Article

When Brands (Don't) Take My Stance: The Ambiguous Effectiveness of Political Brand Communication

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Abstract

Brands increasingly take a stance on political issues, whereas consumers increasingly choose to either support a brand by buying their products ("buycotting"), or turn away from a brand ("boycotting") for political reasons. While buycotts can be understood as a rewarding and cooperative form of mostly individual behavior, boycotts are a conflict-oriented form of collective punishment. Even though research has acknowledged these conceptual differences, studies have failed to analyze the difference in the absolute effect of consumers' disapproval and approval. Moreover, research to date has not identified boundary conditions that might explain variation in the difference between consumers' willingness to boycott or buycott. This research investigates this different effectiveness by conducting two experiments with different sets of brands, issues, and countries. Our results suggest that boycotting outweighs buycotting, implying that political brand communication is a risky strategy. Furthermore, we identify consumers' political interest and category involvement as moderators of this imbalance.

Keywords

political brand communication, political consumerism, political behavior, boycotting, buycotting

Brands increasingly engage in political issues in their communication. In 2018, Nike, for instance, selected controversial football player Colin Kaepernick as its endorser for

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an advertising campaign. Kaepernick had become known worldwide for his protest against racial injustice by kneeling during the national anthem, and he was attacked for these actions by U.S. president Donald Trump and his supporters. Consequently, after the launch of the Nike campaign, Trump tweeted "Nike is getting absolutely killed with anger and boycotts". Even though #boycottNike was trending on Twitter after the start of the campaign, Nike experienced a short-term increase in sales around 31% after the campaign release (Pengelly, 2018). Still, long-term effects of the campaign for Nike's reputation and sales are yet to be determined.

Other examples of brands positioning toward political issues include public statements on political developments (e.g., New Balance's appreciation of Trump's election), promotions combined with political topics (e.g., a Ryanair promotion of cheap flights linked to a "remain" endorsement during the Brexit debate), or commercials featuring a political topic (e.g., Anheuser-Busch's Super Bowl ad supporting immigration). These examples are forms of *political brand communication*, which we define as a brand's public expression of a stance toward a political issue that is not directly related to a brand's business models. Thus, political brand communication can be distinguished, on the one hand, from more business-related marketing forms such as cause-related marketing that is directly connected to a brand's sales (Andrews et al., 2014; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988) and, on the other hand, from broader forms of corporate advocacy that extend beyond marketing activities such as corporate social advocacy (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Rim et al., 2020).

With the increased usage of political brand communication, brands seem to respond to a growing consumer demand for authenticity and identifiability (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). However, consumers have opposed attitudes about brands' political involvement; survey results suggest that about 30% of consumers want brands to take a public stance on political issues, while 50% disagree (Strong, 2018). Moreover, the relevance and diversity of the consequence of political brand communication is underlined by the fact that between one third and half of consumers say that they buy (i.e., "buycott") or boycott products based on a brand's stance on political or societal issues (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020; Edelman, 2018).

Prior academic literature mostly focused on individual drivers and motives of buying or boycotting a brand for political reasons and showed that the tendency to "boycott" was positively influenced by liberal party affiliation, political knowledge, or income (e.g., Baek, 2010; Jost et al., 2017; Neilson, 2010). Furthermore, Matos et al. (2017) found that consumers' self-brand connection and, indirectly, their purchase intentions are higher when a brand's political position is aligned (vs. misaligned) to their individual political affiliation. However, research on the consequences of political brand communication from a firm perspective is scarce. Hence, it remains unclear whether, and under which conditions, political brand communication may be a fruitful or an adverse strategy for firms.

Against this background, this paper investigates whether and when political brand communication induces positive effects of "buycotting" by agreeing consumers that outweigh the negative effects of boycotts by disagreeing consumers, based on two experimental studies with different sets of brands, issues, and in two countries. Our

findings offer several contributions. First, we advance literature on brand communication and political consumerism by providing consistent evidence that boycotting has stronger net effect than buycotting, implying that political brand communication is a risky strategy. Second, we explain the different effectiveness of both forms of political consumerism by arguing that different motivations behind buycotting and boycotting lead to a different perceived effectiveness by consumers. Third, we identify relevant boundary conditions of buycotting and boycotting. Specifically, we show that the imbalance of boycotting and buycotting is decreased for higher consumers' political interest (due to a stronger effect of buycotting) and lower category involvement (due to a weaker effect of boycotting). Finally, we discuss the potential societal implications of political brand communication in increasingly polarized political environments.

Political Brand Communication

For decades now, companies have tried to link their brands with social causes and social responsibility. Marketers thereby aim to differentiate their brand from its competitors, develop a brand personality and strengthen customer ties (Matos et al., 2017). As a result, research has extensively focused on potential effects of cause-related marketing (CRM) on *brand image* and *purchase intentions* (e.g., Andrews et al., 2014; Mohr & Webb, 2005; Smith & Higgins, 2000; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). In this, CRM has been defined as "marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specified amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue-providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives" (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988, p. 60). As a result, when engaging in CRM, corporations regard social responsibility as an investment and thus usually select a social cause that is free of controversy (Smith & Higgins, 2000; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988).

Research on CRM thereby demonstrates that connecting a brand with a cause can increase a company's sales and improve their brand image if the cause is perceived as fitting and the company's motivation behind CRM is not perceived as exploitative (Andrews et al., 2014; Barone et al., 2000; Webb & Mohr, 1998). Moreover, even though CRM usually relates to non-controversial causes and is thus different from the type of communication analyzed here, studies suggest that the effectiveness of CRM is also influenced by the perception of the connected cause as morally correct and by how much consumers identify with a cause (Barone et al., 2000; Koschate-Fischer et al., 2012; Silva et al., 2020). In addition, research also indicates that consumers' general skepticism toward advertising might attenuate the effect of CRM (Manuel et al., 2014; Webb & Mohr, 1998). As such, skepticism toward advertisement might also be a relevant inhibitor for the effectiveness of political brand communication. Overall, research on CRM already points toward individual differences in how people might perceive connecting corporative communication to a social cause and suggests that these differences might relate to variation in consumer behavior.

To examine instances in which companies take a stance on more controversial issues, scholars from public relations have introduced the concept of corporate social advocacy (CSA). CSA has been conceptualized as "the taking of a public stance on a controversial social-political issue by corporations, most often in the form of a CEO statement" (Dodd & Supa, 2015, p. 287). CSA consists of both planned organizational initiatives as well as spontaneous and unscripted remarks, for instance in the form of tweets by a CEO (Dodd & Supa, 2014; Rim et al., 2020), differentiating it from concepts that exclusively relate to marketing activities such as CRM or political brand communication.

Studies on CSA demonstrate that by taking a stance on a controversial social issue, companies can increase their sales and strengthen consumers' brand loyalty (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Park & Jiang, 2020). Moreover, research also demonstrates that CSA can impact how consumers think about the social issues, thus potentially even creating a societal added value (Parcha & Kingsley Westerman, 2020). Still, studies also indicate that taking a stance in a divisive issue can provoke polarized reactions that potentially backfire (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018; Rim et al., 2020). Rim et al. (2020, p. 8) thereby suggest that CSA can lead to boycotts and buycotts with the former being potentially more influential due to the fact that "boycotters are internalized with self-efficacy and driven by anger, they are more likely to be vocal and mobilized, compared to the supporters group who are positively motivated." Overall, research on concepts related to political brand communication, that is, CRM and CSA, suggest that taking a stance in a political issue can increase a company's sales and improve their image, whereas especially controversial issues might pose the threat of consumer boycotts.

Recently, companies have expanded their marketing toolkit by increasingly taking political stances and thereby linking brands with political issues (Matos et al., 2017). In doing so, they engage in what we call *political brand communication* (PBC) meaning a brand's public expression of a stance toward a political issue that has no direct relation to a brand's business models.[1] PBC thereby differs from CRM in two characteristics: First, PBC does not relate to a social cause through a financial contribution that is connected to their own sales, but through the verbalization of a political stance in marketing activities. Second, while CRM usually links a company to a non-controversial issue, PBC can relate to both controversial and non-controversial issues. Moreover, PBC also differs from CSA as it consists solely of pre-planned marketing activities and does not encompass unintentional or unscripted communication efforts. While in previous decades scholars have extensively analyzed CRM, research on CSA and PBC has only developed more recently with the latter having so far only received little scholarly attention (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Matos et al., 2017).

Overall, marketers' decision to engage in political brand communication appears to be driven by the same motivators as corporate social responsibility, corporate social advocacy and cause-related marketing. "Brands communicate in a myriad of voices across ever-fractionating media with multiple messages in an increasingly cluttered environment to consumers with decreasing attention spans" (Matos et al., 2017, p. 126). Consequently, companies decide to take political stances to differentiate themselves from their competitors and create messages with a high memorability that

resonate with consumers (Matos et al., 2017). As such, political brand communication also aims at increasing brand image and thereby sales. Simultaneously, political brand communication also responds to a growing consumer demand for more authentic consumer experience (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). This also reflects the idea of lifestyle politics that suggests that people increasingly seek to find political meaning in their consumption behavior (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020).

Consumers, in turn, increasingly associate brands with political positions and partly base their consumption upon perceived (in)congruity between their political opinion and the perceived political positioning of a brand (Baek, 2010; Hoewe & Hatemi, 2017; Matos et al., 2017). Whereas a perceived similarity between oneself and a brand's political position should thus increase the purchase of products, "a misalignment between brand political position and individual political-affiliation should be perceived as an impactful norm violation of brand trust and the underlying brand relationship" (Matos et al., 2017, p. 128). Research, in turn, has increasingly been focused on political based consumer behavior that has been labelled *political consumerism*.

Political Consumerism

Research on political behavior has extensively focused on analyzing and explaining the motivation behind different forms of political participation (e.g., Dalton, 2000; Kristofferson et al., 2014; Simon, 1995). Scholars thereby have repeatedly voiced concern about the decline in voter turnout and party membership in many western democracies arguing that citizens are increasingly detached from the political process (e.g., Flicklinger & Studlar, 1992; Gray & Caul, 2000; Siaroff, 2009).

Others, however, have emphasized the idea that citizens do not refuse to participate in the political process, but partly just changed their political practices (Bennett, 1998; Inglehart & Catterberg, 2002; Norris, 2002; Shah et al., 2007). As a result, societal changes like the shift from industrial to post-industrial economic systems or the increasing importance of post-materialistic values provide the context for changing political behaviors in which individuals "address personal and political problems related to quality of life concerns outside the realm of electoral politics" (Copeland, 2014, p. 174). Consequently, scholars have started to discuss the emergence of lifestyle politics as political behavior that "depart[s] from a realization that one's everyday decisions have global implications, and that global considerations should therefore affect lifestyle choices" (De Moor, 2017, p. 180).

Part of this discussion is the rise of *political consumerism* which can be understood as the deliberate decision to either avoid the consumption of certain products or seek its consumption due to political or ethical reasons (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014; Copeland & Boulianne, 2020). It thus describes the "use of the market as an arena for politics in order to change institutional or market practices found to be ethically, environmentally, or politically objectionable" (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013, p. 39). While political consumerism is not a new phenomenon, it has been on the rise since the 1980s and even more so with the development and widespread usage of the internet, e-commerce and social media (Kelm & Dohle, 2018; Stolle et al., 2005). Through social

media, consumers have access to a multitude of information sources on how companies, for instance, treat their employees or produce their goods, while social media simultaneously provides a platform for like-minded people to communicate and coordinate (Kelm & Dohle, 2018). Consequently, scholars have suggested that political consumerism nowadays is the "most widespread form of political participation, second only to voting" (Copeland, 2014, p. 172).

Marketing research has extensively studied the predictors of political consumerism by applying a micro level perspective (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020). Studies suggest that female consumers with higher education and political interest tend to more often engage in political consumerism (Newman & Bartels, 2011; Sandovici & Davis, 2010). Moreover, political consumerism appears to be related to mistrust in political institutions, (social) media usage and ideological intensity (Endres & Panagopoulos, 2017; Neilson & Paxton, 2010). While a recent meta-analysis by Copeland and Boulianne (2020) supports this overall pattern, it also indicates a major flaw in existing research designs, as literature so far has not adequately addressed differences in the motivation behind the two main forms of political consumerism, namely *boycotting* and *buycotting*.

A helpful theoretical framework for understanding political consumerism is Heider's (1946, 1958) Balance Theory. It suggests that "[a]ttitudes toward persons and causal unit formations influence each other" (Heider, 1946, p. 107). Moreover, Balance Theory postulates that individuals seek to achieve balance in their relations and "if no balance exists, the state of imbalance will give rise to tension and forces to restore balance" (Harari, 1967, p.178). In a dyadic relationship, a state of balance can be exemplified as the following: "We want people we like to like us, and we tend to like people who like us—and the parallel is true for negative sentiments" (Heider, 1958, p. 205). In more complex networks such as triads, balance can be determined by multiplying the signs of the relations with a positive result indicating an existing balance (Basil & Herr, 2006). Consequently, the relationship between three entities is balanced either if all three relations are positive or if two are negative and one positive (Heider, 1946). If a relationship is unbalanced, individuals might re-evaluate their sentiments and/or opinions toward the involved persons or entities (Harari, 1967).

Scholars have repeatedly suggested that Balance Theory can be applied to consumer behavior (e.g., Basil & Herr, 2006; Woodside & Chebat, 2001). For political consumerism, Balance Theory is helpful to explain the relationship between an individual A, a political issue I and a company C. As suggested above, this relationship can be balanced in two scenarios (see Figure A1 in the Supplemental Appendix). First, an individual supports a political cause that is also supported by a company and as a result, the individual's tie to the company is strengthened increasing the chances of buycotting behavior. Second, if the individual supports a cause and the company takes a stance against that cause, this could potentially result in the individual boycotting the company.

Consequently, if a company takes a stance on a political issue, it can affect the relationship between an individual and the company in two ways. First, if no prior tie between company and individual exists, the individual will most likely try to uphold a

balanced relationship and thus either form a positive or negative connection to the company. Second, if a prior relationship between individual and company exists, it might be re-evaluated if a company takes a stance on a political issue (see also: Hoewe & Hatemi, 2017). If this stance creates an unbalanced triadic relationship, the individual might re-evaluate how (s)he thinks about the company. As a result, Balance Theory provides a framework for understanding why consumers might boycott or buycott a product when a company takes a stance in their marketing activities.

Boycotting and Buycotting as Forms of Political Consumerism

In their meta-analysis of research on political consumerism, Copeland and Boulianne (2020) demonstrate that studies rarely address the difference between boycotting and buycotting. Of the 184 studies that they examine, 78 solely focus on boycotting while an additional 68 do not conceptually differentiate between both forms of political consumerism. Nevertheless, there are at least three arguments for treating boycotting and buycotting as two conceptually different forms of political behavior.

First, research demonstrates that people that tend to boycott are different from those with a tendency to buycott. Baek (2010), for instance, shows that highly educated people participate more often in boycotts than in buycotts, whereas conservatives seem to more often buycott products rather than boycott them. Moreover, Neilson (2010) demonstrates that women more often engage in buycotts than men, while there is no gender difference in boycotting. Finally, her research also suggests that buycotters are overall more trusting, altruistic and more often involved in voluntary associations than boycotters. Since research, however, widely ignores the conceptual difference between boycotts and buycotts, it tends to ignore the "large population of exclusive buycotters" (Neilson, 2010, p. 224).

Second, differentiating between boycotts and buycotts is meaningful because both are driven by different motivational characteristics. Following Friedman (1999), boycotts are a conflict-oriented form of behavior in which people punish a company for specific business practices. Buycotts, however, can be conceptualized as a rewarding and cooperative form of behavior because companies that act in accordance with customers' ethical or political ideals are supported by them. Moreover, while boycotts have been described as a collectivistic form of political consumerism, buycotts have been characterized as individualistic and less often driven by collective action (Copeland, 2014; Kelm & Dohle, 2018; Rim et al., 2020). Another difference between boycotting and buycotting is that as a form of collective punishment, boycotts tend to be more salient and therefore receive more media attention than buycotts (Friedman, 1999).

Finally, Copeland (2014) suggests that boycotting and buycotting are associated with different citizenship norms. In general, citizenship norms describe people's understanding of what it means to be a good citizen. Scholars thereby differentiate between dutiful and engaged citizenship norms. "Whereas dutiful citizenship norms emphasize obligation, loyalty to the state and deference to authority, engaged citizenship norms emphasize the importance of voluntary activity, forming one's own

opinion and helping others" (Copeland, 2014, p. 176). As a result, since boycotting is a conflict-oriented often collective form of behavior in which a company is punished for a perceived transgression, it should stronger correlate with dutiful citizenship norms. Buycotting, however, is a more individualistic and rewarding form of political consumerism and should therefore be stronger associated with engaged citizenship norms. Consequently, boycotting is similar to traditional interest-based politics such as voting, whereas buycotting shares more characteristics with civic engagement, volunteering and participation in community work (Copeland, 2014). It is, however, noteworthy that Copeland (2014) also demonstrates that so-called dualcotters exist that understand "boycotting and buycotting as two sides of the same coin" (p. 184). Her study thereby shows that dualcotters are more similar to buycotters than to boycotters. This is in line with results from Neilson (2010) who shows that dualcotters are more altruisitic and that dualcotting thereby is an intensified variant of buycotting.

Nevertheless, since boycotters differ from buycotters in their sociodemographics and their preferred citizenship norms, the overall tendency to boycott means the absolute effect of consumer disapproval might also be different from the overall tendency to buycott. Since dualcotters perceive boycotting and buycotting as related forms of behavior, we believe that among dualcotters, the overall effect of consumer disapproval will not differ from the effect of approval. Moreover, as both forms of political consumerism are motivated by different factors, they should also be affected by a different set of boundary conditions that might explain variations in the difference in the absolute effects of consumers' disapproval and approval. As these questions have not been addressed by prior research, the following studies aim to contribute to a more detailed account of boycotting and buycotting.

Conceptual Framework

As demonstrated above, consumers react differently to political brand communication if they agree or disagree with the political position taken by a firm. In this, political brand communication mostly appears to influence consumers' *brand image* and *purchase intention* (e.g., Andrews et al., 2014; Ellen et al., 2006; Mohr & Webb, 2005; Smith & Higgins, 2000; Varadarajan & Menon, 1988). We thereby understand brand image with Low and Lamb (2000, p. 352) as "the reasoned or emotional perceptions consumers attach to specific brands". It thus consists of functional as well as symbolic beliefs about a brand including perceptions of brand quality and attitudes toward a brand (Keller, 1993; Low & Lamb, 2000). Purchase intention can be defined as the likelihood that a consumer will buy a specific product. As such, it is a useful proxy for actual purchase behavior even though "[a] greater willingness to buy a product means the probability to buy it is higher, but not necessarily to actually buy it" (Wang & Tsai, 2014, p. 29). Overall, marketing research repeatedly and convincingly demonstrated that brand image directly impacts purchase intention suggesting that both constructs are helpful surrogates for actual consumer behavior (e.g., Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Wang & Tsai, 2014; Yu et al., 2013).

As outlined above, research suggests that it is conceptually meaningful to differentiate between *boycotting* as a potential consequence of customers' disapproval of political brand communication and *buycotting* as a potential consequence of their approval of political brand communication (Copeland, 2014; Friedman, 1999; Kelm & Dohle, 2018). Since both forms of political consumerism are pursued by people with different backgrounds (Baek, 2010; Neilson, 2010) and are related to different motivational factors (Copeland, 2014; Friedman, 1999), this raises the question of whether the overall effect of consumers' disapproval of political brand communication, that is, boycotting, on brand image and customers' purchase intention is larger than the effect of consumers' approval of said communication, that is, buycotting.

Even though research to date has not addressed this question in detail, the different characteristics of both forms of political behavior suggest that the overall effect of disapproval should be stronger. Prior research indicates that political consumerism behavior is influenced by consumers' perceived effectiveness of their decision to boycott or buycott products on a brand's future behavior (e.g., Albrecht et al., 2013; Kelm & Dohle, 2018; Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001). Since boycotting is a form of collective action and buycotting is often characterized as an individually motivated behavior that is less salient (Friedman, 1999; Neilson, 2010), consumers should estimate the effectiveness of boycotting as higher than the effectiveness of buycotting. This is in line with results from Rim et al. (2020) who demonstrate that, in response to CSA, boycotters tend to form networks that are more dense and highly connected than buycotter networks. This might even be amplified by the higher overall media attention that boycotting receives in comparison to buycotting (Friedman, 1999).

The potentially larger effect of disapproval can also be expressed through the lens of Balance Theory. Here, differences in the network structure between boycotting and buycotting networks can explain why the overall tendency to boycott should outweigh the overall tendency to buycott. First, boycotting networks tend to involve more entities due to the collective nature of boycotts. Consequently, there might be a higher pressure to keep or restore balance in the network. Second, boycotting networks have a higher interconnectedness than buycotting networks. It is thus comparatively easy to establish balance in large boycotting networks, that is, by adopting a negative relation to the brand. As such, only a small share of ties needs to be changed or adopted in order to reach balance in a comparatively large network.

Finally, a stronger absolute effect of consumers' disapproval compared to consumers' approval is also in line with the idea of negativity bias stating that individuals give a greater weight to negative stimuli as compared to positive ones (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). The stronger salience and influence of negative information has, for instance, been demonstrated for consumer reviews (Yang & Unnava, 2016), news items (Soroka & McAdams, 2015) and information-processing during political campaigns (Meffert et al., 2006). As a result, we expect negativity bias to also influence political consumerism.[2] Thus, we postulate:

H1: Consumers' disapproval of a brand's political position has a stronger absolute effect on their (a) brand image and (b) purchase intention compared to consumers' approval with the brand's political position.

Moreover, research also suggests that boycotting and buycotting are influenced by different boundary conditions (Friedman, 1999). As a result, the potential difference in the absolute effect between customers' approval and disapproval of a brand's political decision should vary. While research to date has not extensively addressed them, the above introduced conceptualization of boycotting and buycotting suggests which characteristics might increase or decrease the difference in the absolute effect between customers' approval and disapproval. From the perspective of Balance Theory, the likelihood that the connection to a brand is reinforced or changes in response to a brand taking a political stance might also depend on the pre-existing strength of the connection between an individual and the other involved entities, namely the political issue (H2) at hand and the advertised product (H3).

In this, we suggest that for buycotters political interest might be a helpful predictor for the strength of the tie between an individual and a political issue. In general and in line with this, the meta-analysis by Copeland and Boulianne (2020) points toward an overall tendency that people with higher political interest are more likely to engage in political consumerism. Based on the characteristics of boycotting and buycotting, however, we believe that this is especially true for consumers' approval, that is, buycotts. Studies suggest that consumers who are more altruistic, willing to volunteer, who show more civil engagement and who possess engaged citizenship norms are more likely to buycott products (Copeland, 2014; Neilson, 2010). Since all those characteristics imply an intrinsic motivation to participate in political behavior and since they tend to be positively related to political interest (Dalton, 2006; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Xenos & Moy, 2007), we assume that consumers with higher political interest are more likely to buycott.

Boycotting, however, is conceptualized as a collective form of action that shows a stronger relationship with dutiful citizenship norms (Copeland, 2014). People with strong dutiful citizenship norms regard engaging in political behavior as a duty of a good citizen "because of external pressures, the message by political elites, or simple tradition" (Hooghe & Oser, 2015, p. 32). They thereby less often follow an intrinsic motivation when participating in political behavior suggesting that the decision to participate in boycotts might be largely independent from political interest (Dalton, 2006; Hooghe & Oser, 2015).

Dualcotters, finally, are more similar to buycotters, since they are more altruistic and driven by engaged citizenship norms (Copeland, 2014; Neilson, 2010). As such, dualcotting should also be affected by political interest. We, however, suggest that among dualcotters, the tendency to boycott will be similar to the tendency to buycott, since, unlike boycotting driven by dutiful citizenship norms, dualcotting is not a form of collective punishment and less driven by negative bias. Instead, dualcotting has been characterized as an individual decision between products that is politically motivated (Copeland, 2014). Consequentially, we assume that among dualcotters, the

overall effect of disapproval should not outweigh the overall effect of approval. We thus propose that with higher political interest, the tendency to buycott increases, the tendency to boycott remains unaffected and the tendency to dualcott increases, but is equally distributed between boycotting and buycotting behavior. We thus inquire:

H2: The difference in the absolute effects of consumers' disapproval and approval of a brand's political position decreases with a higher political interest.

Moreover, marketing research consistently points toward an important role of consumers' *category involvement* when consumers judge corporate behavior that they perceive as unethical (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010; Haberstroh et al., 2017; Kübler et al., 2020). As a result, through the lens of Balance Theory, we propose that for boycotters, category involvement might be a helpful surrogate for the strength of the tie between an individual and a product. Category involvement "refers to the feelings of interest and enthusiasm consumers hold toward product categories" (Goldsmith & Emmert, 1991, p.363). Studies have suggested that higher involvement leads to deeper knowledge of products and its substitutes, and thus might moderate the effect of moral outrage on purchase intention (Bloch, 1981; Park & Moon, 2003; Park & Yoon, 2017).

Since the decision to boycott a brand can be understood as an assessment between the benefits of buying a product despite a perceived moral misconduct in comparison to the cost of finding a suitable substitute (Friedman, 1999), we suggest that category involvement should also have an influence on boycotting, while it should not affect buycotts. In this, we assume that the higher involved a consumer is with a product, the more the consumer knows about potential substitutes and the lower the potential costs of a boycott. In turn, this suggests that, if suitable substitutes exist, higher category involvement should in the end increase the likelihood that the consumer boycotts a product if (s)he disapproves a brand's political position, while category involvement should not influence the effect of consumers' approval of a brand's political position.[3] Consequently, we postulate:

H3: The difference in the absolute effects of consumers' disapproval and approval of a brand's political position increases with a higher category involvement.

Study 1

Procedure and Measures

To test our first hypothesis, we conducted an online experimental study in Germany using a convenience sample of 184 cases. Of those, 158 respondents ($M_{age} = 31.2$; 53% female) filled out the complete questionnaire, knew the investigated brands and managed to answer a simple control question ("Please set your mark on 3."). We exposed study participants to fictive political brand communication (i.e., advertisements) of two real German fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) brands (categories: beer and detergent). To enable agreement and disagreement of both liberal and conservative

consumers, the advertisement featured either a liberal or conservative position toward a current political issue. Thus, respondents were randomly assigned to one out of four advertisements (brand: beer/detergent × political positioning: liberal/conservative).

The political brand communication by the beer brand addressed gender segregation by either promoting equality for all (liberal position: "One beer. One can. All genders!," showing a rainbow-colored can) or promoting preservation of distinct genders (conservative position: "Everything stays the same with us. Make up your mind!," showing a blue can with a male symbol and a pink can with a female symbol). Furthermore, the political brand communication by the detergent brand featured border security by either promoting open borders (liberal position: "Unlimited washing power for a Germany without limits.") or promoting controlled borders (conservative position: "Germany needs limits! But your washing power does not."; see supplemental material for the used stimulus material).

In this first study, we rely on respondents' brand image as a surrogate for their intended purchase behavior, since prior research has demonstrated a strong correlation between both constructs (see: Reza Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Wang & Tsai, 2014; Yu et al., 2013). To assess the impact of political brand communication on respondents' brand image, we used a pre-post-test-design. Specifically, before and after the stimulus, we assessed respondents' existing brand image on a five-item semantic differential adapted from Low and Lamb (2000; *unpleasant versus pleasant, bad versus good, inferior versus superior, unpopular versus popular, untrustworthy versus trustworthy*; $\alpha_{pre} = .84$, $\alpha_{post} = .88$). The absolute value of the difference between the two aggregated means (|post—pre|) served as our dependent variable ($M = 0.709$; $SD = 0.900$).

Furthermore, we measured respondents' opinion toward the brand's political position on a 7-point one-item scale ("To what extent do you agree or disagree to the statement in the advertisement?" with 1: *totally disagree* and 7: *totally agree, M* = 3.97, *SD* = 2.05). For the analysis, we excluded respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement ($n = 25$) because those people would not buycott or boycott for political reasons. Thus, our final sample consisted of 133 respondents. In addition, we generated two variables out of this measure. First, we computed our main independent variable valence of opinion (1: approval, if respondent marked 5, 6 or 7; 0: disapproval if respondent marked 1, 2, or 3, 52% approval).[4] Moreover, to control for influences of the degree to which participants approve or disapprove the message, we created the variable strength of opinion (from 1 to 3, i.e., 1 if respondent marked 3 or 5, 2 if respondent marked 2 or 6, and 3 if respondent marked 1 or 7). Finally, as an additional control variable, we measured respondents' political affiliation (liberal vs. conservative, 7-point, $M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.10$) and debriefed our participants.[5]

Results

We pooled all respondents and ran a regression model with absolute change in brand image as dependent variable, and valence of respondents' opinion toward the brand's political brand communication (approval vs. disapproval) and respondents' opinion strength as independent variables (see Table 1). Results show a significant negative

Table 1. Results for Regression Models, Study 1.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
(Constant)	0.603**	0.224	1.076***	0.106	1.170***	0.291
Valence of opinion (1: approval)	−0.694***	0.149	−0.685***	0.146	−0.524**	0.222
Strength of opinion	0.248**	0.089	0.507***	0.127	0.439**	0.142
Valence × Strength			−0.484**	0.174	−0.437**	0.186
Brand (1: detergent)					0.001	0.153
Brand position (1: conservative)					0.237	0.230
Political affiliation					−0.103	0.072
Adjusted R^2	0.198		0.237		0.244	

Note. Model 1: $n = 133$, $F(2, 130) = 17.28$, $p < .001$; Model 2: $n = 133$, $F(3, 129) = 14.69$, $p < .001$; Model 3 $n = 125$, $F(6, 126) = 7.62$, $p < .001$; Strength of opinion was mean-centered for ease of interpretation.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

effect of opinion valence ($b = -0.694$, $t(130) = -4.64$, $p < .001$), indicating that the absolute change in brand image was higher for respondents who disapproved the brand's position than for those who approved the position, supporting H1. Furthermore, the stronger respondents' opinion, the higher their change in brand image was ($b = 0.248$, $t(130) = 2.79$, $p = 0.006$).

In addition, we observe a significant interaction between both variables when we add this term to the model ($b = -0.483$; $t(129) = -2.78$; $p < .006$; Model 2). Thus, the marginal impact of opinion strength on the change in brand image was more pronounced for respondents who disapproved the brand's statement than for those who approved (see Supplemental Figure 11A in the online appendix). In other words, the difference in the effects of political brand communication between disapproving and approving respondents increases with a higher opinion strength. Our findings remained stable when we controlled for the product, the brand's position (liberal /conservative) and respondents' own ideology (see Model 3). Furthermore, all results did not change substantially when we analyzed each brand separately.

Study 2

With our second study, we aim to find additional support for H1 and overcome some limitations of our first study. Specifically, instead of using real brands which may facilitate confounding effects of prior associations, we employed a fictitious brand. In addition, we compare the participants' responses between the experimental groups and included a control group to overcome the limitations of the pre-post-test-design used in study 1. In addition, while we measured respondents' brand image in the first study as our main dependent variable, we assessed behavioral consequences (i.e., purchase intentions) of political brand communication in the following study. To provide further evidence for H1, we included skepticism toward advertising as an additional control

variable since it is known to influence the effects of advertisements and CRM (see Gaski & Etzel, 1986; Manuel et al., 2014; Webb & Mohr, 1998). Finally, we included the described boundary conditions to answer H2 and H3 and thus gain a deeper understanding of political brand communication.

Procedure and Measures

We conducted an online experimental study in the USA using a commercial panel provider. Overall, we recruited 853 participants of which 805 (M_{age} = 43.8, 61% female) filled out the complete questionnaire and managed to answer a simple control question ("Please set your mark on 2."). Respondents were randomly assigned to one of five conditions in a 2 (political issue: gun control vs. border wall) × 2 (political brand communication: liberal vs. conservative) + control condition between-subject-design.[6] We created the fictive beverage brand "Mount Augusta" for this experiment. As a product category, we chose bottled water to ensure sufficient category involvement and product substitutability for all participants. Furthermore, we selected "border wall" (i.e., the debate about building a wall at the US-Mexico-border) and "gun control" (i.e., the debate about restricting guns) as political issues as these topics are polarizing and at the time had an approximately equal number of supporters and opponents in the US (ISideWith.com, 2020a, 2020b).

In the control condition, we initially showed participants an advertisement by Mount Augusta promoting new packaging sizes ("Now available in different sizes. The right amount for every occasion. #drinkwater"). In the experimental conditions, respondents initially received a fictive online newspaper article covering the political brand communication, that is, an advertising campaign. Across all experimental conditions, the article reported on a latest advertising campaign in which the brand takes a clear stance on the respective political debate (e.g., liberal border wall condition: "Mount Augusta publicly opposes building of border wall"; conservative border wall condition: "Mount Augusta publicly supports building of border wall"). Following this, fictive statements by a company CEO who reasoned the respective position were quoted. In a second paragraph, which was the same across all experimental conditions, the article reported on the reach and size of the brand's advertising campaign. Finally, a picture of the advertisement was shown to respondents (see supplemental material for the used stimulus material).[7]

After the exposure to the stimulus, we measured respondents' purchase intention toward the brand using a four-item scale adapted from Putrevu and Lord (1994; "It is very likely that I will buy Mount Augusta." "I will purchase Mount Augusta the next time I need bottled water," "I will definitely try Mount Augusta," "I would recommend a friend to buy water from Mount Augusta."; $\alpha = .96$, $M = 3.74$, $SD = 2.06$).

To measure respondents' approval or disapproval of the brand's stance, we used the same 7-point item as in study 1 ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 2.42$). We again excluded respondents who were assigned to one of the experimental conditions and who indicated a neutral position ($n = 68$), leading to a final sample of 737 respondents. Based on this measurement, we created two dummy variables: Approval of the brand's stance (1 for

respondents who marked the item higher than 4, 0 for respondents in the control group and disapproving respondents (<4), 51% approval) and disapproval of the brand's stance (1 for respondents who marked the item lower than 4, 0 for control group and approving respondents (>4), 35% disapproval).

Furthermore, we measured respondents' category involvement using a three-item semantic differential adopted from Ratchford (1987; e.g., "Making one's selection of bottled water is. . .*very unimportant/important*, $\alpha = .87$, $M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.71$). In addition, we measured respondents' political interest with one 7-point-item by Min (2010; "How interested are you generally in politics?," *not interested at all/very interested,* $M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.75$). Finally, as control variables, we asked respondents to indicate their political affiliation (Baek, 2010, two 7-point items, $\alpha = .95$, $M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.74$) and skepticism toward advertising (seven-item scale by Gaski & Etzel, 1986, $\alpha = .77$, $M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.11$).[8]

Results

In a first step, we ran a regression model with purchase intention as the dependent variable, and the two dummy variables covering respondents' approval or disapproval of the shown political brand communication, the setting (border wall or gun control) and the brand position (conservative or liberal) as independent variables. In this, we observe a significant positive effect on purchase intention of approving respondents compared to the control condition ($b = 0.85$, $t(736) = 4.75$, $p < .001$), and significant negative effect of disapproving respondents compared to the control condition ($b = -2.54$, $t(763) = -13.12$, $p < .001$, see model 1 in Table 2). A post-hoc test revealed that the absolute negative effect was significantly higher than the absolute positive effect ($F(1,732) = 6.45$, $p = 01$; $\eta^2 = .01$). Thus, we again found support for our first hypothesis, showing that the negative effect of boycotting outweighs the positive effect of buycotting.

Then, to check the robustness of our findings, we included political interest, category involvement, political affiliation, and skepticism toward advertising as control variables (see model 2 in Table 2). The results remained similar compared to the models without control variables (comparison of coefficients: $F(1, 728) = 4.82$; $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .01$).

Finally, we added interaction terms of category involvement and both dummy variables (approval/disapproval) as well as political interest and both dummy variables to the model (see model 3 Table 2). Again, the absolute effect of disapproval was significantly stronger than the absolute effect of approval, further strengthening the evidence for H1 ($F(1, 724) = 6.70$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .01$). Moreover, we observed a significant interaction of political interest and respondents' approval of the brand's stance ($b = 0.22$, $t(736) = 2.59$, $p = .01$). Thus, with a higher political interest, the marginal positive effects of approving respondents (i.e., "buycotters") increased, supporting H_2. The interaction between disapproval and political interest was not significant. Consequently, a spotlight analysis of the effects of approving and disapproving at high values of political interest (mean + 1 standard deviation) showed that the difference in the

Table 2. Results for Regression Models, Study 2.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Predictor	*b*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
(Constant)	4.074***	0.145	3.357***	0.267	4.350***	0.206
Approval (ref.: control)	0.850***	0.179	0.801***	0.173	0.715***	0.170
Disapproval (ref.: control)	−2.542***	0.194	−2.375***	0.189	−2.467***	0.185
Setting (1= Border Wall)	0.117	0.116	0.137	0.113	0.150	0.110
Brand position ` (1= Conservative)	0.172	0.116	0.084	0.113	0.149	0.111
Political interest			0.051	0.031	−0.036	0.074
Category involvement			0.175***	0.032	0.266**	0.080
Political affiliation			0.031	0.030	0.006	0.030
Ad skepticism			−0.170***	0.048	−0.185***	0.047
Approval × political interest					0.222*	0.086
Disapproval × political interest					−0.070	0.090
Approval × category involvement					0.002	0.092
Disapproval × category involvement					−0.262**	0.095
Adjusted R^2	0.527		0.560		0.585	

Note. $n = 737$, Model 1: $F(4,732) = 206.22$, $p < .001$; Model 2; $F(8,728) = 118.07$, $p < .001$; Model 3: $F(12,724) = 87.27$, $p < .001$; category involvement and political interest were mean-centered for ease of interpretation.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

absolute effects of disapproval and approval was not significant anymore ($F(1, 724) = 2.44$, $p = .12$).[9]

Furthermore, the interaction between respondents' disapproval and category involvement was significant ($b = -0.26$, $t(736) = -2.75$, $p = .01$). Hence, the higher respondents' category involvement, the stronger the boycotting intentions of disapproving consumers, supporting H_3. The interaction between approval and category involvement was not significant. In addition, a spotlight analysis of the effects of approving and disapproving at low levels of category involvement (mean − 1 standard deviation) reveals that the difference in the absolute effects of disapproval and approval was not significant anymore ($F(1, 726) = 1.87$, $p = .17$). Thus, a lower category involvement decreases the imbalance between buycotting and boycotting.[10]

Discussion

Over the past few years, brands increasingly engaged in political brand communication by advocating a specific political position in their marketing activities. However, our research suggest that this might be a risky strategy. In two experimental studies

involving both real and fictive brands, several political issues and set in two countries, we show that the negative effects of disapproving consumers (i.e., "boycotters") can outweigh the positive effects of approving consumers ("buycotters"). Furthermore, we show that the magnitude of this imbalance is decreased for higher levels of consumers' political interest and low levels of category involvement.

We explain these findings by the conceptual differences between boycotting and buycotting. Specifically, we suggest that boycotting is a form of collective action whereas buycoting is more often intrinsically and individually motivated behavior (Friedman, 1999; Neilson, 2010). As such, boycotts are more salient, draw more media attention and are therefore perceived as more effective than buycotts. Moreover, the idea of negativity bias suggests that people show a stronger tendency to perceive and process negative stimuli as compared to positive ones (Rozin & Royzman, 2001) explaining people's overall stronger tendency to boycott vis-à-vis buycott brands. Consequently, our study provides additional support for the concept of negative bias from a background of marketing research. Furthermore, as buycotting is driven by civic engagement, we argue that consumers with a higher political interest show a higher tendency to buycott; in contrast, we argue that a higher category involvement implies a higher knowledge of substitutes to a brand, which eases the potential negative costs of a boycott and thus makes it more likely to participate in a boycott.

To conceptualize political consumerism, we relied on Balance Theory that is based on the assumption that people seek balance in their relationships and perceive imbalance between different relations as a tension (Heider, 1946, 1958). We thereby demonstrate that Balance Theory is a helpful framework for understanding political consumerism. It suggests that the decision to consume a brand (or avoid consuming it) is not only based on characteristics of the brand or the product, but has to be regarded within a wider context including individual political preferences and marketing activities. We thus show that since boycotting networks tend to be larger and highly interconnected, there is a higher tendency to build and uphold negative product ties in response to disapproval of a brand's political stance as compared to positive ties in response to approval of a brand's political stance (H1). Moreover, we demonstrate that analyzing the nature and strength of pre-existing relations to the involved entities (brand and political issue) can help to explain variation in respondents' reaction to political brand communication (H2 & H3). Consequently, our study demonstrates that changing consumer behavior is not a simple task that can easily be accomplished with a marketing strategy. Rather, it might require changing several relations in a consumers' network in order to create or uphold balance within this network and increase the chance of affecting consumers' attitudes and behavior toward a brand.

Furthermore, our study indicates that Balance Theory might also be a fruitful approach to explain other processes of human decision-making, which tend to be complex and involve a multitude of relations. As a result, to understand decision-making processes it is necessary to unravel which entities are involved, how individual networks of entities might look like and how to create or reinforce balance within those networks. As such, Balance Theory might be a helpful theoretical anchor, for instance, to conceptualize and explain persuasive effects.

Moreover, the study offers managerial implications and points toward potential societal consequences. From a managerial perspective, our findings suggest that brands should be careful in positioning themselves toward political issues—especially toward controversial issues (as we tested in our experiments). In particular, brands should take a close look at what political issues are relevant to their target group and what opinions exist in society. Brands that have a distinct user imagery and a homogenous target group may apply political brand communication to foster consumer-brand relationships with existing customers and create unique brand associations. However, especially for brands with a broad, heterogeneous customer base that have diverse political opinions, political brand communication can be a risky, harmful strategy because disapproving "boycotters" may outweigh approving "buycotters."

This risky nature of political brand communication might have recently been exponentiated through the widespread distribution and usage of social media. In this, a perceived misconduct by a brand can potentially create an online firestorm (Johnen et al., 2018) that might increase the salience of a misconduct and thus people's willingness to participate in boycotts. As a result, firms increasingly need to be prepared for communication crises in order to be able to tone down the negative effects of brand communication. Moreover, the severity of potential negative consequences of political brand communication might be related to the political polarization in a given society. The more polarized the opinion climate on an issue is, the larger the potential negative implication of taking a political stance. Consequently, in societies where even public health crises become an issue of party politics, political brand communication might have severe negative consequences.

From a societal perspective, political consumerism first appears to be a desirable development. Scholars have indicated, for instance, that as a form of political behavior, political consumerism can reduce the participation gap between different social groups and thus help to get otherwise disengaged parts of society to become politically active (Acik, 2013; Gotlieb & Cheema, 2017). Our results, thereby, might be informative for political mobilization strategies since they suggest that trying to mobilize people through a sentiment of disapproval or outrage might lead to a larger turn out as compared to a celebratory or reward-based mobilization strategy. Moreover, political brand communication should also be evaluated critically within the framework of increasingly polarized societies. As such, companies' increasing willingness to engage in political brand communication might lead to polarized societies drifting further apart as differences in opinion climate become more salient and larger parts of everyday life become subverted by political behavior.

Our research has several notable limitations. First, there are severe methodological limitations to study 1, as the used sample is rather small and we failed to conduct an adequate manipulation check during the actual study. Since study 2 supports the findings indicated in study 1, we, however, feel confident that the study still provides valid insights into political consumerism. Moreover, the experimental situation was designed to emphasize internal validity thereby relying on a not completely natural setting. Consequently, future research should investigate the total effect of boycotting versus

buycotting in more naturalistic viewing situations, for example, by embedding the stimulus in entertainment content.

Furthermore, the stimulus material used in study 2 consisted of an advertisement and a news article that reported on the marketing campaign. The rationale behind this idea is that we wanted to provide further background information on the campaign to the respondents. However, in doing so, we might have measured the combined effect of the advertisement and the news article that can be interpreted as part of a PR campaign. Consequently, future studies should more clearly differentiate between the potential effect of marketing and public relations campaigns. Also, even though we conceptually acknowledge the unique motivation and characteristics of dualcotting, our research design was not able to single out the effect of dualcotting and contrast it with the effects of boycotting and buycotting. As a result, future studies should address the nature and effect of dualcotting more closely, that is, by asking respondents if and how often they boycott and/or buycott products.

In addition, we used controversial issues as experimental stimuli in both of our studies. Political brand communication on topics where a stronger majority opinion exists might have less adverse consequences when brands support the major opinion. Beyond this, future studies should aim to explore other moderators that weaken (increase) the negative (positive) effects of political brand communication (e.g., characteristics of topic, consumer, or positioning). As a part of this, future research should focus closely on the role of political ideology as a moderator between consumers' (dis)approval of political brand communication and their likelihood to boycott and/or buycott brands. Prior research has indicated that people who identify as liberals are more likely to engage in political consumerism in general (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020). How this might affect the absolute effect of consumers' (dis)approval of PBC as well as potential boundary conditions is a question that future research should address in detail.

Furthermore, as our studies featured only FMCG products with many substitutes, considering durables (e.g., electronics, cars) or services and categories with less substitutes might be interesting. In this, higher category involvement might not impact the tendency to boycott since products are not functionally substitutable. Also, future studies should incorporate a measure for perceived product substitutability (see: Ratchford, 1987) and analyze if this variable can explain variation in boycotting behavior. Moreover, instead of using advertisements (or reports on ads) as forms of political brand communication, future studies can test whether our results hold for other forms such as using controversial political endorsers (as Nike did with Kaepernick). Alternatively, as marketing is solely one form of corporate communication about social issues, future research should also analyze the effect of grander corporate social programs that consist, for instance, of CRM, CSA and PBC. Future research should also focus on other forms of politically motivated consumer behavior, e.g., posting a brand on social media or uploading videos where products are destroyed in response to political brand communication.

Finally, Parcha and Kingsley Westerman (2020) recently demonstrated that CSA might not only have an impact on attitudes toward a brand, but might also affect how

consumers think about the political issue at hand. Consequently, future research should build on this initial result and further investigate the impact of PBC, CRM, and CSA on public opinion. In doing so, scholars might combine insights from marketing and public relations with research on political behavior and unravel whether companies can also induce political activism and thus might actually advocate for social change.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Connecting sales income to charitable donations would be an example of a direct relation to a brand's business model.
2. We believe that among dualcotters, the absolute effect of consumers' approval should not differ from the absolute effect of disapproval, since dualcotting can be characterized as an individual politically motivated choice between products and dualcotters appear not to boycott products as a form of collective punishment (Copeland, 2014; Neilson, 2010).
3. The relationship between category involvement and consumers' disapproval might only hold true for certain products, namely products with suitable substitutes. If consumers believe that no substitutes for a brand are available then the likelihood that (s)he will boycott might actually not increase. We thus believe that this boundary condition might be especially relevant for FMCG that tend to be functionally substitutable (Foxall, 1999).
4. We created this measure to be able to directly contrast the effects of approval and disapproval. Keeping the continuous variable would only allow to analyze the influence of the degree of (dis)agreement on brand image.
5. Since, we failed to include a manipulation check in our initial study design, we had to conduct a manipulation check ex post. We therefore used an online survey with a convenient sample of 133 participants (M_{age} = 22.2; 71% female) in Germany. Each participant was randomly presented with one of our four fictive advertisements and asked to rate how liberal or conservative the political position expressed in the message is (7-point; *strongly*

liberal vs. *strongly conservative*) and how they perceive the political orientation of the advertised brand (7-point, *left* vs. *right*). Both items were then combined to one measure ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 4.16$, $SD = 2.12$). Before debriefing the participants about the fictive nature of the brand communication, we asked them for their sociodemographic background. To test if the stimuli are perceived differently, we ran an ANOVA using Benferroni post-hoc tests (see Supplemental Table A1 in the online appendix, $F(3, 129) = 98.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .70$). The results show that respondents perceived the political positioning in the liberal and conservative setting as significantly different and that each of the mean values was on the expected side of the scale.

6. Due to the introduction of a control group, we had to drop the control measure for opinion strength we used in study 1 because of issues with multicollinearity.
7. We decided to add the news article to the stimulus to provide background information about the marketing campaign. We discuss implications of this decision as part of the study's limitations in the discussions section.
8. To determine whether participants perceived the political messages as intended, we asked them to rate the views held by Mount Augusta and to describe the brand's political orientation, using two 7-point items ("*strongly liberal*" to "*strongly conservative*," $\alpha = .96$, $M = 4.14$, $SD = 2.10$). We then ran an ANOVA with Bonferroni post hoc tests to determine whether the mean perceived political ideology of our fictive brand differed between the experimental conditions and the control condition ($F(4, 800) = 119.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .37$). For both issues the results show that the mean value differed significantly between liberal and conservative positioning and that each of the mean values was on the expected side of the scale. Moreover, in the control condition, the brand's political positioning was perceived as significantly different from the experimental conditions with a political orientation that is close to the scale's midpoint ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.85$, see Table A2 in the Supplemental Appendix).
9. For a visualization of the interaction effect see Figure 12A in the Supplemental Appendix.
10. For a visualization of the interaction effect see Figure 13A in the Supplemental Appendix.

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