



International Journal of Advertising

The Review of Marketing Communications

ISSN: 0265-0487 (Print) 1759-3948 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rina20

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To cite this article: Sohyoun Shin, Jung Min Jang & Jennifer Brundidge (08 May 2026): Consumers as activists: exploring the links between political identity, corporate violence, and boycott intention, International Journal of Advertising, DOI: [10.1080/02650487.2026.2647666](https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2026.2647666)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2026.2647666>



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Consumers as activists: exploring the links between political identity, corporate violence, and boycott intention

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates political consumerism by exploring how consumers' political identity interacts with corporate violence type to influence boycott intentions in the social media setting. Findings show that consumers with a liberal political identity are more likely than conservatives to boycott companies implicated in the labor exploitation news, while no significant ideological differences emerge in response to unsafe product news. These patterns are attributed to the alignment between the consumers' activated political identity and the issues that resonate with their beliefs and values. A moderated serial mediation model further reveals that ideological congruence and news message credibility mediate these relationships. The results highlight the role of consumers as active agents in confronting corporate violence and provide strategic insights for corporations seeking to manage public perception and prevent potential negative impacts.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 22 July 2024

Accepted 14 March 2026


KEYWORDS

Boycott intention;
corporate violence;
ideological congruence;
news message credibility;
political consumerism;
political identity

1. Introduction

In recent years, social media has emerged as a powerful platform for consumer activism, particularly as a venue for organizing and expressing boycott intentions. Individuals share not only aspects of their daily lives, including decisions and evaluations related to product experiences, but also personal values, such as political beliefs. As consumers, they are increasingly aware of the societal impact of their purchases and non-purchases and often use social media to express ideological beliefs that justify these choices (Edwards 2024). Moreover, the public display nature of social media (Boyd and Ellison 2007) encourages users to express perspectives and join collective movements, and thus plays a crucial role in how information spreads and social actions are encouraged and formed. On platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), users

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2026.2647666>.

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can directly attach their own political messages to news posts and add hashtags, amplifying their reach and visibility through their own followers. Similarly, on Facebook, users show their support through emotional reactions such as 'Like' or express disagreement or disapproval through 'Angry.' Consumers often take a proactive stance by venting their frustration with products, brands, or corporate misdeeds on social media, and purposefully engaging in boycotts. When a brand is negatively portrayed in a news post, on-going consumer engagement can rapidly escalate reputational damage. Thus, understanding these dynamics is critical for preventing and minimizing such risk in today's media landscape.

This form of consumer activism is commonly referred to as political consumerism, a type of self-expression rooted in personal values and societal concerns. Political consumerism involves the deliberate purchase or avoidance of products, goods, or services for political reasons (Copeland and Boulianne 2022; Gulen and Aygoren 2020). Prior research further shows how the rise of social media has significantly expanded individuals' potential to engage in political and social discourse, thereby amplifying both the scope and spread of consumer boycotts (Aydin 2021; Dalakas, Joanna, and Szczytynski 2023). Indeed, the internet and social media have made boycott calls more accessible and frequent than ever before (Beck 2019). Researchers have identified several individual-level drivers of boycott behavior, including consumers' intention to correct the brand's perceived egregious behavior and to hold companies accountable for unethical practices (Braunsberger and Buckler 2011; John and Klein 2003). Social media-centered boycott studies have particularly highlight psychological factors as drivers, such as self-image enhancement (Boulianne 2022; Makarem and Jae 2016) and emotional expression, particularly anger (Dalakas, Joanna, and Szczytynski 2023; Lasarov, Hoffmann, and Orth 2023).

While some research has examined political ideology as a community-level factor—for instance, different boycott patterns between conservative and liberal regions in the U.S. (Liukonytė, Tuchman, and Zhu 2023)—less attention has been paid to how political identity, an individual's self-conception grounded in their ideological beliefs about social and political issues (Jung and Mittal 2020), shapes responses to corporate misconduct on social media. This study addresses this gap by examining how consumers' political identities influence their reactions to corporate violence in digital environments, particularly when such corporate misdeed news is reported and disseminated through social media.

We further explore whether the influence of political identity varies depending on the issue at hand. Although prior studies have shown that a brand's political stance can shape boycott participation (Liukonytė, Tuchman, and Zhu 2023; Rim, Lee, and Yoo 2020), they also indicate that reactions differ based on consumers' political alignment, highlighting political congruence as a key driver (Dalakas, Joanna, and Szczytynski 2023; Liukonytė, Tuchman, and Zhu 2023; Rim, Lee, and Yoo 2020). Building on this, we propose that the perceived severity of corporate malpractices may differ depending on one's ideological orientation. For example, liberals, who tend to prioritize values such as equality, rights, and social reform (Heywood 2015), may respond more strongly to labor-related corporate misconduct than conservatives. Importantly, these reactions are likely influenced by the perceived credibility of the news reporting the incident,

which can either strengthen or weaken the effect of political identity on consumers' behavioral intentions.

Thus, this study outlines its research objectives, suggesting both theoretical and practical contributions as follows. First, we explore the role of consumers as political actors who engage in boycotts in response to corporate misconduct. Specifically, we hypothesize and test the interaction effects between consumers' political identities and types of corporate violence—labor issue (i.e. labor exploitation, unsafe workplace) versus product issue (i.e. unsafe, malfunctioning products)—on boycott intentions, with type of corporate violence serving as a critical moderator in our research model. Additionally, this study investigates two serial mediators—ideological congruency and news message credibility—linking the interaction effect to boycott intentions. Our moderated serial mediation analysis provides a comprehensive view of the pathways from the interplay of consumers' political identity and corporate violence news to ideological congruency, connecting perceived news message credibility and ultimately, boycott intention. By uncovering this mechanism, this study enhances our understanding of political consumerism, particularly in the context of boycotts on social media. The findings offer strategic insights for companies by identifying which specific consumer segments are likely to react more negatively to different types of transgressions. This enables firms to better manage public perception through tailored communication strategies across different political identity groups and to proactively prevent rivals from exploiting their missteps as an opportunity.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Political consumerism and political identity

Political consumerism involves the use of the market as a platform for political action, where individuals deliberately purchase or boycott products, goods, or services to challenge unethical, environmental, or political practices or to reward companies for upholding favorable standards (Copeland and Boulianne 2022; Stolle and Micheletti 2013). Copeland (2014) identified four types of political consumers: boycotters (who avoid certain products), buycotters (who actively support certain products), dualcotters (who do both), and nocotters (who do neither). Kam and Deichert (2020) claim that consumer choices are shaped by social values and political preferences, manifesting in actions such as boycotts or buycotts. According to Baek (2010), approximately 49% of Americans can be classified as political consumers, with 46% engaging in both boycotting and buycotting (dualcotters), 30% engaging only in boycotting, and 24% only in buycotting.

Traditionally, boycotts were collective actions led by interest groups, aiming to achieve specific goals by encouraging consumers to avoid certain purchases (Friedman 1985, 1999). Research has since identified predictors of consumer boycotts, including demographics (Copeland 2014; Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005), personality traits (Ackermann and Gundelach 2022), and political orientation (Copeland 2014; Kelm and Dohle 2018). In today's media environment, individuals often use social media to express dissatisfaction, share their opinions against brands, and even call for brand boycotts, which are more likely to be non-instrumental—motivated more by emotional

expression, than instrumental, which is driven by the intent to change or stop corporate harmful practices (Dalakas, Joanna, and Szczytynski 2023; Lasarov, Hoffmann, and Orth 2023; Yousaf, Razzaq, and Fan 2021). Therefore, within this social media research stream, psychological motivations such as self-enhancement and expressions of anger or hostility have been identified as key drivers of consumer boycotts (Boulianne 2022; Dalakas, Joanna, and Szczytynski 2023; Makarem and Jae 2016). The consequences of consumer boycotts also have been examined, revealing their potential to erode brand attitudes, decrease purchase intentions, and damage corporate image (Ettenson and Klein 2005; Klein, Smith, and John 2002, 2004; Makarem and Jae 2016). Furthermore, financial consequences have been reported, including stock price declines following boycott announcements (Tomlin 2019; White and Kare 2011). While Koku (2012) found that online individual-led boycotts may not significantly impact stock prices, they can nonetheless damage firms' reputational capital.

Although social media-driven boycotts are often triggered by emotions (Dalakas, Joanna, and Szczytynski 2023; Makarem and Jae 2016), consumers ultimately base their decisions on values and ideologies, considering the ethical and political implications of business practices (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005). Identity theory emphasizes that individuals are embedded in social structures and interactions, which shape how they perceive and respond to social and political issues (Burke and Stets 2009; Serpe and Stryker 2011; Stets and Serpe 2013; Stryker 2002). For instance, Stets and Serpe (2013) explain that individuals hold multiple identities, reflecting their roles within social structures, group affiliations, and personal self-conceptions. Among these, political identity is particularly relevant; it is defined as a person's self-conception based on their ideology regarding the underlying goals and ideals about how a social and political system should work (Bozonelos et al. 2023; Jung and Mittal 2020), and includes their ideological orientation and party affiliation (Greene 2004). Political identity is commonly framed along a liberal–conservative or left–right continuum (Baron and Jost 2019; Weeden and Kurzban 2016), where liberals generally support change and equality, while conservatives tend to value tradition and hierarchy (Jost, Nosek, and Gosling 2008). Although research has found a modest positive association between liberal ideology and political consumerism (Copeland 2014; Kelm and Dohle 2018), these findings suggest the presence of moderating factors that warrant further investigation.

Emerging research has shown that political congruence affects consumer responses to brand activism. Consumers are more likely to oppose brands whose sociopolitical stances conflict with their own beliefs (Hong and Li 2021). Liaukonytė, Tuchman, and Zhu (2023) found that when a brand's political position aligns with the dominant ideology of a region, it can temporarily boost sales due to counter-boycotting behaviors, although these effects tend to diminish over time. Based on these findings, we propose the possibility of political congruence between consumers' political identity and specific types of corporate violence, as discussed in the following section.

2.2. Corporate violence and political identity

Corporate crime, an overarching concept that often encompasses and is used interchangeably with corporate violence, refers to illegal and harmful actions carried out by corporate officers or employees to further business or personal interests under

the name of the corporation. Such actions are typically categorized into operational crime (e.g. labor law violations) and financial crime (e.g. accounting fraud), and may also include broader forms of misconduct such as violence, theft, and corruption (Friedrichs 2010; Fuller 2019; Song and Han 2017). Corporate violence differs from interpersonal violence in that it results from corporate policies and actions that indirectly expose individuals to harmful conditions, products, or substances, often with delayed and difficult-to-trace effects (Friedrichs 2010). It is typically classified into three types: violence against workers (e.g. labor exploitation), against consumers (e.g. unsafe products), and against the public (e.g. environmental damage) (Friedrichs 2010; Meier and Short 1982). While corporate environmental violence involves more diffuse and long-term consequences—unlike labor and product safety issues, which are directly observable to individuals and frequently elicit immediate perceptions of harm and prompt consumer responses such as boycotts—the severity of harm caused by these violence forms is reflected in rising financial penalties and tangible social harms, including fatalities (Gottlieb 2009; Mattera and Standaert 2024).

A growing body of research has examined the impact of corporate violence on organizational performance. One stream of studies highlights shareholders' awareness of corporate misconduct and their willingness to penalize firms in financial markets. For instance, the total amount of penalties is negatively associated with firm-specific future stock price stability (Zaman, Bahadar, and Mahmood 2021), and unethical environmental practices lower market value (Afrin, Peng, and Bowen 2022). Negative media coverage of corporate wrongdoing also leads to significant drops in shareholder value (Teng and Yang 2021). At the consumer level, unethical practices—including tax evasion, unethical production processes, and illegal employee monitoring—diminish purchase intentions and provoke consumer outrage, increasing the likelihood of boycotts (Delistavrou, Krystallis, and Tilikidou 2020; Trautwein and Lindenmeier 2019; Matute, Sánchez-Torelló, and Palau-Saumell 2021).

However, empirical research on how consumers respond to different types of corporate misdeeds remains limited. Earlier work suggested that the nature of corporate violence types may moderate stakeholder reactions (Davidson, Worrell, and Lee 1994). More recent studies have investigated the role of individual differences—such as value orientations (e.g. materialism vs. post-materialism; Delistavrou, Krystallis, and Tilikidou 2020) and self-interest boundary conditions (e.g. hedonism vs. simplicity; Hoffmann et al. 2018)—in shaping evaluations of corporate violence. These findings suggest that stakeholders' reactions, including those of consumers, are driven not only by the characteristics of the misconduct itself but also by stable individual-level attributes and contextual factors.

Following this reasoning, we conceptualize political identity as a key individual-level determinant of consumer responses, and examine how its effects differ across types of corporate violence. Identity theory provides a useful framework for this analysis, as it suggests that individuals interpret events through the lens of their activated identities (Stryker and Burke 2000). Although corporate violence typically triggers negative responses across ideological groups, the nature and intensity of these reactions may vary by identity and violence type. Political identity, in particular, shapes sensitivity toward such violence: liberals, who tend to oppose inequality and favor

social change, are more attuned to issues like labor exploitation, while conservatives, who are generally more accepting of inequality and resistant to change, may perceive such issues as less severe (Federico and Schneider 2007; Jost 2006; Jost, Nosek, and Gosling 2008). For instance, liberal consumers show stronger negative responses to corporate tax evasion than conservatives, (Matute, Sánchez-Torelló, and Palau-Saumell 2021), and post-materialist consumers—who prioritize environmental protection and support efforts to eliminate worker exploitation—expressed greater boycott intention in response to labor rights violations and worker mistreatment (Delistavrou, Krystallis, and Tilikidou 2020). In social media environments—where identity signaling and emotional reactions are highly visible—these dynamics become particularly more noticeable, as consumers’ political values can shape how they interpret and respond to various types of corporate misconduct.

Based on this framework, the following section develops our hypotheses by elaborating how the interaction between different forms of corporate violence and consumers’ political identities influences their responses.

3. Hypotheses development

3.1. Interaction effects of political identity and corporate violence type on consumers’ intention to boycott

Fernandes (2020) argued that liberals are particularly more responsive to the topics concerning the protection of harm and fairness moral values. Accordingly, we conceptualize political identity as a primary individual-level source of variation in consumer evaluations, while the type of corporate violence provides the contextual condition under which these evaluations are formed. This process can be understood through ideological congruence—the alignment between consumers’ political identity and a firm’s actions or stance—which serve as a cognitive short cut or heuristic cue that may help news consumers to make sense of the news that they encounter (Bartels 2000; Xu, Rim, and Dong 2024). Ideological congruence may therefore make certain impressions more accessible and the sharing of news more fluid. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that consumers are likely to engage in selective exposure (Frey 1986) and have a strong preference for selecting ideologically congruent media (Stroud 2011), even when news media stories are not inherently political (Iyengar and Hahn 2009). Partisans, for whom ideology is a chronically accessible construct (Price and Tewksbury 1997), are particularly motivated in this regard and are especially likely to seek out ideologically congruent news online (Brundidge 2010) and to disseminate it *via* social media (Weeks and Holbert 2013).

Furthermore, identity salience implies that individuals are more likely to interpret situations they encounter in ways that render their more salient identities relevant, thereby enabling them to enact those identities (Stryker and Burke 2000). When consumers encounter corporate violence aligned with their ideological beliefs, their liberal or conservative identity becomes more salient and prominent than other roles or identities. Liberals are known to advocate for stronger labor rights, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and protection against exploitation. Therefore, news on a firm’s labor exploitation is expected to capture increased attention from liberals,

as their liberal political identity will be turned on and energized, and rise to the forefront of identity salience hierarchy. This will eventually induce a greater intention to boycott among liberals. In contrast, conservatives exposed to the same news would not experience a fit or congruency between the topic and their political identity, and they are likely to exhibit a lower level of engagement with the issue. This lack of resonance may lead conservatives to downplay the significance of wrongful corporate labor practices, and consequently they may remain indifferent and less likely to engage in boycotts.

When corporate violence involves defective products that cause harm and injuries, and thus products do not function as they are claimed, we expect to see both liberals and conservatives will respond toward the particular news in a similar manner. This is because ensuring product safety and functionality reflects a fundamental economic responsibility of business—an expectation shared across ideological lines. Carroll (2016) found that economic responsibility was rated highest among corporate obligations, highlighting its foundational role in business legitimacy. Such violations are less likely to activate political identities, as they do not align with ideological priorities. Thus, political identity may not always dominate consumers' responses. Instead, other aspects of consumers' values and interests—such as concerns with product safety, reliability, or quality—may become more prominent in a given context. Drawing on research on the multiple-identity framework (Saint Clair 2018, 2023; Stets and Serpe 2013) and identity-based consumer behavior (Reed et al. 2012), these non-political identities can guide behavior and decision-making, potentially resulting in similar and comparable levels of consumer backlash and boycott intentions across individuals, regardless of their political orientation. Hence, we hypothesize:

H1: The type of corporate violence will moderate the relationship between consumers' political identity and their intention to boycott such that when corporate violence is related to labor issues, consumers with a liberal political identity will exhibit a stronger intention to boycott compared to consumers with a conservative political identity. This will not be the case when corporate violence is related to product issues.

3.2. Interaction effects of political identity and corporate violence type on ideological congruence

As stated earlier, drawing on the idea that consumers activate different identities depending on context (Stryker and Burke 2000), we predict that responses to corporate violence will vary by issue type. To further explore the underlying mechanisms of our proposal, we hypothesize that ideological congruence is crucial in influencing consumer reactions to corporate violence. Ideological congruence captures the alignment between consumers' political or moral ideology and a firm's actions, values, or stance, shaping reactions such as trust, support, or boycott intentions (Xu, Rim, and Dong 2024). More relevantly, ideological congruence refers to the match between audience ideology and the ideological framing of messages or news sources, influencing persuasion and credibility (Walter, Edgerly, and Saucier 2021). This hypothesis is supported by extensive research indicating that the persuasiveness of a message is enhanced when it aligns with the observer's mental representational state (Chandon,

Wansink, and Laurent 2000; Kivetz 2005; Mitchell, Kahn, and Knasko 1995; Schwarz and Clore 1983). Specifically, when individuals encounter information that aligns with their beliefs and values, they are likely to perceive congruence, leading to experience mental comfort (Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman 2004). We suggest that, compared to conservatives, liberals will find labor-related corporate violence news more resonant because it aligns with their core interests and beliefs (Fernandes 2020), resulting in greater perceived congruence. Building on this reasoning, we expect the interaction between the type of corporate violence and consumers' political identities will influence perceived ideological congruence. Specifically, labor-related issues are likely to have a greater ideological fit for liberals, whereas product-related issues are less likely to connect with political ideology. Hence, we hypothesize:

H2: The type of corporate violence will moderate the relationship between consumers' political identity and their ideological congruence such that when corporate violence is related to labor issues, consumers with a liberal political identity will perceive stronger ideological congruence compared to consumers with a conservative political identity. This will not be the case when corporate violence is related to product issues.

3.3. Interaction effects of political identity and corporate violence type on news message credibility

We anticipate not only the interaction effect on consumers' intention to boycott and ideological congruence but also on how credible consumers perceive the news message to be. Within the field of mediated communication, credibility is defined as a perceiver's assessment of believability, or the extent to which a given speaker is likely to convey messages that serve as reliable guides to belief and behavior (Simons 2002). Traditionally, credibility has been defined by two key dimensions—expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis, and Kelly 1953)—evaluated through perceptions of the source or speaker. As mediated communication continues to thrive, recent research has begun to concentrate on the credibility of media messages. People assess its credibility based on its content, when information about the source of a message is absent (Hanimann et al. 2023), and message and source credibility are closely interrelated (Schweiger 2000). The success of professionals including marketers, journalists, and politicians in communicating with their audiences *via* media messages highly depends on receivers' perceptions of credibility (Hanimann et al. 2023). The trustworthiness of the information presented can significantly impact the choices people make regarding which information to engage with (Winter and Krämer 2014).

Relevant to our study, previous research suggests that congruence with one's beliefs, values, and opinions not only leads to mental comfort but may also cause individuals to misattribute this comfort to persuasiveness of the message itself, thereby perceiving the message as more effective and convincing (Bartels 2000; Kim, Rao, and Lee 2009; Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman 2004). Thus, when exposed to the corporate violence news related to labor exploitation and hazardous workplaces, consumers with liberal political identity are likely to perceive the report on the topics as more credible than their conservative counterparts. This discrepancy may arise due to the liberals' political ideology, which typically emphasizes social justice and workers' rights, creating a strong

alignment and fit with the subject matter of the news. Liberals therefore may be more inclined to selectively focus on and engage with news article, and comprehend the contents more and trust the narratives. In contrast, being exposed to the product issue news including unsafe, malfunctioning products, we expect that consumers' political identities do not significantly influence their perceptions of the credibility of news reporting on these issues. The reasoning is that product defects may be a shared concern regarding product safety and functionality among consumers across the wide ideological spectrum. Therefore, there will be a unified response between liberals and conservatives to the product issue news, as the impact of political identity to be diminished over other contributing factors. Hence, we hypothesize:

H3: The type of corporate violence will moderate the relationship between consumers' political identity and their perception of news message credibility such that when corporate violence is related to labor issues, consumers with a liberal political identity will perceive news messages as more credible compared to consumers with a conservative political identity. This will not be the case when corporate violence is related to product issues.

3.4. Moderated serial mediation: the mediating roles of ideological congruence and news message credibility

We predict that the consumers' political identities influence their boycott intentions through a serial mediation process involving two key psychological mechanisms: perceived ideological congruence with the news content and the perceived credibility of the news message. This proposed underlying mechanism is moderated by the nature of the corporate violence (labor issue vs. product issue). The linkage between these elements draws from findings that ideological congruence enhances the persuasiveness and credibility of a message (Chandon, Wansink, and Laurent 2000; Kim, Rao, and Lee 2009; Mitchell, Kahn, and Knasko 1995), which in turn can significantly influence consumer behavior.

Furthermore, existing literature supports the notion that value congruence contributes positively to the enhancement of news credibility (Reber, Schwarz, and Winkielman 2004; Schwarz and Clore 1983). This suggests that when consumers perceive news as congruent with their ideological values and interests, they not only experience a mental comfort that Kim, Rao, and Lee (2009) describe but are also more likely to trust and engage with the content. This dynamic is particularly potent in contexts where ideological beliefs are aligned with the news subject, such as labor issues for liberals who highly value social justice and workers' rights.

To encapsulate these dynamics, we propose a conditional serial mediation model that delineates how consumers' political identity influences their boycott intentions through a moderated pathway, where the corporate violence news type shapes the sequential mediation by ideological congruence and perceived news message credibility. Thus, we predict:

H4: H4: The interaction effect of consumers' political identity and corporate violence news on boycott intention is sequentially mediated by ideological congruence and perceived news message credibility.

In [Figure 1](#), the conceptual research model is presented alongside the hypotheses.

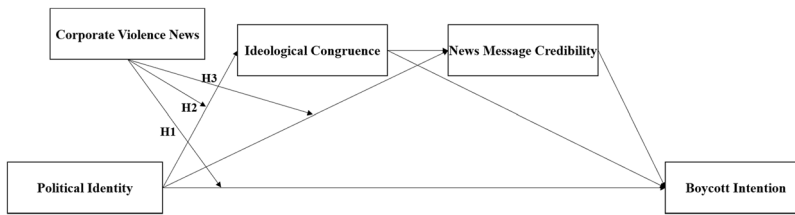


Figure 1. Research model.

Note: H4 tests a moderated serial mediation effect through the linear paths of all variables.

4. Study

This study investigates the relationship between individuals' political identities, types of corporate violence news, and boycott intention (H1). It also examines the interaction effects on ideological congruency (H2) and news credibility (H3), clarifying their roles as significant mediators. Furthermore, it explores the serial mediating roles of ideological congruency and news credibility (H4), providing empirical support for the proposed psychological mechanisms. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), California State University, Chico (approval no. IRB-2024-158).

4.1. Pretest for stimuli validation

Before the main study, a pretest confirmed the validity of manipulating two types of corporate violence news (Labor issue vs. Product issue). These two types were selected because they are directly observable to individual consumers and often elicit immediate perceptions of harm to employees or end users, making them particularly relevant in the context of consumer boycott behavior on social media. Due to their differing characteristics, this pretest step aimed to minimize perceptual biases and maintain the integrity of the experimental approach.

In choosing the communication platform and media channel for these stimuli, we prioritized political neutrality to effectively isolate and assess the impact of corporate violence news. Consequently, we chose Facebook as the platform due to its widespread use (Bosze 2024) and perceived political neutrality relative to other social media platforms (Vogels, Auxier, and Anderson 2021). Additionally, Reuters was selected as the media channel because it is regarded as more neutral than other press outlets (Reuters Fact Check 2001). This approach also aims to mimic real news articles within a social media context, thereby enhancing the external validity of our study (for details on the visual stimuli, refer to Appendix B2 and B3).

One hundred twenty participants (64.2% females, $M_{age} = 41.30$, $SD = 15.03$) were recruited *via* Prolific using the Qualtrics platform. They were randomly assigned to one of two corporate violence news types (Labor issue vs. Product issue) in a between-subjects design. Following previous study (i.e. Van den Abeele et al. 2025), a G*Power analysis indicated that a minimum of 102 participants was needed to achieve 0.80 power for detecting a medium effect size at a .05 alpha level in an independent samples t-test.

Participants first rated the news articles' perceived political alignment using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = liberal, 7 = conservative). They then assessed severity, badness, and importance on separate 7-point Likert scales (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

An independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in perceived political alignment between the labor and product issues. Specifically, participants perceived the labor issue (vs. product issue) as more politically liberal than conservative ($M_{labor\ issue} = 3.50, SD = 1.32$ vs. $M_{product\ issue} = 4.02, SD = .87$; $t(1,118) = 2.53, p = .013$). Additionally, one-sample t-tests indicated that the labor issue stimulus was perceived as more liberal than the neutral midpoint ($M = 4.00$) ($M_{labor\ issue} = 3.50, SD = 1.32$; $t(59) = -2.93, p = .005$), whereas the product issue did not differ from neutrality ($M_{product\ issue} = 4.02, SD = .87$; $t(59) = .15, p = .883$). Meanwhile, no significant differences emerged for severity ($M_{labor\ issue} = 5.70, SD = 1.12$ versus $M_{product\ issue} = 5.68, SD = 1.21$; $t(118) = -0.08, p = .938$), badness ($M_{labor\ issue} = 6.07, SD = .99$ versus $M_{product\ issue} = 6.15, SD = 1.12$; $t(118) = .43, p = .666$), and importance ($M_{labor\ issue} = 6.08, SD = 1.03$ versus $M_{product\ issue} = 5.93, SD = 1.07$; $t(118) = -0.78, p = .436$).

These findings confirm that labor and product issues differ in perceived political alignment but do not elicit distinct perceptions of severity, badness, or importance, indicating that our manipulation was successful and appropriate for the main study.

4.2. Participants, empirical study design, and procedure

To test the proposed hypotheses (H1-H4), we conducted a scenario-based online experiment using Qualtrics. The study employed a 2 (Corporate Violence: Labor issue vs. Product issue) between-subjects experimental design. Corporate violence served as a potential moderator and was manipulated through scenario-based stimuli, as described in the pretest. Political identity was treated as a measured independent variable and assessed using a self-reported 7-point scale. This variable was retained as continuous rather than categorized (e.g. *via* a median split) to preserve meaningful variation, enhance construct validity, and avoid information loss associated with dichotomization

We recruited 250 participants (58.0% female, $M_{age} = 43.93, SD = 14.95$) from Prolific and randomly assigned them to one of the corporate news conditions (refer to [Appendix B](#) for stimuli). As part of an attention check, participants were asked at the end of the survey to identify the topic of the corporate violence news they had read. Data from 21 participants who failed this check were excluded to ensure the validity and relevance of the responses to the study's experimental conditions. All participants received fair compensation (£0.8) for their participation. The final sample size was deemed appropriate based on a statistical power analysis using the G*Power software tool (i.e. Riedel et al. 2025). Treating the number of predictors in the model as three (Corporate Violence, Political Identity, and their interaction), a minimum sample size of 77 was required to achieve .80 power for detecting a medium effect size at the standard .05 alpha level in a regression analysis. Consequently, the 229 participant sample was considered sufficient for robust inference.

Upon accessing the survey through a provided Qualtrics link, participants received brief instructions and were introduced to a fictitious company to minimize confounding effects from prior brand experiences or existing consumer-brand relationships

(e.g. Barbarossa and Mandler 2021). They then read an online news clip detailing an instance of corporate violence related to the company, either a labor issue or a product issue, depending on their assigned experimental condition.

4.3. Measures

After viewing the online news clip, participants responded to a series of measures: boycott intention toward the product, news credibility, ideological congruency, political identity, and demographic variables such as gender and age.

4.3.1. Boycott intention

Participants assessed their intent to boycott the product featured in the news clip using a single item on a 7-point bipolar scale, anchored at 1 = 'I am not boycotting the brand's products' and 7 = 'I am boycotting the brand's products' (Barbarossa and Mandler 2021; Klein, Smith, and John 2004).

4.3.2. Ideological congruence

This was assessed using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items included 'The values I hold in life are very similar to the principles needed to resolve these issues,' 'My values strongly support addressing these issues,' 'My personal values match the efforts aimed at improving these issues,' 'The solutions for these issues provide a good fit with the values I hold dear,' and 'I find that sometimes I have to compromise my personal principles to support the prevailing methods for addressing these issues,' adapted from prior research and modified to fit the study (e.g. Cable and DeRue 2002; Hewlin, Dumas, and Burnett 2017; Cronbach's $\alpha = .862$).

4.3.3. News message credibility

The credibility of the news message was measured using three items on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The items included 'It is trustworthy,'

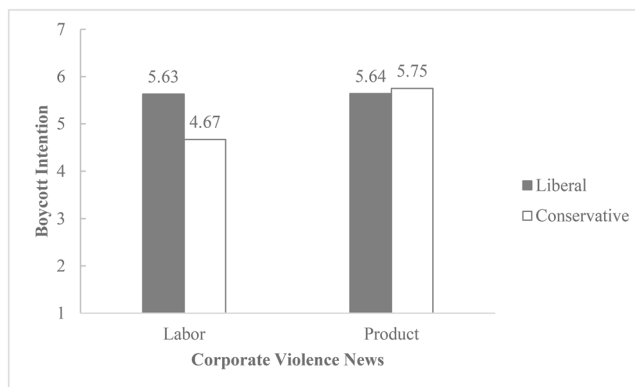


Figure 2. Interaction effects of political identity and corporate violence type on boycott intention.

'It is comprehensive,' and 'It is fair,' adapted from previous studies (e.g. Gaziano and McGrath 1986; Hanimann et al. 2023; Kohring and Matthes 2007; Cronbach's $\alpha = .841$).

4.3.4. Political identity

This was determined using a single item on a 7-point bipolar scale, ranging from 1 (very liberal) to 7 (very conservative), adapted from prior studies (e.g. Kivikangas, Lönnqvist, and Ravaja 2017; Petrocik 2009; Yilmaz and Saribay 2017).

Participants also provided general demographic information, including gender and age (refer to Appendix C for detailed participant demographics).

4.4. Results

4.4.1. Interaction effects

To test the proposed relationships (H1–H3) involving the interaction between individuals' political identity and types of corporate violence news, we employed the PROCESS macro (Model 1) for SPSS (Hayes 2017), using 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals (CIs). The independent variable was individuals' political identity, and the moderator was the type of corporate violence (Labor issue = 1, Product issue = -1). The dependent variables included boycott intention, perceived credibility of the news messages, and ideological congruency toward the featured issue.

4.4.1.1. Boycott intention toward the product. Consistent with our predictions, the interaction effect was significant ($b = -0.18$, $SE = .07$, $t = -2.49$, $p = .014$, 95% CI: [-0.330, -0.038]). Spotlight analysis, following Aiken, West, and Reno (1991), at one standard deviation above and below the mean of political orientation revealed differing patterns of boycott intention across the corporate violence types. Specifically, liberals exhibited significantly greater boycott intention in the labor issue condition compared to conservatives ($M_{liberals} = 5.63$ vs. $M_{conservatives} = 4.67$, Effect = -0.33, $SE = .11$, $t = -3.11$, $p = .002$, 95% CI: [-0.542, -0.122]), while no significant difference was found in the product issue condition ($M_{liberals} = 5.64$ vs. $M_{conservatives} = 5.75$, Effect = .04, $SE = .10$, $t = .36$, $p = .722$, 95% CI: [-0.166, .239]), supporting H1 (Figure 2).

4.4.1.2. Ideological congruence toward the issue featured in the news clip. The interaction effect was statistically significant ($b = -0.09$, $SE = .04$, $t = -2.19$, $p = .030$, 95% CI: [-0.173, -0.009]). Liberals showed significantly greater ideological congruency in the labor issue condition than conservatives ($M_{liberals} = 5.19$ vs. $M_{conservatives} = 4.70$, Effect = -0.17, $SE = .06$, $t = -2.91$, $p = .004$, 95% CI: [-0.292, -0.056]), while no significant difference was observed in the product issue condition ($M_{liberals} = 5.06$ vs. $M_{conservatives} = 5.08$, Effect = .01, $SE = .06$, $t = .13$, $p = .897$, 95% CI: [-0.106, .121]), supporting H2 (refer to Figure 3).

4.4.1.3. Perceived news message credibility. The interaction effect was also significant ($b = -0.13$, $SE = .04$, $t = -3.06$, $p = .003$, 95% CI: [-0.220, -0.048]). In the labor issue condition, liberals perceived the news as more credible than conservatives ($M_{liberals} = 5.24$ vs. $M_{conservatives} = 4.70$, Effect = -0.19, $SE = .06$, $t = -3.03$, $p = .003$, 95% CI: [-0.314,

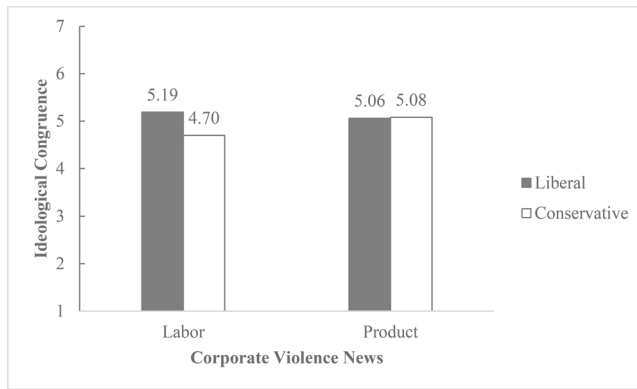


Figure 3. Interaction effects of political identity and corporate violence type on ideological congruence.

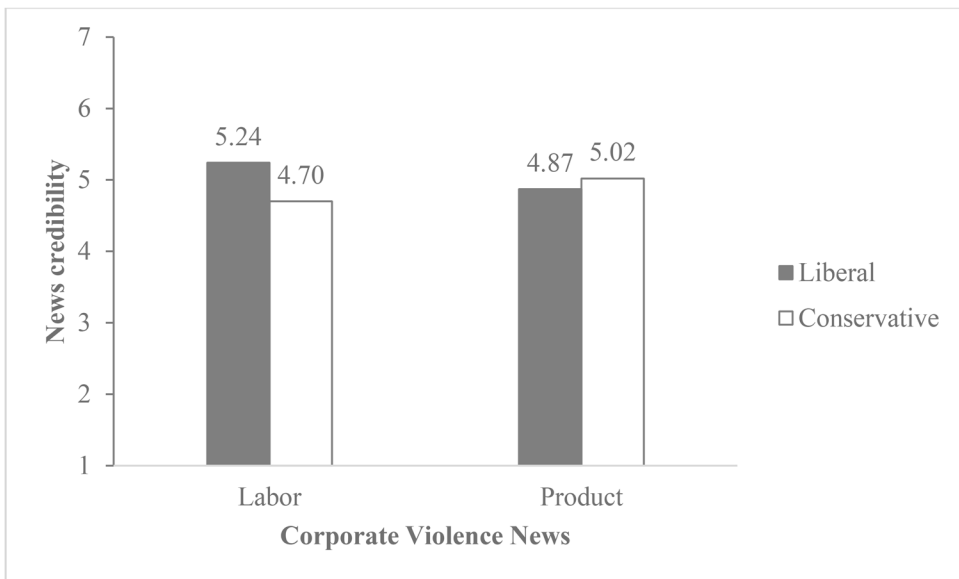


Figure 4. Interaction effects of political identity and corporate violence type on news message credibility.

−0.067]), while there was no significant difference between the two groups in the product issue condition ($M_{liberals} = 4.87$ vs. $M_{conservatives} = 5.09$, Effect = .08, SE = .06, $t = 1.27$, $p = .206$, 95% CI: [−0.043, .196]), supporting H3 (Figure 4).

4.4.2. Moderated serial mediation effects

To confirm the hypothesized moderated serial mediation effects (H4), we employed the PROCESS macro (Model 85) for SPSS (Hayes 2017), using 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) (see Table 1 for results).

4.4.2.1. Ideological congruence as mediator. The moderated mediation path 'interaction of individuals' political identity and corporate violence news types → ideological congruency toward the issue → boycott intention' showed significant moderated mediation (Effect = -0.07, CI: [-0.162, -0.001]). Specifically, for labor-related violence news, consumers with liberal political identity perceived higher ideological congruence, leading to greater boycott intention (Effect = -0.06, SE = .04, 95% CI: [-0.146, -0.005]). This path was not significant when product-related violence news was presented (Effect = .00, SE = .02, 95% CI: [-0.041, .048]). The difference between these two conditional indirect effects was significant (Pairwise contrast = -0.07, CI: [-0.162, -0.001]).

4.4.2.2. News message credibility as mediator. The moderated mediation path 'interaction of individuals' political identity and corporate violence news types → news message credibility → boycott intention' was significant (Effect = -0.05, CI: [-0.115, -0.004]). Specifically, when labor-related corporate violence news is presented, consumers with a liberal political identity perceive higher news credibility, leading to greater boycott intention (Effect = -0.03, SE = .02, 95% CI: [-0.072, -0.001]). However, this path was not significant for product-related violence news (Effect = .02, SE = .02, 95% CI: [-0.008, .063]). The difference between these conditional indirect effects was significant (Pairwise contrast = -0.05, CI: [-0.115, -0.004]).

4.4.2.3. Ideological congruence and news message credibility as serial mediators. Incorporating these results, the moderated serial mediation path 'interaction of two variables → ideological congruency toward the issue → perceived credibility of the news messages → boycott intention' was analyzed and found to be significant (Effect = -0.02, CI: [-0.070, -0.001]). Specifically, with labor-related violence news, liberal consumers perceived higher ideological congruence and subsequent news credibility, which significantly increased their boycott intention (Effect = -0.02, SE = .02, 95% CI: [-0.061, -0.002]). Conversely, this mediation path was not significant for product-related violence news (Effect = .00, SE = .01, 95% CI: [-0.016, .020]). The significant difference between these conditional indirect effects (Pairwise contrast = -0.02, CI: [-0.070, -0.001]) supports the moderated serial mediation model, supporting H4 (Figure 5).

These findings demonstrate that dynamics of individuals' political identity across corporate violence types significantly influences ideological congruency and perceived news credibility, which in turn significantly affects boycott intention toward the product.

5. General discussion

This research demonstrates that the interaction effect between consumers' political identities and corporate violence news types on their intention to boycott, which can serve as a critical reference for understanding how ideological orientation shapes consumer responses to corporate misconduct, offering valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in marketing and communication fields. Politically liberal

Table 1. Moderated mediation analysis.

Antecedent	Consequent														
	Ideological congruence					News message credibility					Boycott intention				
	β	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI	β	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI	β	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	5.30**	.16	33.30	4.99	5.62	2.46**	.36	6.89	1.76	3.16	2.65**	.73	3.64	1.22	4.09
Political identity (X)	-0.08*	.04	-2.01	-0.17	-0.00	-0.01	.04	-0.37	-0.09	.06	-0.10	.07	-1.43	-0.24	.04
Corporate violence news (W)	.26	.16	1.60	-0.06	.57	.34*	.15	2.31	.05	.63	.17	.28	.61	-0.38	0.71
X * W	-0.09*	.04	-2.19	-0.17	-0.01	-0.09*	.04	-2.26	-0.16	-0.01	-0.12	.07	-1.61	-0.26	.03
Ideological congruence (M1)	-	-	-	-	-	.51**	.06	8.34	.39	.63	.37*	.13	2.81	.11	.62
News message credibility (M2)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.26*	.12	2.11	.02	.51
Model summary	$R^2 = .04, F(3,224) = 3.21, p = .024$					$R^2 = .27, F(4,223) = 20.93, p < .001$					$R^2 = .16, F(5,222) = 8.26, p < .001$				

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

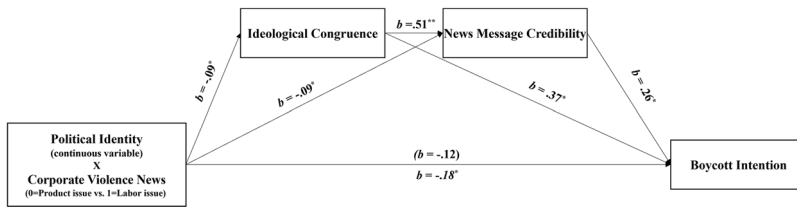


Figure 5. Moderated serial mediations of news message credibility and ideological congruence.
 Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

consumers, compared to their conservative counterparts, demonstrate a heightened readiness to take political stands, upon being exposed to the news of corporate violence related to labor issues. Meanwhile, product-related corporate violence news has not induced boycott intention differently across consumers' ideological spectrum. Additionally, we discovered that ideological congruency and perceived news message credibility serially mediate the observed effects, establishing the foundation for the proposed relationships.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Our research offers several important theoretical contributions. First, this study enhances our understanding of consumer behavior in socially mediated contexts by examining boycott intention, thereby contributing to a more balanced perspective within consumer behavior research. While positive aspects of consumer behavior, such as purchase intention and positive word-of-mouth, have been extensively researched on social media platforms (e.g. Jung and Im 2021; Knoll 2016; Zhu, Kim, and Choi 2022), their negative counterparts, such as boycott intention, have received far less scholarly attention. Although a handful of studies have explored negative valence outcomes in consumer responses, including anti-consumption, brand avoidance, and consumer complaints (e.g. Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009; Lee and Cude 2012), these areas remain under-examined and warrant further investigation. By focusing on the negative dimensions of consumer behavior, particularly boycott intention, this study aims to fill an existing gap in the literature and contribute to a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the full spectrum of consumer responses in social media environments. Second, this study contributes to the broader political consumerism literature by examining how individuals' political identities shape their intentions to boycott in response to different types of corporate violence presented on social media. Although prior research has considered individual-level factors influencing boycott intentions (e.g. Boulianne 2022; Dalakas, Joanna, and Szczytynski 2023; Makarem and Jae 2016), the role of political identity—particularly as moderated by the type of violence—has received limited attention. By examining the interaction between ideological orientation and issue framing, this research extends existing political consumerism scholarship beyond traditional offline behaviors—such as physically participating in organized boycotts—to encompass digitally mediated actions like online boycotts. In doing so, it highlights the evolving nature of political consumerism in an increasingly digital and networked society. Third, our research empirically demonstrates the

moderating role of corporate violence type. While prior studies have examined consumer responses within specific types of corporate violence (e.g. Delistavrou, Krystallis, and Tilikidou 2020; Hoffmann et al. 2018; Matute, Sánchez-Torelló, and Palau-Saumell 2021), empirical research comparing how different types of corporate misdeeds shape consumer reactions remains limited. Our findings show that corporate violence type functions as a significant contingency factor, shaping the intensity of individuals' reactions depending on the specific nature of the misconduct. By adopting a victim-based typology of corporate violence—distinguishing between laborers and consumers—and examining consumers' engagement with two societal issues highly salient and personally relevant, this study extends marketing communication research by offering greater conceptual clarity and stronger experimental control. In addition, this study integrates sociological perspectives on labor relations, inequality, and social justice with criminological insights on corporate misconduct and stakeholder harm. In this way, our study invites more interdisciplinary and cross-subject research to further enrich the existing body of knowledge. Lastly, we identified the key underlying psychological mechanism that mediates the observed effects. We introduced ideological congruence and news message credibility as crucial dual mediators, tracing the precise paths from the interaction effects *via* these two linking to the outcome variable, consumers' intention to boycott. Our findings suggest that the enhanced perception of a fit between one's political identity and the framing of corporate violence increases news message credibility among consumers, and these sequenced processes work against the firm, leading to an increase in boycott intention for consumers with a particular political identity. By probing these psychological mechanisms, our study offers valuable insights for scholars seeking to understand how specific cognitive and perceptual factors contribute to the formation of politically motivated consumer resistance. To sum up, these insights enhance our comprehension of the complex relationship between personal political beliefs and consumer behavior, offering valuable perspectives on consumer activism. This study illuminates the dynamic interplay between consumers' political identities and their actions in response to corporate violence, making a significant contribution to the fields of socially-mediated communication and political consumerism.

5.2. Practical implications

Our findings provide actionable insights for industry practitioners dealing with reputational challenges, particularly those stemming from irresponsible acts of corporate violence. First, corporate public relations or communications practitioners must respond swiftly when news of corporate violence emerges, regardless of the type, to prevent social media reactions from escalating into large-scale activist campaigns. Prompt and appropriate response strategies—such as clearly explaining the situation and providing actionable guidance to affected audiences—should be communicated through press releases or social media updates. Second, the results indicate that special attention should be given to liberal consumers, especially in labor-related contexts. This group's responses tend to be more intense, making them a critical audience for strategic communication. Prior research shows that liberal consumers value transparency and are more likely to trust companies that acknowledge issues openly. They also assign

greater reliability to messages endorsed by independent or expert organizations (Cacciatore et al. 2016). Communication strategies for this audience should leverage these insights by providing transparent disclosures, highlighting concrete corrective actions, and leveraging credible third-party endorsements. Messages should align with liberal values, and be delivered through channels where this audience engages. Modern technological advancements such as algorithms, big data, and artificial intelligence (AI) enable businesses to better anticipate consumers' political identities and tailor their communication strategies accordingly (van Esch, Cui, and Jain 2021). This capability allows for more targeted communication efforts, enhancing trust, strengthening credibility, and reducing negative consumer reactions. Third, our research examines how ideological congruence and perceived news credibility drive consumer responses under specific conditions. With this knowledge, marketers and communicators in industries more susceptible to labor or product-related controversies can adopt proactive approaches to prevent or mitigate the formation of negative repercussions for their firms. Recently, the fashion industry including fast fashion and luxury goods has faced significant criticism for labor abuses, inviting social movements and policy initiatives asking for decoupling the industry from slavery supply chains (Anderson 2024; Savit 2024). Professionals in these industries should communicate the potential reputational and market risks of labor violations to leadership and advocate for aligning corporate practices with consumer values. Engaging stakeholders through public platforms, such as social media, can help foster meaningful dialogue and build stronger connections with audiences. These proactive efforts may establish and restore trust while fostering strong corporate social responsibility, which will support companies in managing reputational challenges if and when they occur.

5.3. Limitations and further research

First, this study used scenario-based experiments to explore the role of consumers' political identity in situations of corporate violence. While much research in this area may rely on actual case studies, experimental approaches are essential for gaining a deeper understanding of these complex dynamics (Coombs and Holladay 2008). Although scenario-based experiments enhance internal validity, they may compromise ecological or external validity compared to field data. We aimed to enhance realism in our scenarios (e.g. European Coalition for Corporate Justice 2020) to offset this limitation and achieve our research objectives. Future research might incorporate actual cases of corporate violence to validate these findings (Grappi and Romani 2015). Second, in this study, we deliberately avoided naming specific companies to prevent confounding brand-related effects. Future research could include real brands, necessitating controls for factors such as brand familiarity, prior brand attitudes, and relationship quality. As Coombs and Holladay (2008) suggest, different types of misconduct may call for tailored management strategies, suggesting that incorporating existing brands and a wider variety of issue types could enhance the robustness and applicability of our findings. Third, our study focused on corporate violence against consumers or workers but does not address the case relevant to environmental harms such as toxic waste or air pollution, another dimension outlined by Friedrichs (2010) and Meier and Short (1982). Corporate environmental violence often involves more diffuse and long-term

consequences and may not elicit immediate consumer responses such as boycotts, as these harms typically require broader contextual understanding. Future research should examine this dimension to more fully capture the scope and complexity of corporate violence. Fourth, this research treated political identity as a unidimensional construct, although previous research suggests it may be more complex and composed of multiple dimensions (Iversen and Goplerud 2018). Considering that consumers may hold varied ideological stances on different issues, such as economic and cultural issues, which a single liberal to conservative scale may not fully capture. Adopting a multidimensional approach to measuring political identity could provide a more nuanced understanding of how political identity influences consumer responses. Exploring the effects of other identities, including economic, and cultural/social dimension (Iversen and Goplerud 2018) as well as issue-specific identities such as green self-identity (Confente, Scarpi, and Russo 2020), on consumer behavior also represents a promising avenue for future research. Additionally, our study sampled from the residents of the United Kingdom. Although we expect that the core patterns observed may hold across different cultural contexts, the diversity in economic, social, and political conditions, as well as varying cognitive styles and cultural values (e.g. individualism vs. collectivism), may influence how consumers interpret and respond to corporate violence. Future research should explore these cross-cultural differences to assess the broader applicability of our findings. Lastly, as we propose that marketers adopt proactive approaches to prevent the formation of negative repercussions and engage stakeholders through public platforms as practical implications, empirical studies are encouraged to examine the effectiveness of these strategies across different industries and the role of social media in shaping consumer responses. Expanding research across diverse cultural and industry contexts will enhance the generalizability of our findings and clarify how cultural variation and industry-specific factors influence consumer reactions to corporate misconduct.

Disclosure statement

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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Data availability statement

Data is available from the author on request.

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