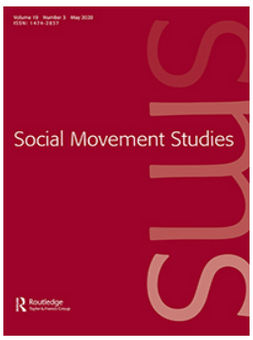
Indirect consumer activism and politics in the market



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Indirect consumer activism and politics in the market

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ABSTRACT

Social movement organizations use consumer activism to mobilize public pressure and cause economic or reputational damage to their target. However, current frameworks fail to explain why organizations would use indirect consumer activism: targeting one firm to elicit change from a third party. This paper aims to explain this choice, drawing upon theories of opportunity structures to explain why groups choose to use indirect strategies. I examine three campaigns using indirect strategies: US-based Grab Your Wallet and Sleeping Giants, and UK-based Stop Funding Hate. Groups use indirect strategies to reach inaccessible targets and to mobilize the public; these strategies help social movement organizations to raise public awareness at the beginning of a campaign. I conclude with some expectations for future research.

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In 2014, LGBTI activists from the 'All Out' movement initiated a campaign against Coca-Cola. Supporters sent 150 000 emails, pressured the company on social media and protested outside its headquarters (CIVICUS, 2017, p. 62). This was not out of the ordinary for a multinational corporation; however, this campaign was not protesting any of Coca-Cola's own actions. Rather, it was sparked by the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Russia, protesting Russia's recent anti-LGBTI laws; Coke was simply a corporate sponsor of the event. While the campaign did not lead Russia to change its laws, it did result in increased LGBTI protection by the company, including employee benefits such as partner recognition. A similar campaign and engagement with American Apparel, another Olympic sponsor, led the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to officially include a ban on discrimination based on sexuality in its charter.

Boycotts of firms have been extensively examined in the literature on both organizations and social movements, looking at the reasons for and success of boycotts and consumer activism: using consumer and purchasing power to try to influence companies' decisions or policies.[1] The above example of Coca-Cola, however, differs in several ways from a 'normal' boycott. Although Russia and the IOC were the responsible parties for the offending laws and the Olympics' location, campaigners targeted corporate sponsors who had not done anything objectively 'wrong', merely continuing the sponsorship from previous Olympics.

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This type of boycott – where a company is targeted in protest of another party's actions – has previously been examined under the label of 'indirect' boycotts (Friedman, 1999).[2] This term covers both 'secondary' boycotts – where the offending party is another company (Schrempf-Stirling, Bosse, & Harrison, 2013) – and 'surrogate' boycotts, where the offending party is a public political actor or country, as in the Coca-Cola case (Friedman, 1985). While these boycotts have been named, they have not been examined in their own right: often, the fact that the boycott is indirect is irrelevant to the research, which simply uses it as an example of a salient and/or long-running boycott (Chavis & Leslie, 2009; Ettenson & Klein, 2005). Nonetheless, such indirect campaigns are quite common: Heldman's (2017) study of consumer activism from 2004–2014 identified 61 campaigns, of which 10 were indirect – they aimed to change the behaviour of actors other than the boycotted company.[3]

Why, then, do social movement organisations (SMOs) use indirect consumer activism? To answer this question, this paper splits potential reasons into two main groups: their benefits and consequences for SMOs themselves, and their effects on the firms that they target. I draw upon theories of political opportunity structures to explain why groups choose to use indirect strategies, and identify two main reasons: the potential for indirect strategies to overcome unfavourable structures and reach inaccessible targets, and the benefits of indirect strategies for mobilising members of the public. While the cases here are somewhat effective in changing the offending party's behaviour, their benefits overwhelmingly seem to be for groups' ability to raise public awareness at the initial stage of a campaign, which is the main reason that groups use these strategies.

This research speaks to the literature on social movements, making three contributions. Theoretically, it extends and develops existing social movement theories to account for and explain groups' use of indirect strategies. Having been examined as extensions of 'normal' boycotts – and often outside the field of social movements and activism – indirect strategies' specific benefits for organizations have been brushed over. Empirically, it examines three topical and as yet unexamined campaigns, adding to our knowledge of how activism takes place in the 21st century and particularly online. On a social level, questions about why groups use these strategies have implications for discussions about representation and participation in democracy. Such strategies imply working entirely outside of the political system. The question of whether groups use them because they are excluded or lack trust in political institutions, or because they intend to raise public awareness for political ends, is thus an important one.

This article begins with a short outline of previous work on indirect boycotts and consumer activism, highlighting particularly the questions that remain unanswered by this body of work. It then discusses how a combination of insights from opportunity structures and public mobilization can help us to understand why groups use indirect strategies. In addition to a purely structural view of choices, the benefits for groups themselves through public mobilization must be taken into account. The three cases are then introduced and examined. In the final section, a discussion of their similarities provides us with some answers to the guiding question of this article, while an overview of their differences leads to some expectations and questions for future research.

Why do SMOs use consumer activism?

Boycotts and consumer activism have been the subject of extensive research, particularly in marketing and consumer research. Most of these studies focus either on the (economic) effects of consumer activism on the targeted firms (Chavis & Leslie, 2009) or on consumers' individual motivations for participating in a boycott (Ettenson & Klein, 2005; Klein, Smith, & John, 2004). Some have researched theories of boycott effectiveness, establishing that boycotts work by implying a threat to a firm, either through the threat of financial damage or risk, or by harming the firm's reputation (Hiatt, Grandy, & Lee, 2015). Previous work on boycotts has shown that they tend to be more successful when they garner media attention and thus affect the reputation of the target firm, even if they do not cause economic harm (Friedman, 1999; King, 2008).

In addition to boycotts, political action against companies has always involved other strategies, including direct action such as protests and shareholder activism (Soule, 2009; Vogel, 1978; Walker, Martin, & McCarthy, 2008). Social media and new communication technologies have multiplied the number of these easily accessible campaign tools. This is illustrated in Heldman's study of 61 boycotts in the US between 2004 and 2014, which found that almost 80% used social media shaming in addition to boycotting, direct action and other more traditional activist strategies (Heldman, 2017). Moreover, she found that social media had vastly increased the number of campaigns that were started – as it lowers the requirements to start a petition or campaign – and that campaigns that used social media were more likely to be effective than those that did not. The use of social media and the Internet to target companies has previously been termed 'discursive' market strategies (Micheletti & Stolle, 2005) and these strategies are often as important to campaigns as the boycott itself.[4]

Both boycott actions and other consumer activist strategies therefore affect firms by damaging their reputation. However, to what extent does this apply to indirect consumer activism? The following section outlines previous work on indirect strategies and highlights the gap that this paper aims to fill.

Indirect and surrogate boycotts: their motivations and effects

Most previous research on indirect boycott campaigns has focused on 'surrogate' foreign policy boycotts: campaigns against companies based or operating in a particular country or world region. For instance, the boycotts and sanctions movement against South Africa from the 1960s to the end of apartheid in 1992 involved divestment and sanctions movements from within individual nations (Vogel, 1978, pp. 169–180; Teoh, Welch, & Wazzan, 1996) as well as a cultural and sports boycott from the international community more broadly, including bans from the Olympics and international sporting events (Booth, 2003; Nixon, 1992). This movement has been the inspiration for the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israeli settlements, a cultural, economic and academic boycott of Israel launched by Palestinians in 2005 and since spread worldwide (Duncan, 2017; Yi & Phillips, 2015). The BDS movement involves more than boycotts, however: multinational companies such as G4S, HP and Caterpillar have also been protested and targeted with online actions for their operations in Israel.

Similarly, companies operating in Burma under military rule were the targets of boycotts by the Free Burma Coalition throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Spar & La Mure, 2003). In addition to these long-term campaigns, some shorter-term boycotts have been examined, including US boycotts of French products during the Iraq War, and the simultaneous Arab boycotts of US products (Aish, McKechnie, Abosag, & Hassan, 2013; Chavis & Leslie, 2009).

Despite the prevalence of research into these indirect boycott movements, however, only rarely have these studies linked boycotts to research into (consumer) activism more generally. Given that these studies come from a patchwork of fields – organizational studies, international relations and consumer studies – they often fail to build on previous studies' theoretical insights. As such, two significant gaps in our knowledge about indirect campaigns stem from this research. First, the reasons *why* groups used a boycott strategy are not elaborated, because in the cases examined – relatively homogeneous foreign policy boycotts – the reason is quite simple: groups in one country are unable to target a foreign government through 'regular' political channels. This also prevents the development of any theoretical expectations about indirect consumer activism's effects and use. Second, the consequences of these campaigns have not been rigorously examined. While some exceptions exist (Chavis & Leslie, 2009; Teoh et al., 1996), they have examined only the economic effect on the boycotted firms or the stock exchange. The reputational effects of these boycotts – particularly on the offending party itself – have remained disregarded, even though this is often the most important effect of consumer boycotts. This article contributes to answering these questions by examining the reasons for using indirect consumer activism: both the benefits for SMOs and the consequences on the targeted firms. To do this, we can turn to existing theories in social movement studies. The next section briefly outlines the opportunity structures framework and examines how it can explain groups' choice of indirect consumer activism.

Explaining indirect campaigns: opportunity structures and mobilization

Opportunity structures

Political opportunity structures have been commonly used to explain the mobilization, strategic choices and success or failure of social movements (Tarrow, 2011; Tilly, 1978). They generally include the exogenous (structural) factors that enhance or restrain groups' potential to mobilize in particular ways and influence institutions and policy (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004, p. 1457). Originally focusing only on the institutional structures that groups were presented with, opportunity structures' scope has expanded somewhat to cope with criticism that it overlooked groups' own agency to choose and interpret the opportunities that they face (Giugni, 2009; Kurzman, 1996). As a result, current opportunity structures focus more on the interaction between groups and structures, examining how groups evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each possible action taking into account their objectives, ideology and resources. Moreover, with the awareness that political action can be targeted at companies as well as public actors, the opportunity structures framework has been broadened to include not only traditional (state) political opportunities but also 'corporate' or 'industry' opportunity structures (Mena & Waeger, 2014; Schurman, 2004).

These structures affect groups' choices, as well as the success of strategies that target firms (King, 2008).

When discussing indirect strategies, a group's opportunity structures are essentially made up of the offending party and the number and type of surrogate targets among which groups can choose. Groups select surrogate targets for different reasons, including the perceived egregiousness of the surrogate target's behaviour and how attainable the target is (Balabanis, 2013). Previous research – in the context of relatively few potential surrogate targets – has emphasized that targets were chosen because of the pressure that they could bring against the offending party (either through commercial 'sway' or by 'act[ing] as lobbyists for the boycotters relative to the offending government entity' (Friedman, 1999, p. 30). However, if there are a very large number of surrogate targets more loosely linked to the offending party, groups may target as many of these as possible to increase their chances of changing the surrogates' behaviour. This gives groups a concrete, quantitative measure of the success of the campaign, as they can point to the 'converted' firms that have cut ties with the offending party. However, if the surrogate targets are too removed from the offending party, it may not be affected by the boycott. The choice of surrogate targets is thus constrained by the structures that actually exist, but is also highly important in ensuring the success of the boycott campaign.

Opportunity structures are thus a convincing explanation for indirect campaigns that target inaccessible offending parties. These include the examples of international surrogate boycotts outlined above, where domestic groups are essentially unable to reach international governments or parties without an intervening, surrogate target. Indirect strategies allow movements to take action when the direct opportunity structure is unfavourable and when the offending party is inaccessible to the movement.[5] However, they are not the only way that groups could react: they could also use other 'outside' strategies such as online (international) petitions or protest movements – as, indeed, have been used in the past in combination with indirect strategies in the anti-apartheid and BDS movements. A second approach can help to explain why social movements use indirect *market* campaigns by highlighting their specific benefits for mobilizing and putting public pressure on firms.

Public mobilization

While the purely structural approach above is fitting for cases like the indirect strategies previously examined, where (foreign) offending parties are inaccessible to (domestic) social movement organizations, what can explain cases where the offending parties are *not* inaccessible, but groups choose to run an indirect campaign anyway? One explanation for this is groups' goal of mobilising supporters and the public.

All boycotts and consumer activism have inherent advantages for public mobilization because they simplify issues and solutions. Boycotts leverage the brand power and public recognition that companies have worked to build for themselves to effect change (CIVICUS, 2017). Indirect boycotts 'transform' topics into 'consumer-accessible marketplace issues' (Friedman, 1999, p. 14); firms are more tangible targets than state institutions and act as 'conduits' for non-market objectives (Spar & La Mure, 2003, p. 81). This provides groups with a concrete way to measure and express the campaign's success – by 'counting' the number of firms that have cut ties with the offending party –

in contrast to often-ambiguous policy outcomes. Moreover, market strategies simplify and individualize the solution: boycotting, signing an online petition or emailing a company require less commitment than traditional collective action (Heldman, 2017; Micheletti, 2003). This has particular advantages for groups that are dependent on member participation or resources as it provides an easy and concrete way to act. The increase of consumer activism through social media, as discussed above, has only lowered the bar for participation by allowing companies to be targeted *en masse* and directly through their social media pages.

This paper thus suggests that indirect strategies are not *only* used when direct opportunity structures are blocked; these strategies may have real advantages for groups by helping them to maximize their public mobilization by providing the public with an easy and tangible means for action and groups with a concrete measure of success. This approach is applied to three cases, which are examined in the section below.

Why do groups use indirect boycotts? Comparing three case studies

Case selection, structure and method

This section turns to three contemporary case studies – Grab Your Wallet and Sleeping Giants in the United States, and Stop Funding Hate in the United Kingdom – to evaluate the reasons why groups use indirect strategies in these three cases, and the consequences of these strategies. As there is a lack of research on indirect strategies and also no known population of these campaigns, these three cases have been selected purposively as exploratory cases. They were selected as novel types of indirect campaigns based on both the tactics that they use (combinations of boycotts and other consumer activist tactics, including social media) and their targets (private offending parties as well as public actors). This decision was made for two reasons. First, examining cases that go beyond the typical 'surrogate' boycotts can help to develop explanations beyond the inaccessible offending party, which is the main explanation used in existing work on indirect boycotts (Friedman, 1985). Second, both preliminary research and interviewees highlighted that these sorts of campaigns – where offending parties are a private actor – seem to be becoming more common (Heldman, 2017). They thus provide an opportunity to develop theoretical expectations and understand new forms of activism.

To maximize comparability, each case is structured in the same way. I begin with a brief description of the background to the campaign before assessing how the campaign is organized (its structure) before outlining how and why indirect strategies are used, and the consequences of the campaign. The campaigns are not directly compared in this section but will be discussed together in the final two sections of the paper.

Initial data collection took place through groups' own websites and documents, as well as secondary sources including newspaper articles on the campaigns (which were particularly useful for information about the consequences of the campaigns). A second round of data collection used both previously published and recorded interviews, as well as presentations by the founders of each movement. Phone interviews were conducted with two groups (Grab Your Wallet and Stop Funding Hate) and written

responses to questions gathered from the third (Sleeping Giants) to gain insight into internal decision-making and motivations.

Grab your wallet: exploiting Trump-business connections

Grab Your Wallet (GYW) began in the run-up to the 2016 US presidential elections in response to a leaked Access Hollywood tape involving a (now notorious) lewd conversation between then-candidate Donald Trump and Billy Bush. Two strangers, Shannon Coulter and Sue Atencio,[6] announced on Twitter that they would be boycotting a short list of companies doing business with Trump. Their hashtag – #GrabYourWallet – quickly generated large numbers of Twitter followers and boycott participants and they subsequently set up the GYW website. Since, its scope has broadened to include companies involved in various scandals; for instance, those providing services to the National Rifle Association (NRA) or dealing with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). While the campaign protests Trump and mostly right-wing figures, it labels itself non-partisan; donors to the campaign include registered Republicans and members of religious groups (Coulter, 2017).

Organization and resources

GYW is a reasonably decentralized movement, with Coulter providing a guiding impetus by coordinating these decentralized actions, updating the movement's website and Twitter pages. The website acts as a central hub for the campaign, including companies currently being boycotted, 'Safe Companies' and those that have taken action, as well as instructions on how to contact brands.

Coulter is a digital marketing and campaigning expert; as such, she made calculated steps in building and creating the movement (Coulter, 2017). While the campaign functioned without a legal organization for the first couple of years, Coulter has since set up a 501(c)(4) organization (a 'social welfare' organization). This provides a legal entity with which to cooperate with other organizations and charities but remains more flexible than a 501(c)(3) (a traditional non-profit), which faces more restrictions on political action. This flexibility helps her stay true to the initial mission of the campaign; she also prioritises contact with supporters, which she sees as the foundation of a legitimate and successful campaign (personal communication, 14 March 2019).

How and why indirect strategies are used

In contrast to the other campaigns examined in this paper, GYW has exploited both commercial and political connections between businesses and the Trump administration and other political groups (for instance, companies participating in political action committees on gun rights are being boycotted). The GYW website lists around 40 companies being boycotted and at least 100 'on the radar' but not currently being boycotted.

GYW actively advocates a boycott of the companies listed on their website. Nonetheless, Coulter wants the campaign to offer 'clear, actionable ways for companies to get out of boycotters' crosshairs', rather than becoming an 'aimless funnel for outrage' and losing effectiveness (Coulter, 2017; Halzack, 2017). The central website thus includes specific reasons for which companies are being boycotted, and the list of

'dropped' companies includes the reason why the boycott was ended (usually a statement by the company apologising or cutting ties with the offending party).

These strategies are used for two reasons. First, Coulter explains that she set the movement up in part because of the very visceral reaction that she had observed from women on Twitter when confronted with the Trump brand while shopping in their favourite stores (Coulter, 2017). Boycotting stores stocking these products provided a way for these women to deal with – and potentially reverse – this invasion of their private life. Second, the boycott provided a concrete way for participants to take action. Due to the strong geographical partisan division in the US, the common advice to 'write to your representative' seemed useless – the elected representative probably already agrees with you (Halzack, 2017). This boycott provided a way for people to actually act against Trump when the traditional paths for action were useless. In other words, the campaign has aimed to provide people with a concrete way to take action in a situation when they felt powerless.

Consequences of the campaign

In terms of change among the surrogate targets, over fifty companies have either withdrawn their support for the Trump administration or ceased sales of Ivanka's brand. Economically, the boycotts have had some impact: in July 2018, Ivanka Trump announced that she would be ending her clothing brand. While she did not mention the boycotts, it has been estimated that sales of her brand on Amazon and other online retailers fell 27% in the year ending June 2017 compared to the previous year, and another 55% in the year ending June 2018 (Vara, 2018). Actions targeting other offending parties have also been somewhat successful, with Alex Jones and his program Infowars permanently banned from Twitter in September 2018 after GYW's #BlockParty500 action. Politically, however, the boycotts have had little to no effect: particularly regarding Trump, it is questionable whether any effect is even possible, as the campaign has no specific demands for the president. It is difficult to imagine anything Trump (or other offending parties) could do – short of resigning – that would lead to an end to the campaign.

Indeed, given the success of the movement so far, GYW aims to move away from a focus on the Trump administration to an emphasis on a broader view of company ethics, including an app screening companies by comparing their official CSR policy with their lobbying and political contributions (personal communication, 14 March 2019). Moving towards this the campaign has run some shorter actions, including the #BlockParty500 action blocking some of the largest companies on Twitter until the platform banned Alex Jones, and the Grab Your Ballot action raising funds for Democratic candidates running in tight electoral races in the 2018 midterm elections. These specific actions and goal have, so far, ensured that the process of broadening the campaign does not cause it to become too diffuse and peter out.

Sleeping Giants: the alt-right and online advertising

The Sleeping Giants (SG) campaign was established in November 2016 to target Breitbart News, an alt-right news website which enjoyed privileged access to Trump during his presidential campaign. The campaign began when Steve Bannon stepped

down as executive chairman of Breitbart to act as chief executive of Trump's campaign: according to the founders, until that point they had been unaware that the news website existed (Swisher, 2018). Nonetheless, the campaign describes itself as not just about Trump, but rather about the racism, sexism, xenophobia and homophobia they found on the websites (personal communication, 17 March 2019). Like GYW, therefore, it describes itself as non-partisan, aiming to cut ad revenue off from Breitbart.

Organization and resources

SG – like GYW – is a highly decentralized campaign and is run fully online. The campaign leaders were initially anonymous, justified by the fact that they worked in digital marketing and could be perceived as having conflicts of interest (Willis, 2018). However, Matt Rivitz, one of the founders, was identified against his will by a right-wing newspaper in July 2018 (Coffe, 2018), and co-organizer Nandini Jammi decided to also publicly reveal her identity. The movement is coordinated mainly through its official Twitter page; Facebook is used to share related news stories or campaign updates.

The campaign operates mostly through participants' Twitter accounts: followers tweet to companies when they see an advertisement on Breitbart, politely letting them know that they are advertising on the website and asking them to remove the advertisement. The tweets are usually accompanied by a screenshot of the company's ad next to an offensive Breitbart article. Participants tag Sleeping Giants so that they can retweet it to their followers and track any response from the company involved. Funding for actions that require finances has come from sales of merchandise and a crowdfunding action; the organizers are 'determined not to make money' off the campaign, which they run in their spare time (Swisher, 2018).

How and why indirect strategies are used

The offending party in the SG campaign is Breitbart News, and surrogate targets are companies advertising on the website. These relations are based purely on programmatic advertising. Some of the campaign's actions have extended beyond 'just' Breitbart – the campaign supported boycotts of Bill O'Reilly and Laura Ingraham when supporters asked for action on these topics (Swisher, 2018).

Like GYW, the majority of SG's work has been Twitter-based; however, this has been supplemented by more traditional forms of direct action. In 2017 SG rented a billboard truck to drive around the Amazon headquarters in Seattle requesting the company pull its ads from Breitbart (Fleishmann, 2018). Similar actions are still being run against Google and Facebook, which, like Amazon, have still not blacklisted Breitbart. Interestingly, SG actively *discourages* participants from boycotting Breitbart advertisers, as most companies are unaware that they are advertising on the website (Sleeping Giants, 2018). They thus rely solely on other indirect strategies, emphasising the need to stay courteous towards companies when contacting them via Twitter or Facebook.

While Breitbart is not a 'blocked' target in the same way as the Trump administration, it is difficult to target for three main reasons. First, targeting any news outlet through a direct campaign is tricky, as it is easy to be accused of censorship; second, it is anyway impossible to boycott a media outlet that you do not already read. Finally, the amount of reputational damage that can be done to Breitbart is quite small, given that it

is a very extreme paper that does not really care what people think about it. This makes it very difficult to directly target a media outlet like Breitbart; indirect strategies represent a way around this. As founder Rivitz highlighted, they also have instantaneous, visible results: when he sent his first tweet, the company replied within two hours, which he found 'very satisfying' after having participated in many other petitions and email actions to no effect (Swisher, 2018).

Consequences of the campaign

The SG campaign has had the most surrogate success of any campaign studied here, not only because of the large number of surrogate targets and their weak relation to Breitbart, but also because of the extreme slant of the newspaper, which makes it an easier target. The list of advertisers that have dropped Breitbart counts over 4000 national and local companies (Sleeping Giants, n.d.). However, this has not translated into economic damage to Breitbart itself, as the website is privately funded and does not depend on ad revenue (Farhi, 2017).

The campaign has spread worldwide, with SG Twitter groups set up in Canada, around Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil. These have started organically, with people reaching out to SG with their interest in starting a new branch targeting a local media platform; SG just provides a logo and permission. The original SG campaign now has plans to start a broader discussion about ethical technology and advertising, ultimately framing itself as 'the conscience of social media communications and advertising' (Swisher, 2018).

Stop funding hate: creating a movement for 'fair advertising'

The Stop Funding Hate (SFH) campaign started in August 2016 after a spike in hate crime in the wake of the Brexit referendum and the intensification of anti-migrant sentiments in the three main UK tabloids (the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*). The tabloids had been a longstanding problem in the UK: in 2015, the UN Commissioner for Human Rights had urged UK authorities to 'take steps to curb incitement to hatred by British tabloid newspapers' after migrants were referred to in one article as 'cockroaches' (OHCHR, 2015). This pushed SFH to begin their campaign, which aims to 'make hate unprofitable' by removing the advertising revenue of tabloids publishing xenophobic or hateful content (Wilson, 2017).

Organization and resources

Uniquely out of the three cases here, SFH has been centralized from early on in the campaign and has a non-profit organization at its core, which was set up shortly after the campaign began with the aim of having a legal entity for crowdfunding activities and in case of legal action by the tabloids (personal communication, 27 February 2018). While this has had benefits for some of the more institutionalized action, the organization tries to balance centralized and decentralized action.

Each day a representative from the organization goes through the print versions of the three tabloids, making a note of the main advertisers, and tweets their names. Followers then tweet to those companies, with a polite request to withdraw their adverts

from the newspaper. These daily posts appear only on Twitter; the group uses its Facebook page (with around 200 000 followers) and website for their larger campaigns, for news and keeping track of the campaign's progress. Additionally, the group uses a smaller, closed Facebook group (around 800 members) to allow supporters to have a say in future campaign activities. This allows the group to overcome some of the tension between its top-down structure, and bottom-up democratic processes (personal communication, 27 February 2018). As part of these attempts and echoing Sleeping Giants' tactics, in February 2018 followers were also encouraged to tweet directly to companies whose ads appeared on online pages of the newspaper. However, the Daily Mail turned online advertising on its opinion pages off almost immediately, making these tactics redundant (Stop Funding Hate, 2018a).

How and why indirect strategies are used

The offending parties in this case are the UK tabloids, and the surrogate targets are advertisers. Surrogate targets remain limited because of SFH's focus on the print editions of the newspapers – daily tweets usually include about 10 advertisers.

SFH does not actively advocate for a boycott, leaving it up to participants to choose whether they will boycott the companies involved or simply contact them over Twitter or email (Stop Funding Hate, 2017). As such, the strategies used are mostly online. However, the campaign also uses more traditional consumer activism, where SFH targets particular companies (mobile service providers, John Lewis, The Co-op or Lego) for an extended period of time. These have been selected both on their previous ethical performance, as well as the key customer base that they serve (personal communication, 27 February 2018).

Like Breitbart, the tabloids are not technically blocked, but are again difficult to target directly without facing accusations of censorship or of 'freezing' the media debate, particularly as they are part of the mainstream UK media. Wilson, the founder of SFH, also highlighted that one of the main reasons why he wanted to use indirect strategies was because nothing else had worked until then, despite attention to the problem for years. He found it illogical that companies advertising in the newspapers were not held to account, when they were making the tabloids financially viable (personal communication, 27 February 2018). Targeting advertisers was a novel strategy to create change where nothing else had worked.

Consequences of the campaign

The campaign has been quite successful in changing surrogate targets: the SFH website lists around 30 companies that have promised to stop advertising in the tabloids. In addition to this, many companies have removed their ads without publicity, indicating that success may be wider than indicated. Nonetheless, this is only a small percentage of the companies that advertise in the print and online versions of the tabloids.

In terms of ultimate success, the campaign considers that it has achieved many of its goals. In April 2018 the new editor of the *Daily Express*, Gary Jones, acknowledged at a Parliamentary Committee on Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences that 'cumulatively, some of the headlines that have appeared in the past have created an

Islamophobic sentiment' (Home Affairs Committee, 2018). SFH also recognized that the *Daily Express*'s coverage of migrants had significantly changed under the new editor, and after consultation with supporters decided to reclassify it as 'under review' (Stop Funding Hate, 2018b). In September 2018, Georgie Grieg became the new editor of the *Daily Mail* amid reported plans to 'detoxify' the newspaper (Waterson, 2018). As a result of this decrease in anti-immigrant stories, SFH has begun what it calls a 'new phase' of its campaign, which shifts the focus to different issues and media platforms (Stop Funding Hate, 2018c).

The group also aims to shift to a new stage of the campaign by mainstreaming the idea of a 'fair advertising movement', beginning with the recent creation of the Conscious Advertising Network, a group of businesses voluntarily promising to include ethical advertising in their CSR policies (Conscious Advertising Network, 2019). This ties in with their work with the UN Global Business Compact and indicates a shift to institutionalising the idea of 'fair' advertising.

The reasons for and consequences of indirect strategies

The commonalities between these three case studies, summarized in Table 1, allow us to form some preliminary observations about why groups use indirect strategies and the consequences of these strategies. In the following section I discuss these findings in the light of the theoretical expectations developed above, before developing some expectations and suggestion for future research.

The first question that this paper tackled was *why groups use indirect strategies* as opposed to other strategies (online or more traditional direct action). As discussed above, in the past, the main focus has been the inaccessibility of the offending party, either because of its size or its distance (usually a foreign state). These cases are no exception; however, the two types of inaccessibility are somewhat different to the cases examined in the past. First, the offending parties in these cases are 'out of reach' because they simply do not care what the public – apart from their readers – think about them. The prospects for reputation damage – usually a vital part of a consumer activist campaign (King, 2008) – are therefore limited. Indirect strategies are used towards the firms that fund these outlets to (hopefully) achieve economic damage instead, by cutting off other revenue. Second, at least some of the offending parties in each campaign are media outlets, and as interviewees point out, campaigns directly against the media are accused of censorship or having a 'chilling effect' on media debates. Thus, while it is true that groups use indirect strategies because other avenues are blocked, the types of blockages in these cases are different to previously examined examples of indirect campaigns.

A second possible explanation was indirect strategies' potential benefits for public mobilization. In contrast to the above argument, this can help to explain why groups used indirect consumer activist strategies rather than other types of strategy towards policy-makers. The organizers of all three campaigns emphasized that they saw these strategies as a concrete and 'satisfying' way to tackle the problem, providing people with a real way to feel that they were having an impact. A second – unforeseen – point raised in all three campaigns was their non-partisan nature. Using market strategies in these cases thus seems to allow for a more plausible argument of bipartisanship and turns the discussion from a political one to a moral one, which can help to encourage wider public

Table 1. The three case studies.

	Grab Your Wallet	Sleeping Giants	Stop Funding Hate
Organization behind campaign	Centralized 401(c)(4), website.	Twitter, Facebook and website.	Centralized non-profit. Twitter, Facebook and website.
Relation between the surrogate and the offending party	Commercial ties (retailers and other); political ties (contributions and support). High number of surrogate targets	Advertisers (programmatic only). Very high number of surrogate targets	Advertisers (print and programmatic). Medium number of surrogate targets
Indirect strategies used	Twitter, email and phone actions. Boycott encouraged.	Twitter, some real-life actions. Boycott discouraged.	Twitter, email and phone actions, shareholder activism. Boycott up to individual participants.
Consequences	Surrogate success: ±50 companies. Very little 'ultimate' success. Ivanka's clothing range cancelled. Has now shifted to a new stage of campaign (screening company ethics and CSR)	Surrogate success: >4000 companies. Economic effect on Breitbart, but privately funded so still running. Continues running with the same tactics. Some plans to hold discussions with companies.	Surrogate success: ±30 companies. Also 'ultimate' success: tabloids changed editors and tone of articles. Has now shifted to a new stage of campaign (mainstreaming ethical advertising)

mobilization and support for the campaign – as well as enticing firms to act without being blamed as taking sides. This is an interesting strategy for campaigns to take in the current, polarized political landscape of the U.S. and UK.

Secondly, I examined the *consequences of these strategies*, which can be sorted into two groups: consequences on the surrogate targets and offending parties; and consequences for the movement group itself. Firms' responsiveness to the campaigns has varied, but generally they have seen 'surrogate' success: SFH lists about 30 companies no longer advertising in the tabloids, GYW lists 53 'dropped' companies, and SG's list counts over 4000 companies that have dropped Breitbart. However, as discussed above, change in the offending party has been slower to arrive, particularly where the offending party is not economically dependent on the surrogate target (as in SG). This echoes findings in other analyses of the effects of indirect boycott campaigns, which have had an effect on surrogate targets without much long-term change (Chavis & Leslie, 2007; Ettenson & Klein, 2005).

Next to these short-term consequences, however, are broader effects. All three campaigns have used indirect strategies as a stepping-stone to a more durable and diverse campaign. GYW sees its work against the Trump administration as 'just the beginning' and aims to create a durable platform to screen companies' overall ethics (personal communication, 14 March 2019). SG aims to create a broader discussion about ethical technology and advertising through a conference or event, mirroring the work that SFH has begun in the UK by creating the Conscious Advertising Network and attempting to mainstream the notion of 'fair' advertising. This implies that these groups see indirect strategies as a stepping-stone to a broader campaign. Given their advantages in overcoming tricky opportunity structures and in mobilising members of the public, they seem to be a good way to get a campaign started, before broadening its scope and moving to more institutionalised strategies.

Divergences and factors affecting indirect strategies' consequences

While these campaigns have many similarities, they also differ along some key points. This final section examines these divergences to develop some expectations about the effect of different factors on groups' use of and the consequences of indirect strategies.

The first factor is that of the availability of targets: while the issue and offending party do not seem to affect success in these three campaigns, the surrogate target seems to be key. First, in order to create change in the offending party, some form of relationship of dependency must exist between the offending party and the surrogate target (Friedman, 1985). SG, for instance, has seen huge numbers of advertisers remove themselves from Breitbart; however, the websites' financial independence means that it has not had to cease functioning (Farhi, 2017). Moreover, the surrogate target must be vulnerable to a (boycott) campaign; there must be some dependency of the surrogate target on the campaign group. This can be seen in SFH, where surrogate targets with a younger, more socially aware core customer base have generally been more responsive to pulling their advertisements (personal communication, 27 February 2019). This goes against the finding in much of the literature that surrogate targets will be most effective when chosen according to their egregiousness ('dirty hands') or their CSR policy (Balabanis, 2013; Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2013). The success of this sort of strategy

therefore seems to have more to do with the type of surrogate target chosen than the offending party itself. Future research could work towards a means of rigorously measuring campaigns' success – both towards surrogate targets and the offending parties – and determining the exact effect of different choices of surrogate targets

A second factor that may affect campaigns' success is group factors, particularly the level of formal organization of a campaign. All three of these groups highlighted the importance of a bottom-up structure for democratic legitimacy and flexibility at the initial stages of the campaign: indeed, all three campaigns ran for at least several months without an official organization. At the same time, interviewees from both GYW and SFH – the two groups with legal organization – highlighted the advantages that having a legal entity can bring, particularly in terms of the opportunities to coordinate with other similar groups and the opportunity for long-term legislative change. Nonetheless, they also see it as vital to keep in touch with the grassroots supporters of their campaign, and highlight that this tension between top-down and bottom-up strategies is one that must be balanced throughout the campaign.

Third, online strategies play a vital role in all three of these campaigns. Indeed, based on the findings from these three case studies and preliminary case selection work, online strategies seem to be a necessary condition for indirect strategies to be used. In other words, while there are consumer activist campaigns that do not use boycotts (such as SFH or SG), online strategies are used regardless of whether a boycott takes place or not. Twitter and Facebook are used in SFH and SG to communicate with companies themselves, particularly by allowing supporters to directly contact companies and to spread the message. These campaigns see social media as important because it combines the public and private: consumers can directly contact companies, but everyone can see that contact was made, putting pressure on companies to respond. On the other hand, GYW shies away from relying too much on 'overhyped' social media as a way to contact companies, preferring emails and phone calls as a more personal show of commitment to the company. At the same time, all three campaigns use Internet strategies to maintain contact with their supporters and to democratize their campaigns, whether through Twitter (SG), a closed Facebook group (SFH) or email (GYW). An interesting question for future research is thus how the effectiveness of campaigns may change based on different types of online strategy, and whether firms are more swayed by certain types of contact.

Finally, an important point that was highlighted by groups was the *novelty* of this sort of indirect strategy, and they attributed at least some of their success to this novelty and companies' surprize at being targeted in this way. It may well be that if this sort of campaign becomes more mainstream, its effectiveness will decrease; future research should continue the work begun here by taking on the question of how groups mitigate this risk by diversifying their strategies and institutionalising their actions. However, much of this will only be visible over time, along with whether or not these strategies' effectiveness actually decreases or not.

Conclusion

While indirect strategies have been studied in the past, the specific reasons why SMOs choose this sort of consumer activism have not been examined. This paper has drawn upon political opportunity structures to explain some reasons why groups use these strategies. It found that groups use indirect strategies not just because the offending

party is inaccessible, but also because of the benefits for mobilizing members of the public. These indirect campaigns had inconsistent consequences on the offending party itself; the most important consequence was to raise public awareness on a topic at the beginning of a campaign. All three campaigns rely on online strategies to facilitate communication between the organisation and its supporters, and to allow supporters to contact companies directly, highlighting the necessity of online organisation for this contemporary form of consumer activism.

The article has broader theoretical implications for three main areas of study. For social movement studies, it has examined and explained some new tactics for (consumer) activism and twists on old ones, namely the evolution from surrogate strategies to indirect strategies. For studies of boycotts and consumer activism specifically, this paper has demonstrated the new demands being made upon firms, particularly questions that are more social and two-sided than typical campaigns for human rights or the environment. Finally, for management studies and corporate social responsibility (CSR), these campaigns raise questions for companies that are caught in the crossfire, who have to choose a side and decide what action to take in the face of these campaigns. These campaigns espouse a broader view of the role of firms in both social and political life, and how citizen campaigns can affect their actions.

Notes

1. In this paper these two terms will be used interchangeably when referring to (political) action in the marketplace, with boycotts also used in the more specific sense of the refusal to buy a company's product or service.
2. For the rest of the paper the boycotted company will be referred to as the 'surrogate target' (echoing Friedman's (1985) 'surrogate boycotts'), and the third party will be referred to as the 'offending party'.
3. Heldman does not use the terminology of direct and indirect, but rather consumer activism 'proper' and for political ends.
4. For the rest of the paper these non-boycott actions are referred to as 'indirect *strategies*', and the aggregate of all indirect boycotts and other strategies on one topic as 'indirect *campaigns*'.
5. Domestic opportunity structures also shape what action groups may take internationally: for instance, the sports boycott of South Africa took place mostly in countries with shared popular sports (Commonwealth countries); in the U.S., this sports boycott never gained popularity due to a lack of shared sports between the two countries and thus no opportunity to boycott matches (Nixon, 1992).
6. Sue Atencio helped to set up the website, but works mostly behind the scenes; Shannon Coulter is the face and voice of the campaign.

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