent Malay Muslim nationalism identity respectively. *Harakah*, in particular, is a mouthpiece of Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, which strongly advocates for the establishment of an Islamic state in Malaysia.

These are the reasons why Malay Islamic policy has remained entrenched in Malaysia until now. The current Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, is a devout Muslim who is associated with Islamic movement in the Middle East. He is keen to follow in the footsteps of his predecessors and enthusiastically promote his ideal Islamic government after his long-awaited desire to become Prime Minister is finally fulfilled. Given that the Islamic influence has grown more powerful than the secular side since the 15th general election in 2022, effecting any changes in Malaysia without consideration on Malay-Muslims majority would be extremely difficult.

²⁶ Khairudin Aljunied, *Islam in Malaysia*, 186.

²⁷ Sven Schottmann, *Mahathir's Islam: Mahathir Mohamad on Religion and Modernity in Malaysia* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 180–181.

²⁸ Elvin Ong, "Urban versus Rural Voters in Malaysia: More Similarities Than Differences," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 42, no. 1 (2020): 28–57.

²⁹ *Internet Users Survey 2022* (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2022), 10, 15.

Real politics can also explain the emergence of the current boycott campaign. The increasing of opposition power has raised the attention of the conservative Islamists, who repeatedly emphasise the importance of Malay Muslim identity through uncontested issues. This include showing support towards those who live in conflict and war zone.

Some writers refer to this condition as “Muslim Millenarianism.” In Malaysia, Islam is becoming more popular and comprehensive due to the fast growth of internet technology and the Muslim population in the 21st century.³⁰ The outbreak of the boycott campaign in 2023 was a reasonable phenomenon under the current social condition of internet generation and media globalisation.

McDonalds and HP products

The Gaza crisis has become a hot topic in Malaysia since October 2023. The main concern is the official attitudes towards the crisis in a two-thirds Muslim-populated Malaysia. Although Malaysia has not declared itself in its constitution as an Islamic country, the population composition and constitution prove that it is a de facto Islamic country. Therefore, it is important for the Anwar’s government to respond to the Gaza crisis wisely without provoking Western countries or causing economic impact.

The Rise of Globalisation

Globalisation has benefited all of us since the emergence of computers and smartphones. These electronic devices have become our medium of getting information or for the convenience of personal needs in daily life. However, how should we receive and accept the news or information among these message-flooding every day? This involves an important question—mega corporations are controlling our daily life by taking over different types of chain stores. They usually acquire larger capital than the past with the help of globalised division of labour and regional integration of economic alliances. The capitalists aim to reduce the production cost and increase profit. Their economic powers are larger than the political power either in local country or in the international society.

As these transnational chain stores associated with our daily use, including the supermarket, fast-food shop, electronic devices and journalism, once the mega corporations integrate them under the same holders, can we say that the news we read from the newspaper or social media is fairly reported? We cannot exclude the possibility of media manipulation over controversial issues, especially those that might have shaken the economic interests of those mega corporations or transnational chain stores, such as McDonald’s and HP products.

The Rise of McDonald and its Arrival in Malaysia

Since its rise in the 1970s, McDonald’s, a famous fast-food shop originally from America, has become a symbol of globalisation. It is widely welcomed by children and students due to their crispy burgers and fries. McDonald’s also needs to bear the social burden as the public expectation, not only to earn money or help children for their birthday parties and provide happy childhood memories but to join charities for the needy too. Somewhere with McDonald’s branches implies that a certain amount of population and a satisfactory degree of urbanisation are already provided there too.

The first branch of McDonald’s in Malaysia was opened at Jalan Bukit Bintang in 1982, which is a famous business zone in Kuala Lumpur. After that, McDonald’s started its hybridisation plan with local customs in Malaysia, including the Ayam Goreng (Fried Chicken), Nasi Lemak, Bubur Ayam (Chicken porridge), and launched nationwide. In order to comply with business regulations, especially as 63% of the population is Muslim in Malaysia, McDonald’s is also required to match the Halal standard.³¹ Additionally, McDonald’s in Malaysia and Singapore sold its franchise to the Alireza family, a famous tycoon in Saudi Arabia.³²

³⁰ Muhammad Haziq bin Jani, “The Rise of Muslim Millenarianism in Malaysia,” *The Diplomat*, March 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/the-rise-of-muslim-millenarianism-in-malaysia/> (retrieved on 18th January 2024).

³¹ “Our History,” McDonald’s Malaysia, accessed January 18, 2024, <http://mcdonalds.com.my/company/history>.

³² Ching Yee Choo, “McDonald’s Malaysia and Singapore Sold to Saudi Group,” *Nikkei Asia*, December 5, 2016, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/McDonald-s-Malaysia-and-Singapore-sold-to-Saudi-group> (retrieved January 18, 2024)

Unfortunately, the public does not focus on this news while the boycott campaign reached Malaysia several times especially in late 2023 and in 2024, and they are still claiming its association with America and supported Israel. It seems that this is partly contributed by McDonald's who distribute food for free to the Israeli army during the crisis.

The Coming of Digital Age

Meanwhile, the coming of digital era also contributed to the fast changing of globalisation. Since the 1990s, computers have become increasingly popular due to their cheaper selling price. This is a result of the globalised division of labour in manufacturing industries and the rising regional integration of economic alliances such as ASEAN and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

With the outbreak of Covid-19, the usage of computers, smartphones, and tablet computers for daily use and food consumption has increased significantly. This is because we need to prevent further infection and protect ourselves, our communities, and our countries. As a result, almost every household now has at least one computer and smartphone. Those who have a better living condition may have two or more gadgets or tablet computers, (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2021).³³

The establishment and expansion of McDonald's as a fast-food chain in America can be attributed to Richard James McDonald and Maurice James McDonald in 1940. However, the global management shift for McDonald's was facilitated by Harry J. Sonneborn, an American businessman of Jewish descent. This transition posed challenges for McDonald's entry into Islamic markets, particularly due to historical associations. The company encountered resistance despite being far removed from Israel's founding date as it was perceived as linked with Israel.³⁴

On the other hand, computer technology gained significance after the 1960s when its modern applications were introduced to the public following developments driven by individuals like Bill Gates and Dave Packard before the outbreak of Second World War. The origins of HP predominantly lie in America without any association with Israel or Jews according to records documented by John Minck about HP history concerning their operations within US borders.³⁵

While the modern significance of computer was invented and gradually known by the public after 1960s, they started to put in force to the production. According to the records wrote by John Minck about the history of HP, the establishment of HP was mainly based in America. It never associated with Israel or Jews. Apart from that, the involvement of HP with the current regime of Israel is undeniable.

In terms of media coverage related to Gaza crisis, different agendas are evident between Palestinian-led media which focuses on reporting Palestinian hardships under Israeli rule and Hamas-led media which advocates extreme measures against Israel aiming at reclaiming statehood due to this stance Hamas has long been designated a terror organisation by Western countries including those that align with Western ideologies.³⁶ In actual political dynamics Israeli-led media garners more attention from Western nations owing partly due its strong international business networks whereas contrasting views prevail among local entities such as Palestinian-led versus Hamas-led media.³⁷

Why McDonald but Not HP Products?

It's important to consider why McDonald's was targeted more frequently than other companies in boycott campaigns in Malaysia, despite there being many Israel-associated or American-linked companies present there. The answer is simple: giving up McDonald's is relatively easy and has a low

³³ "Number of Tablet Users in Malaysia 2013–2028," Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/974690/malaysia-number-of-tablet-users/> (Retrieved January 19, 2024).

³⁴ Steven Mark Adelson, "McDonald's and the New Franchising Paradigm," *Financial History - Museum of American Finance* (2012), 15–19.

³⁵ John Minck, *Inside HP: A Narrative History of Hewlett-Packard from 1939–1990*, HP Memory Project, <https://www.hpmemoryproject.org/an/pdf/Hpnar101107.pdf> (retrieved on January 19, 2024).

³⁶ Somdeep Sen, "Journalism as Resistance: Contextualizing Media Culture in the Gaza Strip," *Asian Politics and Policy* 6, no. 3 (2014): 487–492.

³⁷ Faiza Virani, "Western Media When It Comes to Israel and Palestine: Tale of Two Very Different Realities," *Business Recorder*, 2023, <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40267203/western-media-when-it-comes-to-israel-and-palestine-tale-of-two-very-different-realities> (retrieved January 21, 2024).

cost, whereas giving up other products like computers or phones is harder and more costly. This is especially true for people living in rural areas who have lower incomes and cannot afford to buy expensive electronics.³⁸

In Malaysia, households earning more than RM6000 per month are mainly those who live in urban areas. However, people living in rural areas like Kelantan, Kedah, Sabah, and Perlis struggle to find jobs that pay RM3000-5000 per month, which makes it difficult for them to afford electronics like computers and phones. This information was updated in 2022 and the situation has not much improved as of 2024.³⁹

The cost of electronic devices in Malaysia is still prohibitively expensive for most people, with prices ranging from USD300-500 or RM1000-1500 on popular online shopping platforms such as Shopee, Samsung, and Apple. Statistics show that the average household income in Malaysia ranges from RM3000-6000 per month, and only urban residents may earn above RM7000. Very few residents earn above RM10000 or more. Nevertheless, the average household income in 2022 is 20-30 times higher than it was in the 1970s, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia.⁴⁰

Malaysia is considered a middle-range developing country that has partially achieved upper-middle-income status, as defined by the World Bank in 2023.⁴¹ A country that earns USD4666-13845 GNI per capita annually is considered a middle-income country by the World Bank. This means that Malaysia's purchasing power is not weak, but it is far from being a strong purchasing country. Many people can only afford high-quality computers and phones by paying for them in monthly instalments, which is becoming more common on platforms like Shopee and Lazada.

Electronic devices like computers and phones are essential for everyday communication, browsing news updates, and online learning. As a result, it is unlikely that products associated with America or Israel will be the target of boycotts although it may be included in the boycott list such as of BDS Movement. Fast-food, on the other hand, is not essential and can be replaced by choosing a different brand or even opting to forego it for the sake of a healthy body. Obesity is a significant problem in Malaysia, according to medical research conducted by experts.⁴²

It has been noted that McDonald's has fewer outlets in Malaysia compared to other popular fast-food chains. In fact, it has almost three times fewer outlets than Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), and even Pizza Hut has more outlets than McDonald's.⁴³ This discrepancy could be attributed to the life style of Malaysian who do not focus on eating burgers but mostly like to have chicken, which for some people the KFC menu is perceived as more delicious and crispy than McDonald's menu. Nevertheless, McDonald's success in cultural globalisation over the past three decades has created an image of cultural imperialism, making it more susceptible to social instability and affecting its sales performance, particularly in Malaysia where it is a relatively significant fast-food chain.⁴⁴

The boycott campaign against McDonald's also raised an important question about its impact on the working class.⁴⁵ For those working in fast-food or electronic stores, the employees' background and socioeconomic status are essential in determining the success of the boycott. Fast-food jobs are often seen as a way for people from low-income states, to improve their financial situation as they require

³⁸ Dursun Yener, "Social Impact in Consumer Behaviour—Consumer Boycotts as a Consumerism Activity," in *Socio-Economic Perspectives on Consumer Engagement and Buying Behaviour*, ed. Hans Ruediger Kaufmann and Mohammed Fateh Ali Khan Panni (IGI Global, 2017), 26-31.

³⁹ Hana Naz Harun, "Households Income in Malaysia on the Rise, Says DOSM," *New Straits Times*, July 2023, <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/07/935920/households-income-malaysia-rise-says-dosm> (retrieved January 20, 2024).

⁴⁰ Department of Statistics Malaysia, "Household Income Survey Report 2022 (Malaysia & States)," accessed May 13, 2025, <https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/household-income-survey-report-malaysia-states> (retrieved May 13, 2025).

⁴¹ Nada Hamadah, Catherine Van Rompaey, and Eric Metreau, "World Bank Group Country Classifications by Income Level for FY24," *World Bank*, June 30, 2023, (retrieved January 19, 2024).

⁴² Kimberly Wong Yui Y'ng and Moy Foong Ming, "Fast-Food and Obesity," *The Sun*, 2023, https://thesun.my/home_news/fast-food-and-obesity-DE10722890 (retrieved January 20, 2024).

⁴³ Nurul Atiqah Mazlan, "Queuing Application in McDonald's Sungai Dua, Penang," *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2020), 702-710.

⁴⁴ Douglas Kellner, "Theorizing/Resisting McDonaldization: A Multiperspectivist Approach," in *Resisting McDonaldization*, ed. Barry Smart (Sage Publications, 2012), 186-206.

⁴⁵ Hadi Azmi, "Malaysians Hit Back as McDonald's Franchisee Sues over Israel Boycott: Lost a Customer for Life," *South China Morning Post*, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/economics/article/3246901/malaysians-hit-back-mcdonalds-franchisee-sues-over-israel-boycott-lost-customer-life> (retrieved January 21, 2024).

less specialised skills and are easier to learn. On the other hand, promoting and selling computers or smartphones may require a certain level of expertise, which can be a barrier for those from low-income families. To quell public anger, McDonald's donated RM1 million (around USD220000) to the Palestinians and issued a statement distancing itself from McDonald's in Israel.⁴⁶ They also emphasised that all McDonald's outlets in Malaysia are Muslim-owned as of October 15, 2023.

Why did the Muslims in Malaysia link McDonald's to the Gaza crisis? It is likely this is because supporters of Gaza believed that McDonald's was founded by Americans, and since the American government views Israel as a key ally in the Middle East, they concluded that McDonald's would support Israeli troops. There was also a photo that has been widely circulated showing Israel's army who happened to be eating McDonald's product. The core idea among these individuals was that those who support Israel or provide assistance to Israeli-linked entities would be considered enemies or betrayers of Palestinians, making them targets for boycotts.⁴⁷

They viewed dining at a restaurant endorsed by what they perceived as murderers as immoral and disgraceful. Driven by the Ummah concept — which obligates Muslims to support others facing difficulties or enemies according to Islamic teachings in Al-Quran and Al-Hadith — they passionately supported Palestinians and called for actions such as “Free Palestine,” “Save Gaza,” “Condemn oppressors and silencers!,” and “End the Israeli occupation!” On top of this, cognitive bias played a role through illusory correlation based on people's preconceived expectations or stereotypical knowledge.⁴⁸ Moreover, there are those who heavily focused their attention on fast-food shops, with McDonald's experiencing significant negative impact from this boycott campaign compared to other American-associated or Israel-linked establishments like Nestle Milo and coffee. This selective attention means that McDonald's garnered more focus than others—leading it to being encoded into memory better—and subsequently affected real-world consumer behaviour.⁴⁹ (Klaus Fiedler, 2004)

Those who are in support of the boycott seem do not affected by the news that the franchisee of McDonald's in Singapore and Malaysia was sold to Saudi Arabia in 2016. The franchise is now fully Muslim-owned and caters to Muslim customers in Malaysia and Singapore, which is reflected in their menu. Additionally, the boycott campaign has slowed down rapidly, although sometimes at it high, likely because the Palestinian conflict has become a permanent issue and people have become desensitised to it.

Attitudes of Non-Muslims

Due to religious and ethnic differences with majority Malaysian Malays, there is a pattern of confrontation in politics and social life. Not all non-Muslims support the Palestinians, and those who do are motivated by factors such as sympathy of war victims, human rights issues, socioeconomic status and personal gain, rather than religious obligation.

The Chinese community in Malaysia for instance, is known for their business acumen and social skills, while the Indian community is known for their proficiency and excellence in science and technology. Although politically denominated by Bumiputras, both communities enjoy a high standard of living due to their hard work and dedication. The top 10 billionaires in Malaysia are mainly Chinese and Indian, including Robert Kuok (郭鶴年), the late Ananda Krishnan, Lim Kok Thay (林國泰, son of Lim Goh Tong, the founder of Genting Group). Only three families in the top 50 richest billionaires in Malaysia are Malays, including Syed Mokhtar Al-Bukhary, Syed Azman Syed Ibrahim, and Azman Hashim.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Michael Dorgan, “McDonald's Malaysia Sues Pro-Palestinian Group for Israel Boycott: Report,” *Fox Business*, December 30, 2023, <https://www.foxbusiness.com/fox-news-world/mcdonalds-malaysia-sues-pro-palestine-group-for-boycott-report> (retrieved January 21, 2024).

⁴⁷ Kat Tenberge, “Social Media Fuels Boycotts against McDonald's and Starbucks over Israel-Hamas War,” *NBC News*, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/social-media-fuels-boycotts-mcdonalds-starbucks-israel-hamas-war-rcna125121> (retrieved January 20, 2024).

⁴⁸ Klaus Fiedler, “Illusory Correlation,” in *Cognitive Illusions: A Handbook on Fallacies and Biases in Thinking, Judgment and Memory*, ed. Rudiger F. Pohl (Psychology Press, 2004), 97–98.

⁴⁹ Klaus Fiedler, “Illusory Correlation,” 102–103.

⁵⁰ Anuradha Raghunathan and Naazneen Karmali, “Malaysia's 50 Richest,” *Forbes*, 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/lists/malaysia-billionaires/?sh=63a134784c24> (retrieved May 14, 2025).

There is a common belief among Malaysians that Chinese excel in business due to their practical mindset, strong communication skills with people from different backgrounds, open-mindedness, tolerance towards different cultures, regular innovative approaches to entrepreneurial management, and a long history of business practices in the Malay archipelago. This is considered to be a result of their civilisational heritage, which is different from the common values of Malays who emphasise on religion and customs.⁵¹

As a result, some would say that they do not pay much attention to the Gaza crisis as compared to the Malays. While some intellectuals may speak out for justice in Gaza, their opinions are not as influential as those of the Malays. Interestingly, the boycott campaign against Israel did not affect Sarawak and Sabah, which are also part of Malaysia. The people in these states were self-disciplined and did not harm non-Muslims. In fact, they even enjoyed discounts at boycotted restaurants, which was welcomed by netizens who saw it as an opportunity to enjoy fast-food at a lower price. People can easily browse for big sales on McDonald's website in regard to this.⁵²

Conclusion

Regardless of media globalisation on world's issues related to political and religious debates, Malaysians generally agree that a more harmonious and tolerant environment must be created. On the Gaza crisis, whether we like it or not, the boycott campaign has had an impact on Malaysia's economic recovery, particularly on those working in the accommodation and food service industry, which has become the third largest group of workers in the past ten years according to the Ministry of Economy.⁵³ The first two largest groups are wholesale and retail trade, and manufacturing. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing also employ a significant number of people, as they are linked to the logistics and commodity trading involved in supplying restaurants. This indicates that Malaysia has yet to become a highly developed country, and that blue-collar and physical labour remains a major trend. As a result, some have argued that the grassroots are the real losers in this boycott campaign although some are still strong in their boycott.

We understand that the freedom of speech, behaviour and individual choice, including consumption behaviour, are essential to Malaysia's success as a leading multicultural society in Southeast Asia. These cornerstones have been taken as an example of a diversified and tolerant society by scholars and politicians. It can be said that the boycott campaign has had unexpected negative consequences for underprivileged groups, including job loss and financial difficulties in supporting their families. However, many are still in sympathy to those people killed in Gaza, so they have chosen to support the boycott campaign despite some voices try not to boycott any products as a fear on job loss. Whatever happened, it is important to acknowledge that we are responsible for our own actions and should not try to force our stance on others. Instead, we should use evidence-based reasoning to persuade them.

We are fortunate to live in a place without wars or battles. However, we can still contribute to solving conflicts based on our abilities. We can also discuss this topic with our friends, neighbours, teachers, and scholars. Although achieving a peaceful agreement between Israel and Palestine may seem difficult in this century, we can learn from it.

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⁵¹ Wan Norhasniah Wan Husin, "Business Dominance among the Malays and Chinese in Malaysia from a Civilizational Perspective," *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 3, no. 4 (2013): 360–363.

⁵² McDonald's Malaysia, "Promotions," <https://www.mcdonalds.com.my/promotion>. (retrieved January 22, 2024).

⁵³ Ministry of Economy Malaysia, "Employed Persons by Industry 1982–2019," <https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/2020-09/1.4.pdf> (retrieved January 22, 2024).

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