

Treating Ivanka Unfairly: Understanding the Impact of Presidential Tweeting on Publics'  
Perceptions and Intentions to Buycott or Boycott Corporations

**Abstract****Research Paper**

**Purpose** - In this study, we explored the impact of presidential tweeting about corporations on publics' perceptions of and behavioral intentions toward those corporations. Specifically, we examined publics' intentions to boycott or buycott (Friedman, 1996) Nordstrom, four months after President Trump's tweet denouncing the company's decision to discontinue his daughter's clothing line.

**Design/methodology/approach** – An online survey was conducted among 517 American citizens using Qualtrics panels in June 2017. Respondents were compensated for their participation.

**Findings** - We found strong associations between perceived moral inequity and boycott intentions, and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action and buycott intentions. Furthermore, demographic characteristics associated with both types of perceptions were also examined. Younger, more educated respondents tended to accept Nordstrom's actions as being routine business decisions, whereas conservative participants saw Nordstrom's actions as being morally iniquitous.

**Originality/value** - This study is one of the first to explore the impact of presidential tweeting, albeit indirectly, on publics' perceptions and intentions toward corporations who form the subjects of said tweets. Practitioners may utilize these findings to provide guidance to corporations who may be at the receiving end of presidential tweeting.

**Keywords** - boycott, buycott, perceived moral inequity, presidential tweeting, public perceptions

Treating Ivanka Unfairly: Understanding the Impact of Presidential Tweeting on Publics'  
Perceptions and Intentions to Buycott or Boycott Corporations

On February 8, 2017, the president of the United States, Donald J. Trump sent out a tweet in which he called out Nordstrom for being unfair to his daughter, Ivanka Trump. President Trump tweeted, "My daughter Ivanka has been treated so unfairly by @Nordstrom. She is a great person -- always pushing me to do the right thing! Terrible!" This tweet, posted on the president's personal Twitter account and retweeted by his official POTUS account, was sent out by the president in light of Nordstrom's decision to stop carrying Ivanka Trump's line of clothing and accessories on their website, purportedly due to poor performance. Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary at the time, characterized Nordstrom's actions as "targeting Ivanka Trump for political reasons" (Easley, 2017, para. 3), while Nordstrom continued to defend its action as a business decision made based on sales performance (Abrams, 2017). Nordstrom is only one of many corporations that have been mentioned in the president's tweets, either positively or negatively, since he took office in January 2017.

Nordstrom's decision came in the wake of the #grabyourwallet movement, a campaign meant to encourage boycotts of products tied to the president, his family, and his donors. The timing of the decision, in particular, prompted both President Trump's supporters and detractors to claim the move to be political. While the president's supporters cried foul, accusing the company of being politically motivated, his detractors jubilantly claimed victory, with the co-founder of the #grabyourwallet campaign, Shannon Coulter tweeting, "Big news everyone. You did this. I am in awe" along with a link to a news story about Nordstrom's decision. Such a framing of corporate action by both supporters and detractors of the president to fit their own political ideologies and interests forced Nordstrom to reiterate their position to various

stakeholders. Not only did Nordstrom reiterate on Twitter that the decision was based on sales performance and that they hoped “offering a vendor’s products isn’t misunderstood as us taking a political position,” (Abrams, 2017, para 5), co-president Pete Nordstrom also sent out a memo to all employees noting that although the subject was “sharply divisive,” “No matter what we do, we are going to end up disappointing some of our customers. Every single brand we offer is evaluated on their results—if people don’t buy it, we won’t sell it” (Bhasin, 2017, para 10). Nordstrom’s own defense of their actions further underscore the dual framing of the reasons behind the decision, political motivation or sales performance.

As social media continue to become ubiquitous in our daily lives, so too do they in politics. Areas of research on which scholars have focused their attention include politicians’ use of Twitter to garner support to raise campaign funds (Adams and McCorkindale, 2013), as well publics’ sentiment toward candidates (Zhang, Seltzer, and Bichard, 2013). However, the new administration under President Donald J. Trump poses new opportunities and challenges for business scholars and practitioners related to social media use: presidential tweeting about corporations. President Trump’s social media use, which he refers to as “modern day presidential,” fittingly in a tweet (Donald Trump, 2017), is characterized by, among other things, expressing support or disdain for corporations that he perceives to be acting against him, prompting the Wall Street Journal to create a Trump Target Index, which tracks stocks affected by the president’s tweets. Given the undeniable link between social media and publics’ perceptions of corporations (e.g., Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014), how President Trump’s tweets impact publics’ perceptions of corporations mentioned in them is a topic that behooves attention from scholars.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to unpack the impact of presidential tweeting about corporations on publics' perceptions of those corporations and their attendant behavioral intentions. Using President Trump's tweet about Nordstrom's unfair behavior to his daughter in removing her clothing line from their online stores that served to frame the company's action as being political and unfair and Nordstrom's own framing, we explore publics' intentions to boycott or buycott<sup>1</sup> (Friedman, 1996; John and Klein, 2003; Klein, Smith, and John, 2004; Neilson, 2010) Nordstrom. Specifically, in this study, we seek to understand publics' perceptions about Nordstrom's actions – whether their actions were perceived to be morally iniquitous as framed by the tweet or simply commensurate with business action as framed by Nordstrom, and how these perceptions influence their intention to boycott or buycott Nordstrom. In the next section, we review the literatures upon which our investigation is grounded.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Boycott and Buycott Intentions*

The idea of individuals using their purchasing behaviors to punish or reward companies, particularly to force them to behave in ways that the individuals want (Brinkmann, 2004) is certainly not new. People can engage in either direct or indirect revenge behaviors to punish companies (Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp, 2010) as part of their coping processes to deal with the companies' (perceived) actions. A large body of literature exists on political consumerism (Neilson, 2010), or publicly motivated consumption, as a form of political participation (e.g., Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti, 2005), social justice (e.g., Micheletti and Stolle, 2008), to drive

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<sup>1</sup> Although there are several terms similar to boycott or buycott, such as revenge, retaliation (Zourrig, Chebat, and Toffoli, 2009), consumer movement, anti-consumption (Iyer and Muncy, 2009), procott, reverse boycott (Friedman, 1996), and brand avoidance (Lee, Motion, and Conroy, 2009), this study uses boycott and buycott to avoid confusion.

lifestyle politics (Shah, McLeod, Kim, Lee, Gotlieb, Ho, and Breivik, 2007), and to effect social change (Holzer, 2006). Additionally, scholars have investigated issues related to individuals' motivations behind anti-consumption behavior (John and Klein, 2003; Klein et al., 2004; Sen Gurhan-Canli, and Morwitz, 2001; Tyran and Engelmann, 2005), and corporations' public responses to reduce consumers' intention to forgo or withhold a product consumption (Yuksel and Mryteza, 2009) to better understand how businesses may deal with such negative consumer behaviors.

Often referred to as "consumers voting at the checkout" (Jacobsen and Dulrud, 2007, p. 469), political consumerism manifests through two broad consumer behaviors: boycott and buycott (Friedman, 1996; Neilson, 2010). Boycott is a protest strategy that refers to individuals punishing businesses for unfavorable behaviors by deliberately avoiding purchasing from them (Neilson, 2010). Buycotting, on the other hand, is a rewarding strategy where individuals choose to support businesses for exhibiting behaviors that they consider to be desirable and responsible. Originally conceptualized as an activist strategy to reward or punish companies by calling for consumer boycotts or buycotts of certain companies or products from certain countries (e.g., calls to boycott U.S.-based companies' products in various Islamic-majority countries in the wake of 9/11; Fischer, 2007), other scholarship has examined individual-level boycott and/or buycott behavior, with consumers being seen not as weak accepters of capitalism but as independent, ethical, and responsible actors (e.g., Harrison, Newholm and Shaw, 2004).

In line with scholarship conceptualizing individuals as independent actors who may enact political consumerism by choosing to boycott or buycott companies based on their (the companies') behaviors and actions, this study seeks to understand individuals' boycott and buycott intentions by exploring the antecedents of these intentions. However, this study

represents a departure from prior scholarship on individual level political consumerism by exploring not hypothetical, abstract boycott/buycott intentions for political, ethical, or environmental reasons (e.g., Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011; Neilson, 2010), nor reporting a case study of a boycott or buycott (e.g., Peretti and Micheletti, 2011). Furthermore, those who are committed to reducing consumption for a simpler life (i.e., simplifiers), or for creating global impact (i.e., global impact anti-consumers; Iyer and Muncy, 2009) are not the focus of this study either. Instead, this study explores individuals' boycott/buycott intentions against a company the actions of which were criticized by the president of the United States, and in that sense, politicized. In the paragraphs that follow, we provide some theoretical context to the specific instance of presidential tweeting under investigation in this study.

#### *President Trump's Frame vs. Nordstrom's Frame*

Although the concept of framing has been understood differently by various scholars (e.g., Cappella and Jamieson, 1997; McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver, 1997; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000), in general, framing is understood to be the selection of "some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" (Entman, 1993, p. 52) to make them more noticeable and memorable to audiences. For Gamson and Modigliani (1987), a "frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (p. 143). While a frame may include and signal the message sender's intent or motives (Gamson, 1989), the framing of a message does not necessarily indicative of conscious decision making about what to say and how to say it (Entman, 1993).

Frames serve four main purposes in the communication process, as discussed by Entman (1993). Frames help explicate an issue, i.e., problem definition, to determine its and its costs and benefits. They can also help diagnose problem-creating agents, i.e., provide causal analyses.

Some may evaluate the causal agents and their effects and pass a moral judgment. And finally, frames may provide recommendations for ways to remedy the problem.

Gain and loss frames are some of the most common types frames used in scholarship and practice to induce perceptual and behavioral change (see O’Keefe & Jensen, 2006 for a review; Salovey, Schneider, & Apanovitch, 2002). Gain framing highlights the advantages of compliance with the communicator’s suggestion while loss framing emphasizes the disadvantages of noncompliance (O’Keefe & Jensen, 2007). Several scholars have tested the effectiveness of gain-framed and loss-framed messages in health communication contexts (e.g., Cho & Boster, 2008; O’Keefe & Jensen, 2007; Quick & Bates, 2010). Although inconsistent findings have been reported over time, in general, loss frames have been shown to be effective when promoting detection behavior or advocating for a difficult behavior, while gain frames are known to be advantageous when encouraging disease detection (O’Keefe & Jensen, 2006) or promoting a simple action (Kiene, Barta, Zelenski, & Cothran, 2005).

How news frames influence publics’ understanding and evaluation of issues (e.g., Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Kinder and Sanders, 1990; Pan and Kosicki, 1993) or public opinion (e.g., Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, and Fan, 1998) has been a key interest to many scholars for decades. While the frame-building process is traditionally thought to involve journalists, it can be also done by politicians and interest groups (Callaghan and Schnell, 2001) or by interactions among political system, publics, and the media (Zhou and Moy, 2007) or other types of social actors (Vilegenthart, 2012), including corporations.

This particular case, that of presidential tweeting against Nordstrom, represents an interesting situation as it places the president and company against each other, each presenting differing explanations of the corporate action (i.e., Nordstrom discontinuing Ivanka Trump’s



line), and therefore, potentially dividing public perceptions of the corporate behavior. Regardless of Nordstrom's real reasons behind their decision, the corporate action was characterized and framed by the company and the president very differently. While President Trump framed Nordstrom's decision to remove Ivanka Trump's line from its online store as a personal attack on the president's family and a declaration of opposition against the president and his agenda, Nordstrom has maintained that the decision was based purely on poor sales performance of Ms. Trump's line on their website (Abrams, 2017). This case shows how a politician's (President Trump) and social actor's (Nordstrom) frames can play out. We argue that President Trump's frame corresponds with Entman's (1993) moral judgment frame while Nordstrom's frame was defining the nature of the problem as sales related. Such dual (and contradictory) framing of the corporate action presents interesting questions for scholarship to explore. First, how are publics' perceptions of the corporate action related to their boycott/buycott intentions toward Nordstrom? And second, who is likely to accept one view of the corporate action over another? These two broad questions guide this study and the development of our hypotheses and research questions, which are outlined in the sections that follow.

### *Publics' Perceptions of Corporate Action*

How publics react to corporate behavior, particularly in times of crisis, has been a focus of much public relations research. From consumer activism stemming from irresponsible corporate action (e.g., Grappi, Romani, and Bagozzi, 2013), to publics' perceptions of corporate transgressions as being ethical violations of social norms (e.g., Lindenmeier, Schleer, and Priel, 2012), and the impact of perceived corporate action on companies' trustworthiness (Aqueveque and Encina, 2010) and attendant buying intentions (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore and Hill, 2006), scholars have examined the outcomes of corporate action in many ways. However, despite

publics' perceptions of various social issues being increasingly central to public relations scholarship, publics' differentiated perceptions of the nature of corporate action itself is an area that has received little attention. To address this gap in our understanding of how publics understand corporate (mis)conduct, Krishna, Kim and Shim (2018) proposed the idea of perceived moral inequity of corporate action, defined as individuals' evaluations of corporate behaviors or actions being unethical, unjust, and/or morally wrong. Such a conceptualization fits with President Trump's framing of Nordstrom's actions, when he referred to Nordstrom being "unfair" to his daughter Ivanka, and the then White House press secretary framing Nordstrom's actions as "targeting Ivanka Trump for political reasons." (Easley, 2017, para. 3).

Perceived moral inequity of corporate action has been shown to impact consumers' evaluations of their relationship with the corporation in question (Krishna, et al, 2018; Lindenmeier et al., 2012). Such transgressions have also been linked to negative affective responses toward the corporation, as well as intentions of engaging in punitive actions against the organization in question (Grappi et al., 2013), including protests and negative word-of-mouth behaviors. Given the punitive nature of boycotts, and the conceptually opposite nature of boycotts as rewarding behavior, it would logically follow that publics' perception of corporate action being morally iniquitous would be associated with boycott and boycott intentions. The following hypotheses are therefore posited:

H1: Perceived moral inequity of corporate action is positively associated with individuals' boycott intentions.

H2: Perceived moral inequity of corporate action is negatively associated with individuals' boycott intentions.

Although the opposite of perceived moral inequity of corporate behavior would conceptually be perceived ethicality or morality of corporate behavior, the dichotomous framing of corporate action as being either morally iniquitous (by the president) or simply a business decision unmotivated by politics (by Nordstrom) make using perceived ethicality as the opposite not entirely appropriate. Instead, in this specific case it would logically follow that individuals who do not perceive Nordstrom's actions as being morally unjust would simply accept Nordstrom's framing as the action being a purely business and sales-based decision. The perceived lack of any inequity or unethical behavior on the part of the company would then preclude the need to punish it, and may even motivate individuals to reward it for being an economically responsible business that takes product buying decisions based on sales performance rather than political appeasement. The following hypotheses are therefore posited:

H3: Perceived business/economic nature of corporate action is negatively associated with individuals' boycott intentions.

H4: Perceived business/economic nature of corporate action is positively associated with individuals' buycott intentions.

Furthermore, for businesses to be able to identify who among their publics is most likely to be impacted by presidential tweeting against them, it is important to understand the demographic factors to contribute to individuals' perceptions of either moral inequity of corporate action or business/economic nature of corporate action. Extant literature has indicated that political orientation or political ideology affects people's knowledge of and perceptions of social issues or causes of such issues (Pandey, Sinha, Prakash, and Tripathi, 1982). Additionally, demographics can be significant factors predicting publics' communication behavioral outcomes in the context of crisis (Jin, Fraustino, and Liu, 2016). Identifying demographic factors that may

lean toward perceiving corporations negatively (or positively) in light of presidential tweeting may help businesses decide how to respond if they are on the receiving end of antagonistic presidential tweeting. Accordingly, the following research is examined:

RQ: How are age, political orientation, income, education, and gender related to perceived moral inequity of corporate behavior and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action?

### **Method**

#### *Measures*

In order to test the hypotheses outlined above and answer the research question, an online survey was constructed using Qualtrics. Measurement items were derived from existing research. Participants were asked to consider Nordstrom's actions regarding President Trump when responding to items. Boycott intention was measured by three items adapted from Paek and Nelson (2009), which were found to have strong reliability ( $\alpha = .947$ ). Three items adapted from Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi's (2013) work measured boycott intention and reported a Cronbach's alpha of .907. Both perceived moral inequity (Lindenmeier, Schleer, and Pricl, 2012) ( $\alpha = .961$ ) and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action ( $\alpha = .820$ ) were measured by three items each (e.g., "I consider Nordstrom's behavior about President Trump to be unethical" for perceived moral inequity, and "I consider Nordstrom behavior to be strategic" for perceived business/economic nature of corporate action), and were also found to be reliable based on Cronbach's alpha calculations (see Table 1 for all measures).

[Insert Table 1 here]

#### *Sample*

The data for this study were collected using Qualtrics' online panels. We used probability quota sampling method based on the US Census Bureau (United States Census Bureau, 2015),

including quotas for age, gender, and political affiliation. The survey was open to individuals who identified as U.S. citizens. Participants were compensated for their responses. Data were collected in June 2017, a few months after President Trump's tweet. A total of 517 valid responses were collected and analyzed. Of the sample, 257 identified as male (49.71%) while 260 identified as female (50.29%). The age distribution of the sample is included in Table 2. In terms of political affiliation, 165 (31.91%) individuals reported being Democrats, 143 (27.66%) were Republican, 170 individuals (32.88%) reported being Independent, 11 (2.13%) reported "other" and 28 people (5.42%) declined to answer. Political orientation was measured with a single item, asking participants to respond to "I consider myself politically" with responses ranging from "conservative, moderate, liberal, progressive<sup>2</sup>". The income, education, and political orientation distribution of the sample is reported in Tables 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Table 6 shows a comparison of how participants' reported political affiliation mapped against their political orientation.

[Insert Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, and Table 6 here]

### *Data Analysis*

All data analyses were conducted using Stata IC/14. First, Cronbach's alphas were calculated to ensure reliability of the measures, as reported earlier. Then, the hypotheses were tested and research question examined using structural equation modeling. To assess data fit, Hu and Bentler's (1999) joint-criteria was used, whereby  $CFI > .95$ ,  $SRMR \leq .10$ , or  $RMSEA \leq .06$  and  $SRMR \leq .10$  is considered a good model. However, due to missing data, SRMR was not available, and therefore TLI was analyzed instead, the cut offs for which as the same as CFI. Standardized coefficients are reported.

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<sup>2</sup> The limitation associated with measuring political orientation/ideology with a single item measure is addressed in the limitations section.

## Results

To test the hypotheses using structural equation modeling, Kline's (1998) two-step procedure was utilized. First, the measurement model including all studied variables was tested. The measurement model was found to have good fit with CFI = .971, TLI = .958, and RMSEA = .060 ( $\chi^2(94) = 249.98, p < .001$ ). The structural model<sup>3</sup> was then tested and was too found to have acceptable fit, with CFI = .931, TLI = .907, and RMSEA = .092 ( $\chi^2(92) = 492.43, p < .001$ ). Error covariances were added between the five demographic variables, of which five were found to be significant. Political orientation and age, income and education, income and gender, education and gender, and age and gender were all found to covary.

Hypotheses 1 through 4 were then examined (see Figure 1). H1 predicted a positive relationship between perceived moral inequity and boycott intentions, and such a relationship was found ( $\beta = .57, p < .001$ ). H2, which predicted a negative relationship between perceived moral inequity and boycott intentions too was supported ( $\beta = -.19, p < .001$ ). In H3, a negative relationship between perceived business/economic purpose and boycott intentions was expected. Interestingly, this hypothesis was not supported. In fact, a significant positive relationship was found between perceived business purpose and boycott intentions ( $\beta = .15, p < .01$ ), a facet of this study that will be discussed in the next section in detail. And finally, H4 predicted a positive relationship between perceived business/economic nature of corporate action and boycott intentions, and a strong positive association was found ( $\beta = .75, p < .001$ ).

Next, the answer to the research question was sought. Results showed that neither age, income, nor gender were associated with perceived moral inequity. However, political orientation was found to be related to perceived moral inequity. Political orientation, the scale for

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<sup>3</sup> Covariance matrices are available from the corresponding author upon request.

which went from conservative to progressive, was negatively associated with perceived moral inequity ( $\beta = -.27, p < .001$ ). Income ( $\beta = -.11, p < .05$ ) was negatively associated with perceived moral inequity, indicating that individuals with lower levels of income reported higher levels of perceived moral inequity.

Finally, the reverse patterns were visible for the relationship between demographic variables and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action. Age was negatively associated with perceived business purpose ( $\beta = -.31, p < .001$ ), indicating that younger respondents saw Nordstrom's actions as being just routine business decision-making. Political orientation ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ) was significantly associated with the variable, in that being more liberal was associated with perceiving Nordstrom's actions as being just routine business. Income ( $\beta = .15, p < .01$ ) and education ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ) both positively predicted perceived business/economic nature of corporate action. Gender was not significantly related to the variable.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The purpose of this study was to unpack the impact of presidential tweeting against a corporation on publics' perceptions of the corporation, as well as their behavioral intentions regarding the corporation. To do so, we chose the case of Nordstrom's decision to remove Ivanka Trump's clothing line from their website, and the subsequent tweet issued by President Trump against Nordstrom and in support of his daughter Ivanka. Condemnation against Nordstrom was then forthcoming from many of the president's associates. We used the dual framing of Nordstrom's actions by the president and his associates as being unfair and politically motivated, and by Nordstrom itself as being a sales-driven business decision, to understand

whether acceptance of either of these framings contributed to individuals' intentions to boycott (Klein et al., 2004) or buycott (Paek and Nelson, 2009) Nordstrom.

Furthermore, we investigated the demographic characteristics of individuals who perceived Nordstrom's actions as being either morally iniquitous or simply a business/economic-driven decision. Results of our surveys conducted among citizens of the United States showed that gender was not associated with either type of perceptions, but income, education, and political orientation all predicted perceived moral inequity and perceived business/economic nature of corporate action. Richer, younger, more educated, and more liberal, individuals tended to see Nordstrom's actions as being business-driven in nature rather than politically motivated. Interestingly, age and education were not associated with perceived moral inequity.

Additionally, individuals' perceived moral inequity of corporate action was positively associated with their boycott intentions and negatively with their buycott intentions. Perceived business nature of corporate action was positively associated with buycott intentions, and counter to our expectations, also with boycott intentions. The implications of this work for research and practice are discussed next.

#### *Understanding the Impact of Presidential Tweeting and Framing*

This study represents one of the first efforts to understand the impact of presidential framing of corporate action through tweeting against corporations on publics' perceptions and their attendant behavioral intentions toward the organization. The study of President Trump's use of Twitter is still in its infancy (Stolee and Caton, 2018), and this present research is an effort in the direction of contributing to such work. Although President Obama is generally acknowledged as the "first Internet president" (Greengard, 2009) for his online civic engagement, and for agenda building during his campaigns, President Trump's usage of Twitter, particularly to reflect



on corporations that he believes to be for or against him, represents several opportunities for both public relations research and practice. Through this present study, we sought to present a theoretically grounded explication of individuals' punitive or rewarding intentions toward a corporation about which President Trump had tweeted.

The results indicated that presidential tweeting about a corporation to frame the latter's behavior in a certain way certainly may have impacted some individuals' perceptions about the company, which then led to those individuals' intentions to boycott it. Although several companies discontinued Ivanka Trump's brand, Nordstrom was the only one directly targeted by the president, and our results indicate that the president's involvement may have successfully shaped the perceptions of some individuals who reported Nordstrom's actions as being morally iniquitous. Future research should seek to understand whether the relationships examined in this study also hold for publics' perceptions of corporations about which President Trump has tweeted out or mentioned his support. It may also be worth tracking other companies who have discontinued Ivanka Trump's brand, such as Neiman Marcus, Shoes.com, Belk, ShopStyle, and Gilt, all of whom used the same justification for their decisions as Nordstrom's (Peterson and Taylor, 2017), but were not directly targeted by President Trump in his tweets.

#### *Unpacking the Dichotomous Framing of Corporate Action*

The case of Nordstrom's decision to discontinue Ivanka Trump's clothing line from its online business and President Trump's subsequent tweet against this action lent itself to a dichotomous framing of the nature of the action, and therefore a dichotomization of publics' perception of the nature of the action. While President Trump characterized Nordstrom's actions as being unfair and politically motivated, Nordstrom defended its decision as one that was purely motivated by sales performance. Such dichotomous framing of corporate action is also

reminiscent of gain-loss frames used in health-related contexts discussed earlier in the manuscript. Individuals who agreed with President Trump's characterization and perceived Nordstrom as being morally iniquitous also reported intentions to boycott Nordstrom, similar to how loss frames have been shown to discourage cancer screening behaviors (D. Cox and A. D. Cox, 2001). This finding represents an important lesson for any corporation that may be intending to decide whether or not to antagonize the president, and be at risk of criticism from him, for such corporations run the risk of facing boycotts from those who agree with the president.

Furthermore, perceived business/economic nature of corporate action too was found to have a positive association with boycott intentions, contrary to our expectations. Such a finding indicates that our assumption of the dichotomous framing of the corporate action may not actually be dichotomous in the eyes of the publics. Rather, some of those who did accept Nordstrom's explanation for discontinuing Ivanka Trump's clothing line may also have agreed with President Trump, and therefore may still want to boycott Nordstrom. Although the effect size for this association was small, it was significant, and companies should pay attention to this finding to understand how they may defend their corporate behavior if their actions are criticized by the president. As these findings show, publics may not perceive political motivation and business motivation as being mutually exclusive, and while accepting their defense of corporate action as being commensurate with business decision making, may tend to also agree with the president's framing. Similar to how perceived self-efficacy moderates the effect of gain-loss framing in skin cancer detection intentions (van't Riet, Ruiter, Werrij, and De Vries, 2008), factors such as support for the President, or even belief in capitalism may moderate the impact of framing. Though such analyses are beyond the scope of the present study, future research should

serve to examine the impact of such and other demographic variables, particularly to understand how framing corporate action as routine business may also be a double-edged sword for corporations.

This particular finding also opens to the doors to discussions of what is truth in today's polarized political environment, the impact of ideology in believing certain versions of events over others, and whether ideology may even trump belief in or acceptance of certain framing. As discussed in the previous paragraph, both perceived moral inequity and perceived business purpose were associated with boycott intentions. This finding indicates that although some individuals believed Nordstrom's framing, they still intended to boycott the company, possibly putting ideology and support for President Trump over acceptance of the company's framing. Perhaps some individuals accepted Nordstrom's framing but thought it was a cover for their true intentions, thus making assumptions about the company's intentions that matched their political ideology. Indeed, this may have also been the case for some of President Trump's detractors who may continue to believe their efforts at punishing companies succeeded, but purportedly believed Nordstrom's response as being the politically correct response to protect their reputation. Although we do not have data to further investigate these points, they certainly are worth pondering, given the polarized political environment in the United States. Understanding how ideological strength plays into individuals' behavioral intentions, and how support for President Trump may take precedence over other considerations, regardless of how true or untrue they may, are worthy areas of future investigation.

However, all is not lost for corporations who find themselves under fire from the president on Twitter. Our findings show that individuals who accepted Nordstrom's defense of their actions and perceived their actions as being commensurate with regular business practice

also reported wanting to support the company through boycotting behaviors. The key question for any corporation wrestling with decisions to enact actions that might antagonize the president, or debating how to deal with presidential tweets against them is who their, the business's key constituencies are, an aspect that was studied in this research and is discussed next.

#### *Understanding the Impact of Demographic Variables on Publics' Perceptions*

As noted earlier, a key question answered in this study was what demographic features characterize individuals who accepted the president's framing of corporate action versus the corporation's defense of its actions. Our findings clearly show the impact of income, education, political orientation, and, in a limited way, age, on publics' perceptions of corporate action in light of presidential tweeting. These findings underscore the importance of corporations having a clear understanding of their key publics, particularly consumer publics, as corporate actions that are perceived to be for or against the president may result in either punitive or rewarding behaviors from their publics, depending on their demographics.

Results of this study indicate that companies with consumer publics who tend to be less affluent and conservative may want to carefully consider any actions that may be perceived to be against President Trump and his policies, as such perceptions may lead to boycotts from their consumers. On the other hand, companies with consumers who tend to be educated, younger, liberal, and more affluent may undertake the risk of antagonizing the president, as such action, particularly when framed as being a regular business decision rather than a political one, may encourage supportive, boycotting behaviors from their publics.

#### *Limitations*

Like any research, this study does suffer from a few limitations. First, only one corporation formed the focus of this study, and the findings of this study therefore cannot be

generalized for other industries or other companies. Future research should seek to understand the relationships investigated in this study in other industries beyond retail. The news and media industry would particularly be an interesting context to understand the impact of presidential tweeting, considering the president's regular assertions of media bias against him. Additionally, exploring other brands' controversies in relation to President Trump, such as Apple, Budweiser, Under Armor, Amazon, Tesla, Google, Uber, and Starbucks, may allow researchers to better understand the dynamics of consumer responses toward corporations which are perceived to be either against or for President Trump.

Second, these results are generalizable only to the population of Qualtrics panels, although every effort was made to ensure an equal distribution across age and gender, including quotas for age, gender, and political affiliation. Furthermore, the impact of other factors, such as individuals' moral and ethical orientations, their prior relationship with Nordstrom, prior patronage of Nordstrom, availability of alternative stores, ease of switching patronage, and so on should also be investigated when understanding boycott and buycott intentions.

Additionally, information about the president's tweet was not provided in the survey to avoid priming the participants. Respondents were instead asked to consider Nordstrom's actions related to President Trump writ large. This strategy was adopted by the team intentionally to avoid priming the participants. Instead, this research strategy allowed participants to think broadly about how they felt about Nordstrom in relation to President Trump. We do acknowledge, however, that adopting this strategy may call into question our assertion about the results being reported in this study reflecting the impact of presidential tweeting. We argue that the results reported in this study reflect the impact of the dual framing of Nordstrom's actions toward the president, and given that one of the two frames was made public through the

president's tweeting, this study does indeed help understand the impact of presidential tweeting. The framing of Nordstrom's actions as being unfair and politically motivated came from President Trump's tweet, and as was evidenced through the results of this study, such a framing was indeed accepted by several participants in the study. Whether these participants were actually exposed to the president tweet or not is not a factor in question; the fact that the contents of the tweet were accepted by some participants, we argue, reflects, albeit indirectly, the impact of presidential tweeting.

Future research may use experimental designs to examine the relationships studied here. Additionally, it may be interesting to explore the effects of the two frames on other types of information behavioral intentions, such as information seeking, selecting and forwarding (Kim and Krishna, 2014), beyond information processing, which has been a focus of previous framing research (Kisicki and McLeod, 1990). Furthermore, political orientation was measured using a single item score, asking respondents to identify as either "conservative," "moderate," "liberal," or "progressive." However, political orientations are far more complex than may be captured through just one item, and may be seemingly paradoxical. For example, one may identify as a being "socially liberal" but "fiscally conservative," as aspect of political identity not captured by this study.

Finally, even though we drew upon literatures on frame theory and operationalized individuals' perceptions of corporate behavior using President Trump's and Nordstrom's two frames, this study's findings should be read with caution and should not be interpreted as a framing analysis. The purpose of this study was to understand consumers' perceptions of and intentions toward Nordstrom, rather than to test media framing effects. A content analysis measuring media frames as an independent variable may be a future step to take for further

research. It may be interesting to see the extent to which the media, and which kinds of media, adopted either President Trump's or Nordstrom's message frames (or both) in their coverage, and how exposure to such media coverage may have impacted individuals' perceptions.

Furthermore, utilizing different frames to design corporate responses to presidential tweets, scholars may use experimental studies examining the impact of various frames on consumers' perceptions and intentions to provide corporations with theoretically grounded direction on how to respond in such situations.

Despite these limitations, we believe this study to be an important first step in understanding the impact of presidential tweeting, and helping corporations and industries understand and respond to situations where they may be included in presidential tweeting. Specifically, this results of this study can be linked to further discussions on the consequences of corporate activism for or against President Trump and on the strategic actions corporations may take when facing his criticism online. Interestingly, Nordstrom's performance was not affected by the president's tweet, despite anti-Nordstrom sentiment appearing in social media conversations in the first two weeks that followed. Business analysts considered the saga to be a temporary noise for Nordstrom's sales (Bhasin, 2017). The question of how corporations should make or adjust their business decisions and how they should communicate them in response to presidential tweeting requires further research, and the present study represents an important first step in that direction.

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### Tables

Table 1.

#### *Measurement items and Cronbach's alphas*

Variable	Item	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Moral Inequity	I consider Nordstrom's behavior to be unethical	.961
	I consider Nordstrom's behavior to be unjust	
	I consider Nordstrom's behavior to be morally wrong	
Perceived Business Purpose	I consider Nordstrom's behavior to be strategic	.820
	I consider Nordstrom's behavior to be business-wise	
	I consider Nordstrom's behavior to be reasonable for the purpose of business	
Boycott Intention	I intend to make a special effort to buy from Nordstrom	.947
	I intend to support Nordstrom by choosing it consciously over other stores	
	I intend to participate in collective movements in favor of Nordstrom	
Boycott Intention	If I can, I intend to boycott Nordstrom to bring about changes in its conduct	.907
	If I can, I intend to participate in collective movements against Nordstrom to change its conduct	
	If I can, I intend to participate in demonstrations against Nordstrom to change its conduct	

Table 2

#### *Age distribution of sample*

Age range	Frequency	Percentage of Sample
18-30	118	22.82%
31-45	161	31.14%
45-60	161	31.14%
60 and above	77	14.89%

Table 3

#### *Income distribution of sample*

Income bracket	Frequency	Percentage
< \$30,000 per year	94	18.18%
\$30,000-\$49,000	101	19.54%
\$50,000-\$74,999	128	24.76%
\$75,000-\$99,999	78	15.09%
\$100,000-\$149,999	64	12.38%

>\$150,000	52	10.06%
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Table 4

*Education distribution of sample*

Education	Frequency	Percentage
Did not complete high school	2	0.39%
High school or G.E.D.	72	13.93%
Some college (did not complete or completing)	119	23.02%
2 year college	69	13.35%
4 year college (B.A. or B.S.)	142	27.47%
Professional degree (M.D. or J.D.)	10	1.93%
Some graduate school (did not complete or completing)	13	2.51%
Master's degree	63	12.19%
Doctoral degree	27	5.22%

Table 5

*Distribution of political orientation*

Political Orientation	Frequency	Percentage
Conservative	142	28.63%
Moderate	196	39.52%
Liberal	135	27.22%
Progressive	23	4.64%
Total	496	

Table 6

*Distribution of political orientation by affiliation*

	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Other	Total
Conservative	21	86	27	2	136
Moderate	50	49	88	2	189
Liberal	83	5	37	2	127
Progressive	10	3	10	0	23
Total	164	143	162	6	475

Figures

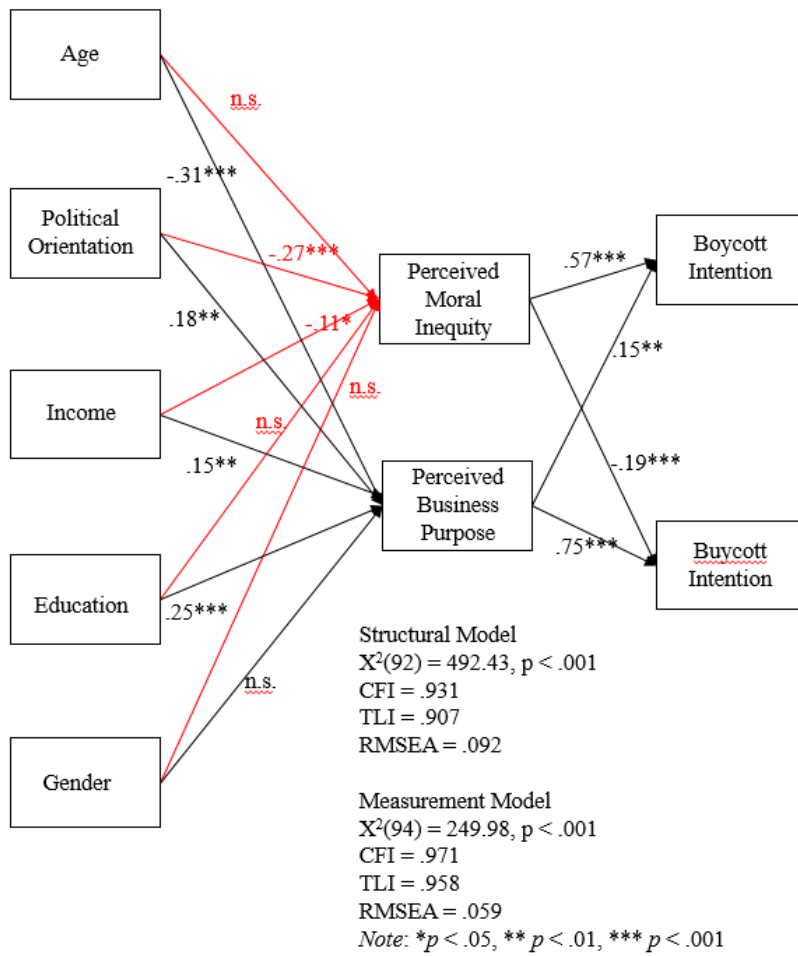


Figure 1. Results of the tested model