

Consumers on a Mission: A Qualitative Study of an Ongoing Consumer Boycott

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Abstract

Despite the growth in the number of boycotts, marketing has not paid much attention to consumer boycott behavior. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to investigate one of the most heated consumer boycotts, namely the Canadian Seafood Boycott which began on March 29, 2005, to determine what drives consumers to boycott and whether the Canadian Seafood Boycott is likely to be effective (i.e., stimulate participation from consumers) as well as successful (i.e., convince the Canadian Government to outlaw the hunt of all seals permanently). Accordingly, this study analyses comments contributed by consumers who signed an online petition to permanently end the seal hunt. The findings show that signatories of the petition, in general, are very angry and upset about the Canadian Seal Hunt. The comments left by the signatories reflect, as previously suggested, that consumers boycott to meet a number of objectives, namely instrumental, expressive, and punitive objectives.

Keywords: consumer boycotts, boycott behavior, Canadian seal hunt

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It has been stated that “boycotts of businesses are reaching epidemic proportions in America largely because they are so successful” (Anonymous 1990). Accordingly, it is not surprising that Friedman (1999) reports that business leaders generally perceive boycotts as the most effective technique that consumers have at their disposal to impact company policies. However, despite the growth in both the number of boycotts and the number of consumers participating in them, marketing has not been paying a lot of attention to boycotts and consumer boycott behavior (Ettenson and Klein 2005; John and Klein 2003). Nevertheless, there appears to be a body of accumulated knowledge about boycotts and boycott dynamics of interest to marketers. Boycotts have been identified as a form of consumer behavior congruent with the marketing concept (Klein, Smith and John 2004). In other words, company targeted by boycott have obviously neglected their focus on researching and understanding their consumers, and therefore severely fail to satisfy customer needs and wants. Consequently, consumers feel compelled to use boycotts to communicate an extreme degree of dissatisfaction and displeasure to the boycott target by withholding their dollar votes.

Currently, there are a number of ongoing consumer boycotts, but none seems to be as controversial and heated as the Canadian Seafood Boycott which began on March 29, 2005—the first day of the spring seal hunt that year. Here we see the Canadian Government (CBC News 2006) and much of the Canadian Press (MSNBC News Services 2004) pitched against many of the world’s animal welfare and rights organizations (Boycott Canadian Seafood 2007), international politicians and governments (The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2006), a growing number of celebrities (Zeit 2007) as well as an increasing number of consumers around the globe who have pledged to participate in the boycott to force the Canadian Government to end the seal hunt for good. To illustrate, on November 14, 2007, the search term “Canada seal hunt” resulted in 1.49 million hits on *Google*, the search term “petition Canada to stop the seal hunt” showed 149,000 hits, and the search term “pledge to boycott Canadian seafood” came up with 50,400 results.

Consequently, the purpose of this investigation is to examine what drives consumers to boycott and to determine whether the Canadian Seafood Boycott is likely to be effective (i.e., stimulate participation from consumers) as well as successful (i.e., convince the Canadian Government to outlaw the hunt of all seals permanently) (Garrett 1987; John and Klein 2003).

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Boycotts as Drivers of Social Justice

Miller et al. (1992) note that the first U.S. consumer boycott can be traced back to the Boston Tea Party when colonists tried to “turn economic clout into political power” (Glickman 2005). Boycotts have played an important role in the political culture of the U.S. ever since, as consumers have realized that they can use their “organized purchasing power” to better their own personal lives as well as that of others (Glickman 2005). In other words, in the U.S. boycotts are moral acts (Smith 1987), drivers of social justice, and are very often used to improve the lives of the “seemingly powerless” (Friedman 1999, p. 225). Consequently, it is not surprising that over 40% of Fortune 50 companies may be boycott targets at any given time (John and Klein 2003).

Boycott dynamics

John and Klein (2003, p. 1198) define “a boycott as occurring when a number of people abstain from purchase of a product, at the same time, as a result of the same egregious act or behavior, but not necessarily for the same reasons.” This egregious act or behavior does not necessarily have to directly impact the physical wellbeing of the potential boycotter; a consumer might decide to boycott because the target is causing harm or injustice to a third party. Any increase in egregiousness is likely to increase boycott participation (John and Klein 2003). Further, the more emotional and self-explanatory the egregious act, the higher the boycott participation (Hickman 2005). Interestingly, if a consumer believes that the act/behavior of an organization is egregious, the purchase of the boycotted product might trigger feelings of guilt because a purchase can be seen as supporting the boycott target and the egregious act. These feelings can increase boycott participation and further cause a consumer to continue with the

boycott (John and Klein 2003). In addition, the higher a consumer's financial contribution to the nongovernment organization (NGO) advocating the boycott, the more likely the consumer will refrain from purchasing any of the target's products (Innes 2006). In this context, NGOs are defined as nonprofit organizations that "combine resource mobilization, information provision, and activism to advocate for changes in certain issue areas" (Spar and La Mure 2003, p. 79).

A boycott can be considered *effective* if there is participation, no matter how small, and it is considered *successful* if the boycott target ceases the egregious act or behavior. Generally, the more effective a boycott, the more successful it is likely to be (Garrett 1987; John and Klein 2003). It is obvious that the reaction of the boycott target directly affects the boycott's success, but it also can influence the boycott's effectiveness because the target's response to the confrontation has the potential to kindle publicity that focuses on the issue (Clouder and Harrison 2005). Even though some targets yield to the NGO's demands and thus may be able to prevent a boycott from being launched, others respond in a manner that is considered insufficient or even insulting and thus, in effect, aid the NGO in the recruitment of new members to the cause (Clouder and Harrison 2005). However, the more the target is committed to the behavior or policy in question, the higher the target's level of resistance, even though the boycott might reduce its profitability and harm its image (Garrett 1987). As Innes (2006) points out, if neither NGO nor the boycott target are willing to compromise, a boycott can continue indefinitely.

A trend toward consumer empowerment and sovereignty

The Internet has turned into be a very cost-effective and quick way of educating millions of consumers about boycotts. Therefore, it does not seem surprising that by 2005 almost two thirds of U.S. consumers stated that they participate in at least one boycott per year (Glickman 2005). And the trend seems to continue. Pires, Stanton and Rita (2006, p. 938) find that the widespread adoption of information and communication technologies "is enabling an uncontrolled growth of consumer empowerment," since it has turned "information scarcity" into "information democracy" or "transparency." This ease of securing information has empowered consumers to hold companies accountable for their egregious acts and/or force organizations to change their behavior, and has therefore led to an increase in consumer

sovereignty (Klein, Smith and John 2004), which has been defined “as the power of consumers to determine, from among the offerings of producers of goods and services, what goods and services are and will be produced and capitalized” (Shaw, Newholm and Dickinson 2006, p. 1052). Interestingly, even as this widespread dissemination of information and the tremendous growth in virtual communities in combination with the increase in economic globalization, de-regulation, and competition has led to a proliferation of consumer sovereignty, it has simultaneously reduced the sovereignty of national governments and individual businesses (Harrison 2005).

The potential costs of consumer boycotts

Gelb (1995) concludes that boycotts can be very expensive to the target. For example, US consumers were apparently so angry about France’s refusal to join the war against Iraq that they decided to boycott French wines (Chavis and Leslie 2007). The boycott was so powerful that it lowered weekly sales by 26% during its peak, and by approximately 13% during the six months the boycott lasted, leading to a total loss of \$112 million. Even though Spar and La Mure (2003) agree that boycott targets usually fold because of the implicit threat of financial losses, they assert that organizations also need to consider the damage to their reputation that a boycott can cause. It is worth noting that brand image is harmed not only among boycotters, but also non-boycotters even though they might not be ready to take action. Klein, Smith and John (2004) consider this indirect effect to be potentially much more harmful to an organization in the long run than the direct loss of sales. For example, in 1998 Nike yielded to boycotters’ demands because founder Phil Knight found that after seven years of boycotts, “the Nike product has become synonymous with slave wages, forced overtime, and arbitrary abuse. I truly believe the American consumer doesn’t want to buy products made under abusive conditions” (Spar and La Mure 2003, p. 91).

Boycott functions/objectives

Boycott actions differ in terms of their function or objective (Friedman 1999; John and Klein 2003). Even though NGOs generally call and organize boycotts to force the boycott target to change its behavior (i.e., instrumental boycotts), they could call boycotts to simply vent frustration with their target (i.e., expressive boycotts), or to punish the boycott target (i.e., punitive boycotts) for having taken actions

that are irreversible (Friedman 1999). Although consumer participation in boycotts can be categorized by the same functions, we agree with John and Klein (2003) that consumer boycott actions can be more complex than those of NGOs. Accordingly, we extend Ettenson and Klein's reasoning (2005) by suggesting that for individual consumers these three boycott objectives are not necessarily independent of each other, and that consequently, consumers can boycott for any or all of these three reasons. In the case of the Canadian Seafood Boycott, we therefore expect consumers to participate because they are angry that the Canadian Government is allowing and supporting the seal hunt and thus they want to express their anger; they further want to punish the Canadian Government and the fishermen for killing the seals, which are irreversible acts; and most importantly, they want to coerce the Canadian Government into permanently outlawing the commercial hunt.

The First Seal War

The first evidence of an international movement protesting the seal hunt can be traced back to the 1955 hunt. That year, Drs. Harry Lillie and Joseph Cunningham traveled to the ice with the sole purpose of documenting the seal hunt on film. This was the first time sealers were officially accused of skinning seals alive, a charge that has accompanied sealing ever since (Watson 2003). Events unfolding in 1964 mark the "official" beginning of the anti-sealing movement (Zeit 2007). The production company Artek was commissioned by the Quebec Government and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to produce a film with the goal of attracting tourists to the area. Artek decided to focus on the seal hunt to give viewers an idea about the rough live of sealers (Watson 2003). The film, *Les Phoques* (The Seals), also included "a scene in which a seal is skinned alive and its carcass left flailing on the ice" (Canadian Geographic 2007). As the film made its way across Europe and the U.S., public outcry was immense and brought anti-hunt expeditions to the ice with the goal of ending the seal hunt. The Canadian Government responded by (1) establishing steep fines for those who interfered with the seal hunt; (2) impounding ships and helicopters belonging to members of the anti-sealing movement; (3) arresting and imprisoning protesters (Lee 1989); and (4) passing the first regulations addressing the exploitation and humane killing

of seals (Zeit 2007). These Seal Protection Regulations regulated the quota, the dates of the hunt, killing methods, as well as required the licensing of sealers, vessels, and aircrafts (Canadian Geographic 2007).

From 1974 to 1976, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) employed an ad agency to create the media campaign “Stop the Seal Hunt” (Zeit 2007). The “sophisticated” campaign featured French actress Brigit Bardot who condemned the killing of seal babies, and came at a price tag of \$1 million Canadian (CAD) (Malling 1978). Not being ready to budge, the Newfoundland Government announced plans for an international campaign that was intended to defend the seal hunt. The cost for that campaign was \$1 million CAD. Despite these efforts, IFAW was winning the media war (Malling 1978).

The European Community banned the import of whitecoat (i.e., harp seal pup) and blueback (i.e., hooded seal pup) pelts in 1983. Since the European Community used to import 75 percent of all Canadian seal pelts, the market collapsed (Canadian Geographic 2007). Immediately after the announcement of the ban, a seafood boycott organized by the IFAW began in Great Britain (Canadian Geographic 2007; CBC Archives 1984) and was extended to the United States in late 1984 (Best 2004). In 1987, the Canadian Government restricted the hunting of seal pups (Canadian Geographic 2007). According to the new regulations, whitecoats and bluebacks could no longer be hunted until they begin to moult, which occurs at age 10 to 14 days or 15 to 16 months, respectively (Fisheries and Aquaculture Management 2002).

In the aftermath, Lee (1989) stated that the “seal war” (1989, p. 38) had been, from its very beginning, a moral conflict. He further observed that the anti-sealing movement boasted the better communicators, who were adept in “capturing media attention with a variety of sensational tactics” (1989, p. 38). These tactics habitually provoked Canadian politicians as well as the Canadian press to emotional outbursts such as the following, which is attributed to John Allen Fraser, the minister in charge of sealing in 1984: “Let's not forget who we are dealing with, we are dealing with blackmailers, with liars, with fanatics, so obviously no rational argument can convince fanatics, people that I would call fascists” (as cited by Lee 1989, p. 38).

Events Leading to the Second/Current Seal War

On December 18, 1995, Canadian Fisheries Minister, Brian Tobin, announced an increased total allowable catch of 250,000 for the 1996 seal hunt (IMMA 1995). He stated that according to a recent report from the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, the concern about “ever increasing seal populations” ... “as a significant constraint to the recovery of groundfish stocks” is very relevant.” This marked the official revival of the seal hunt by the Canadian Government (Kauder et al. 2006), and significant government subsidies were used to rebuild the industry (CIBE 2001).

In 1996, members of IFAW disguised as photographers of a U.S. hunting magazine managed to videotape the hunt. The images caught on tape convinced the Newfoundland Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to finally join the anti-sealing movement, and further shamed the sealing industry (Brosnahan 1997). As Brosnahan stated on CBC’s *The World at Six* “It’s a charge that just won’t go away: inhumane hunters, suffering seals.” The video showed, “among many other bloody scenes a sealer skinning a live seal after dragging it over the ice with a hook.”

In the early 2000s, the seal war finally heated up and has led yet again to severe political confrontation. For example, when a U.S. family contacted all Canadian Senators to voice concerns about the “horrible” and “inhumane” seal hunt, Senator Céline Hervieux-Payette responded by describing what she finds horrible about her neighbor to the south: “The daily massacre of innocent people in Iraq, the execution of prisoners—mainly blacks—in American prisons, the massive sale of handguns to Americans, the destabilization of the entire world by the American government’s aggressive foreign policy” (CBC News 2006).

Considering that marketing theory and practice generally focus on satisfying consumer needs and wants, such harsh reactions by a government official to one of Canada’s most important target markets are puzzling and counterproductive, especially in light of the fact that sealing contributes very little to the value of the Newfoundland Fishery (CBC News 2007) and provides seasonal employment to relatively few individuals (Klapper 2007). Throughout the years, the value of the hunt has been estimated at 0.06% to 0.09% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Newfoundland (DFO 2007; Southey 1997). Even in 2006, when harp seal pelts brought a record price of \$104 CAD each, the contribution of the hunt to the

GDP of Newfoundland was reported at 0.12% (DFO 2007; Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2007), and its contribution to Canada's GDP was 0.0022% (CIA 2007; U.S. Department of Agriculture 2007). In terms of employment, only about 4,000 to 6,000 fishermen participate in the annual seal hunt as an off-season activity (Klapper 2007) to supplement their annual income by an average of \$1500 Canadian before expenses (The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2006).

METHODS

Research Methodology

In securing and analyzing the data, we used “netnography,” a qualitative research methodology developed by Kozinets (2002). Netnography can be defined as the online equivalent of ethnography and offers a number of advantages, such as that it makes use of publicly available information “to understand the needs and decision influences of relevant consumer groups” (Kozinets 2002, p. 62). Netnography can also be conducted unobtrusively. Even though Kozinets suggests that the relative scarcity of social cues provided by online contexts might impede trustworthiness (i.e., validity), he explains that netnography allows to uniquely render the behavior or act—rather than the individual—the ultimate unit of analysis, and therefore this lack of social cues and demographic information is not likely to impede data analysis.

Description of the Dataset

The textual discourse of the present research is the outcome of an online petition that was posted on a virtual community that is frequented by over 7 million consumers who are interested in ethical and social issues, including matters relating to animal welfare/rights. The petition was posted by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) which counts about 10 million members—or one in every 30 persons—and is thus the largest NGO focusing on animal welfare in the U.S. (HSUS 2007). The petition was posted on March 22, 2007 and its goal of 50,000 valid signatures was reached on May 20, 2007. It showed the picture of a sealer lifting his hakapik (i.e., a type of club) to crush the skull of a juvenile harp seal as the seal looks up at him. The petition stated that of the 325,000 seals killed during the 2006 seal hunt most were “as young as 12 days of age.” It further reported that more than 440,000 consumers had

joined the boycott to date, and that snow crab exports to the U.S. had declined by \$350 million CAD since the beginning of the boycott. Even though signatories have to be registered users of the virtual community to sign any of the petitions, they can choose to remain anonymous. Signatories were asked to declare their country and state of origin and also to add a message to the Canadian Government explaining why they were joining the boycott. To help streamline the data analysis, we decided to focus on the messages generated by consumers in the U.S. Of the 50,000 consumers who signed the petition, 46,228 originated from the U.S. A total of 17,525 U.S. consumers left a message for the Canadian Government; 2,018 of these messages were left by consumers who chose to remain anonymous; 15,478 by consumers who identified themselves; and 29 were either unrelated (15) or pro-sealing (14).

Ethical Issues

It has been argued that consumers who post messages in a public online area have, in effect, given implicit informed consent. Consequently, providing anonymity to those consumers who post these messages cancels the need to formally request informed consent (see Sudweeks and Rafaeli 1995). Accordingly, we have disguised the identities of the consumers whose comments we summarize or cite. Boycotters are referred to by the number assigned to them and their gender, if it could be derived from the signatories' names. In addition, the classifications "anonymous" versus "identified" were used when summarizing or citing comments.

Data Analysis

As suggested by Kozinets and Handelman (2004), we iteratively analyzed these 17,496 messages for expected and evolving themes, and then compared our findings to the existing literature on consumer boycotts and related topics as well as media coverage of the seal hunt.

Even though the HSUS did not ask consumers to provide demographic data, some of the comments show that the signatories come from varied age groups, educational and professional backgrounds. The ages of the signatories range from the 11-year old child to the 74-year old former gunnery sergeant. There are a number of signatories who are clergy, Ph.D.s, MDs, and DVMs. There are

others who report that they own or manage companies and no longer buy Canadian supplies, as well as those who are in the travel business and steer clients away from Canadian vacations.

Is participating in the boycott a sacrifice?

Quite a number of signatories express how strongly they feel about the seal hunt. It seems that giving up the consumption of Canadian seafood is thus easy. This does not come as a surprise since Canadian seafood has numerous substitutes, and the cost of participating in the boycott thus is very small to consumers (John and Klein 2003) who can choose to buy seafood from other countries' fisheries, or substitute other meat or food products for seafood (Department of Finance 2006). It further seems that these signatories believe that they are morally obligated to participate in the boycott at any cost until the seal hunt is abolished. For example, S#225 (female, identified) states: *I am so against this hunt that if it means going totally vegan in order to make sure that I do not buy any Canadian sea food, I'll do it in a heartbeat.* And S#9269 (gender unknown, identified) exclaims: *Every time I think of what you are condoning and allowing, it makes me sick deep to the core; ethically, morally, and instinctually sickened. Nothing you could offer me would be tempting enough to diminish or ease the repulsiveness of your seal hunt.*

The power of boycotts

Klein, Smith and John (2004) find that for consumers to participate in a boycott, they need to believe that they can, indeed, make a difference. This seems to be the case with a large number of signatories. For example, S#967 (female, identified) is very certain about the power of boycotts: and notes: *Boycotting a product is one of the most effective ways to let a producer know the intensity of a person's feelings on a subject....* And S#4888 (male, identified) seems to be very confident that the boycott will succeed since he states: *... The few dollars this terrible industry makes is totally wiped out be the hundreds of millions you are "losing" from people like [me]; and there are a lot of us.* This comment also addresses the vulnerability of Canada's fishing industry to a boycott. Much of the industry's output is designated for export, making it the fifth largest exporter of seafood and fish products in the world. In 2003, 73%, or \$3.3 billion CAD, of this export volume was designated for the U.S. market. Accordingly,

the *Toronto Star* had warned early on that such a boycott “even if only partly successful, could be an economic disaster for Canada” (Hepburn 2005).

S#7910 (male, identified) raises another interesting issue by noting: *We will never buy any sea food or other products from Canada because of the seal killings. It takes a lot of time [and] money to persuade people to buy their products once they quite or try another.* As expressed by this signatory, once the boycott is over, Canada’s fishing industry is likely to face a problem. The recovery to previous sales levels at the pre-boycott price structure to pre-boycott customers might be slowed down because it generally takes consumers time to forget and forgive the offensive behavior (Ettenson and Klein 2005), if they return at all. That is, two-thirds of those who participate in a boycott are unlikely to return to the target’s products even after the boycott has been called off (Clouder and Harrison 2005).

S#1156 (male, identified) addresses an issue that relates to the potential success of the boycott: *I talked with the [Department] of Fisheries and Oceans and they feel as if the boycott has not affected them at all. Do not go to Canada and do not buy anything made in Canada.* To be specific, several politicians and departments within the Canadian Government, in addition to the Center for Consumer Freedom, a lobbying group for the food industry, have vehemently denied that the boycott has had any impact (CTV.ca 2007). The NGOs advocating the boycott and members of the Canadian press appear to believe that it has affected the profitability of the fishing industry (Harper 2007). So, who is right? First, it has been found that most boycott targets will deny publicly that there has been any effect on their sales and profits (Davidson 1995). Second, some Canadian fish processing plants have received communications from U.S. customers demanding guarantees that they are not involved in the seal hunt (CTV.ca 2007). Third, there might be an easy explanation for the conflicting reports. That is, as mentioned above, since seafood has a high degree of substitutability which makes the demand for this product class fairly elastic, a decrease in the demand of Canadian seafood will lead to a decrease in its price. Even though consumers who have pledged to participate in the boycott are not likely to buy even at a lower price, the target will notice that as the price drops, seafood sales are likely to pick up again. Non-traditional buyers—such as hospitals, schools, prisons, etc.—to whom the seafood was not attractive at a higher price, now see it as a

viable purchase at the lower price. Since the amount of the product sold is thus likely to remain fairly stable—albeit at a lower price—while production costs are expected to remain constant, profitability will be reduced (Best 2004).

Vow to boycott all Canadian products and/or travel to Canada

It should be noted that 2,615 of the respondents feel the need to let the Canadian Government know that they will be boycotting all Canadian products. S#10 (female, identified), for example, states: *I will not be a part of any act that causes suffering and is cruel and inhumane. Therefore, I will not buy any products from your country until you put a stop to this barbaric slaughter.* Further, 1,342 signatories pledged to boycott all travel to Canada. That is, S#13300 (female, identified) warns: *I think the Canadian Tourist Industry should wake up. I am not even interested in visiting a country with such practices.*

Encouraging others to join the boycott/educating others

A total of 923 of the signatories promise that they will spread the word about the boycott even though—based on the outrage expressed by many more—it stands to reason this number might be understating the actual reach of the boycott petition. Consequently, it can be expected that the longer the boycott lasts, the more consumers will end up participating in it (Best 2004). For example, S#13 (female, identified) states: *This practice is absolutely barbaric. I will boycott everything coming from Canada and encourage others to do the same!* And S#2118 (female, identified) is representative of the many teachers and professors who have been educating their students about this issue: *I'm a retired elementary school teacher who taught a whole lesson for 20 years about murdering harp seals in such a brutal manner. The children were so horrified that I have no doubt they still would sign these petitions.*

A picture speaks more than a thousand words

Friedman (1999) strongly recommends the use of graphic pictures to communicate about the egregious behavior. This probably has been one of the most successful tools used by the NGOs fighting the annual seal hunt. The videos that have been placed on *YouTube* and *My Space*, as well as on the websites of the NGOs (http://hsus.org/protect_seals.html) very dramatically show how seals are being slaughtered. It is commonly said that a picture is worth a thousand words (Friedman 1999); a video

showing the seal hunt, however, must be worth hundreds of thousand of dollars in donations to the NGO showing it. For example, S#10041 (female, identified) maintains: *When I saw this series on HBO it literally made me sick to my stomach. This is the most disgusting form of inhumane treatment I have ever seen and heard of!!! How anyone can look into the innocent eyes of these beautiful creatures and make the decision to bash their brains in is beyond me....especially those who are barely old enough to get around!!!* ... Further, the videos seem to have a long-term effect, as evidenced by S#13349 (male, identified) who states: *I'm 60 years old, but my mind still contains images of a film I saw in high school of baby seals being clubbed by hunters. In some cases these animals are not even dead when they are skinned by the hunters. Please stop this savagery.*

Clubbing baby seals to death while their mothers are watching

An extensive search of NGO websites has shown that none of these organizations claim any longer that baby seals are killed before their mothers' eyes. This practice used to be fairly common until 1987 at which time the Canadian Government outlawed the killing of whitecoats (Kraus 2004). Since harp seals permanently abandon their pups when they are approximately 12 days old and begin moult, today's hunters mostly focus on seals between 12 days and 12 weeks of age (Senate Resolution 118 2007). The comments left by signatories, however, show that they are still haunted by these pictures. For example, S#10134 (female, identified) exclaims: *I saw a television program in 1978 about these baby seals being killed, clubbed to death, while the mother seal watched screaming in agony. You cannot tell me this was something that did not hurt all involved including me!*

Skinned while alive and conscious

S#2464 (female, identified) is outraged: ... *Canada the country that exchanges money for the pools of blood from many many helpless baby seals who are brutally beaten to death and many are even skinned alive SHAME ON CANADA !!!!* And some of the signatories even cite statistics as evidenced by S#13768 (female, identified), who requests: *Please take immediate action to end the seal hunt once and for all. It is outrageous that over 40% of the baby seals are skinned alive....* Some of the respondents appear to be veterinary professionals. For example, S#9402 (male, identified, DVM) suggests: *There are*

at least two questions here: Is this necessary? If so, is the method humane? Since many of the babies are killed, it is not properly selective. Since some are skinned alive according to postmortems, this is inhumane as a method...

The above comments seem to relate to what is commonly called the “independent vet study.” In 2001, five veterinarians from the U.S, UK, and Canada were commissioned by the IFAW to go out on the ice to comprehensively examine the skulls of 76 carcasses left behind by sealers (Burdon et al. 2001). Carcasses were randomly chosen from a number of areas representative of the hunt on March 27th and 28th. In all cases, the team arrived after the sealers had left, and the sealers did not know that the abandoned carcasses were to be evaluated. The veterinarians could not detect lesions of the skull in 17% of the carcasses, which indicates that the seals were conscious when being skinned. An additional 25% showed either minimal to moderate skull fractures, which indicates a “decreased level of consciousness,” but most likely not unconsciousness (Burdon et al. 2001, p. 8). Adding these two figures leads to the claim that is highly probable that 42% of seals were alive and conscious when skinned.

Canada compared to China and Japan

What might be of concern to the Canadian Government is that the seal hunt is likened to Japan’s whale hunt and dolphin slaughters as well as China’s fur farms and shark hunts. That is, S#652 (anonymous) notes: *... It is cruel and barbaric to bludgeon an animal to death, I thought Canada was a developed country, but their practices on seals are equal to China's skinning raccoon dogs alive. Shame on you, who is the "ugly American" now?* And S#827 (female, identified) exclaims: *What a gruesome lot of people!!!!!!! Don't forget about China cutting off fins and throwing the sharks back to sea to drown, just for some fin soup!!! Then we have Japan on the other hand, luring dolphins near shore and then massively killing them and leaving them to suffer. THE SIGHT IS HORRIFIC!! I could not believe my eyes!!! ...*

What do signatories think of fishermen/seal hunters?

Jean-Claude Lapierre, president of the Seal Hunters' Association on the Magdalen Islands, has complained that individuals opposing the seal hunt "... [have] said publicly that we are barbarians and we

massacre seals," ... "our reputation has been sullied across the planet" (The Epoch Times 2007). His statement is supported by many of the signatories' comments. Apparently many view sealers as less than human, as criminals who need to be punished and jailed. For example, S#1263 (gender unknown, identified): ... *The people who do the clubbing are no better than cold-blooded serial killers.* And S#2419 (female, identified) expresses: *How can you sleep at night knowing that you are allowing baby seals to be beaten to death for profit? May God forgive you because I can't.*

A number of signatories also state that sealers kill for fun. This seems to refer to a statement made by sealer Desmond Adams who apparently said "...we all go out for the love of it rather than the money, which isn't there anymore" Taylor (2007). S#900 (gender unknown, identified), for example, exclaims: *This is horrendous. Recently the sealers went on record that they kill the babies for fun!!!*

Advise fishermen to find other jobs

One final recurring theme is that the fishermen really need to find other jobs. S#1189 (anonymous) suggests: *Get out and get a real job like the rest of us. One that doesn't involve murdering animal, small or large...* Some of the signatories make specific suggestions as to where the fishermen/sealers should look for jobs. S#2074 (female, identified), for example, suggests ecotourism: *There are other more progressive ways to earn a living than this. Is this all Canada can offer such people for gainful employment???? ... People would pay more much more money to see these beautiful, innocent creatures in their natural habitat than know they are being murdered...* Interestingly, the IFAW began in the late 1980s, as an alternative to the seal hunt, to organize eco-tours to take tourists on seal watching ventures in Îles de la Madeleine, Quebec. By the late 1990s, these tours added annually about \$1 million CAD to the local economy (Canadian Geographic 2007).

S#10929 (female, identified) recommends: *This is a cruel and inhumane practice. ... Leave the seals alone and go into the fake fur business.* Interestingly, S#15124 (male, identified) remembers that this solution had been proposed a long time ago: *Whatever happened with that fake fur plant that was proposed (or was it built) in Canada to compensate for money lost from fur seal slaughter?* This signatory seems to remember that in 1977, Franz Weber of the *Fondation Franz Weber*, offered to help

the Newfoundland Government develop an alternative to sealing. Weber wanted to build a factory in Newfoundland to produce toys and clothing made of fake fur and promised that the factory would provide permanent employment for 600 individuals (Blaskin 1977; Watson 2003), and annually produce merchandise worth about \$20 million CAD. Considering the Fondation's global network, Weber was able to virtually guarantee access to a world market, making such a factory more profitable than the seal hunt (Blaskin 1977) which is a seasonal activity and provided at that time the equivalent of just 100-150 full-time jobs (Southey 1997). Weber also offered a compensation of \$2.5 million CAD to the sealers (Watson 2003). Weber was turned down by the Canadian Fisheries Minister Romeo LeBlanc who stated that he would not be "blackmailed" (Watson 2003, p. 87), and by the fishermen, one of whom stated on national television "We are going to fight it. We are going to fight for our way of life. And we will tell the rest of the world to stuff it" (Blaskin 1977).

And some signatories have heard about another alternative offer made more recently. That is, S#17156 (female, identified) recalls: ... *I understand that people in Newfoundland have financial difficulties, but there have been serious offers to buy out seal licenses and assistance with the development of eco-tourism...* Incidentally, in 2006 Cathy Kangas, the founder and head of PRAI Beauty, offered to raise \$16 million CAD to help Canada end the seal hunt. A spokesman for Fisheries Minister Loyola Hearn rejected the offer, claimed that it was not enough to offset the losses if the seal hunt were to be abolished, and suggested that Kangas "put the money in another worthwhile cause" (BBC News 2006).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The data analysis has shown that signatories of the petition, in general, are very angry and upset about the Canadian Seal Hunt. The comments left by the signatories reflect, as previously suggested, that consumers boycott to meet a number of objectives, namely instrumental, expressive, and punitive objectives.

Since many of the signatories seem to feel that the Canadian Government and fishermen are violating animal welfare and/or rights, the Canadian Seafood Boycott can be considered a boycott of conscience (Friedman 1999). The degree of hostility against the boycott target caused by such boycotts is

generally very high (Friedman 1999). Further, the stigma is likely to haunt the target for years to come. This can negatively affect retail sales on two levels. First, retailers who had discontinued the target's products will be reluctant to restock even after the boycott has been called off, because they might be afraid that the boycott will be reestablished at some time in the future (Friedman 1999). In addition, we suggest that it is probably very likely that the retailers who discontinued carrying the target's products might already have built relationships with new suppliers that carry substitute products and thus be reluctant to sever these new relationships. Second, Friedman (1999, p. 42) suggests that those customers who had to switch stores during the boycott so they could find substitute products might, "simply through inertia," stay with the new retailers instead of reviving old shopping habits. We argue that it is also likely that some of these consumers might (1) actually prefer the shopping environment they were forced to discover due to the boycott; (2) remain frustrated with their prior retailers for not having participated in the boycott; and/or (3) have a lasting negative impression of the boycott target so that they would not consider ever returning to purchasing its products.

Considering that an increasing number of consumers are joining the Canadian Seafood Boycott, the boycott can be deemed effective. Further considering that many of the signatories are determined to boycott until the hunt is abolished for good, it may be expected that the boycott will eventually be successful. Therefore, it might be worthwhile for the Canadian Government to consider an end to the seal hunt. A number of alternatives to the seal hunt have been offered throughout the years, and there seems to be no end to outsiders coming up with suggestions. *The Economist* (2007), for example, suggests a solution that would be "the very least bad for Canada's brand." Instead of selling the sealing licenses to sealers, auction them off to the highest bidder. Changes are that the animal welfare and animal rights organization would win the bids, and the moneys raised could be used to provide alternate sources of employment for the fishermen.

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