Wal-Mart's Conscientious Objectors: Perceived Illegitimacy, Moral Anger, and Retaliatory Consumer Behavior

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In 2 studies, participants' perceptions and emotional responses toward Wal-Mart were investigated. Moral anger was tested as a mediator of the relationships between ethical concerns and willingness to support or take confrontational actions against Wal-Mart. In Study 1, greater ethical concerns predicted less consumer support and increased willingness to take confrontational actions; moral anger mediated this relationship. In Study 2, moral mandates positively predicted people's ethical concerns while ethical concerns predicted increased moral anger. Willingness to protest retail organizations is not simply motivated by rational judgments about economic self-interest as consumers' ethical perceptions and moral emotions can motivate such actions.

"Wal-Mart sells cheaply made products which are often made in sweat shops by child labor and does not allow their employees to join unions. They rarely hire women to management positions." (Participant #58 offers reasons for disliking Wal-Mart)

"I have to question why [Wal-Mart's] products are so cheap—are they exploiting workers in third world countries or even in the U.S.? How much profit do they make by limiting [people's]/subcontractors salaries? Do they take advantage of the poor...? (Participant #41)

Wal-Mart is the second largest employer in the world with 1.9 million employees (Wal-Mart, 2008a). It is the world's largest retailer, with more than $374 billion in sales in 2007 (Wal-Mart, 2008a). Wal-Mart's undisputed power and influence in the retail market has led critics to focus their attention on the ethics of Wal-Mart's business practices and the long-term economic consequences on communities as reasons to dislike the company. Wal-Mart does pay its retail clerks less than comparable large retailers (Bianco & Zellner, 2003; Dube & Jacobs, 2004; Hopkins, 2003)—in fact, the low wages Wal-Mart pays its employees force many to utilize public safety net programs (e.g., food stamps) to subsist (Dube & Jacobs, 2004), which costs federal taxpayers $2,103 per Wal-Mart employee (G. Miller, 2004).

Wal-Mart is antiunion (Bianco & Zellner, 2003), thus blocking a potential avenue for collective action by employees who feel they are treated badly. A number of lawsuits have been waged against Wal-Mart for issues such as discrimination against female employees, overtime work without pay, substandard working conditions, and water pollution (Irwin & Clark, 2006). In addition to the harm that employees suffer due to Wal-Mart business practices, local communities also suffer when a new Wal-Mart is opened. For every job created by Wal-Mart, 1.5 other retail jobs are lost, retail wages fall (Neumark, Zhang, & Ciccarella, 2008), and smaller businesses close (Basker, 2005; Jia, 2007).

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Despite such criticisms, Wal-Mart does have positive features. As advertised by Wal-Mart, the stores are convenient and offer inexpensive products; in fact, Wal-Mart drives down prices of many consumer goods. Economists report that Wal-Mart's presence in the market saved consumers $287 billion annually (or $957 per person and $2,500 per household; Global Insight, 2007). Indeed, consumers save even if they never set foot inside a Wal-Mart store due to Wal-Mart's pricing influence on other retailers who are forced to compete with Wal-Mart's low prices (Hausman & Liebtag, 2005). Further, in 2007 Wal-Mart donated $296 million to charities and local communities (Wal-Mart, 2008a). After hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Wal-Mart donated $18 million to relief funds, trucked supplies to the area, and provided $3.5 million worth of supplies to shelters (Wal-Mart, 2008b). Thus, there are positive and negative aspects of Wal-Mart that can be emphasized. Yet there are consumers who feel so strongly about Wal-Mart's business practices that they are willing to actively protest and boycott against Wal-Mart, despite the fact that Wal-Mart products tend to be less expensive than any other retail outlet.

We explore moral beliefs as a driving force behind consumer decision making and propose that some people can be considered *conscientious objectors*—they respond to Wal-Mart's business practices on moral grounds, feel considerable anger, and boycott this retail outlet. In line with Skitka, Bauman, and Sargis's (2005) moral mandate model, we argue that people are not always rational actors when responding to threats to

their moral values. Consumer protest responses are in stark contrast to rational choice or economic self-interest models of behavior (see Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1965; Turiel, 1983). As Akerlof (2007) pointed out, economists might expect consumers to become angry and protest organizations that raise prices because such actions negatively impact the consumer's self-interest. What economic self-interest models are not able to predict are consumers' feelings of moral anger and willingness to boycott or protest in response to perceptions that Wal-Mart is setting prices *too low*. In fact, Akerlof and Shiller (2009) argued that standard economic theory has neglected to take into account human psychology and noneconomic motives and, unless it does so, economics will be hard-pressed to understand and predict important aspects of consumer behavior. The purpose of our project is to explore people's responses to the retail outlet Wal-Mart while integrating psychological theorizing on moral reasoning and cognitive appraisal theory of emotion, to show that people are not necessarily guided by rational self-interest when they make their consumer choices.

COGNITIVE APPRAISAL THEORY OF EMOTION

Existing evidence suggests that customers' appraisals and emotions are an integral component of consumer choices (Holbrook, 1986, 1995). Consumer research has examined appraisals and emotions in relation to
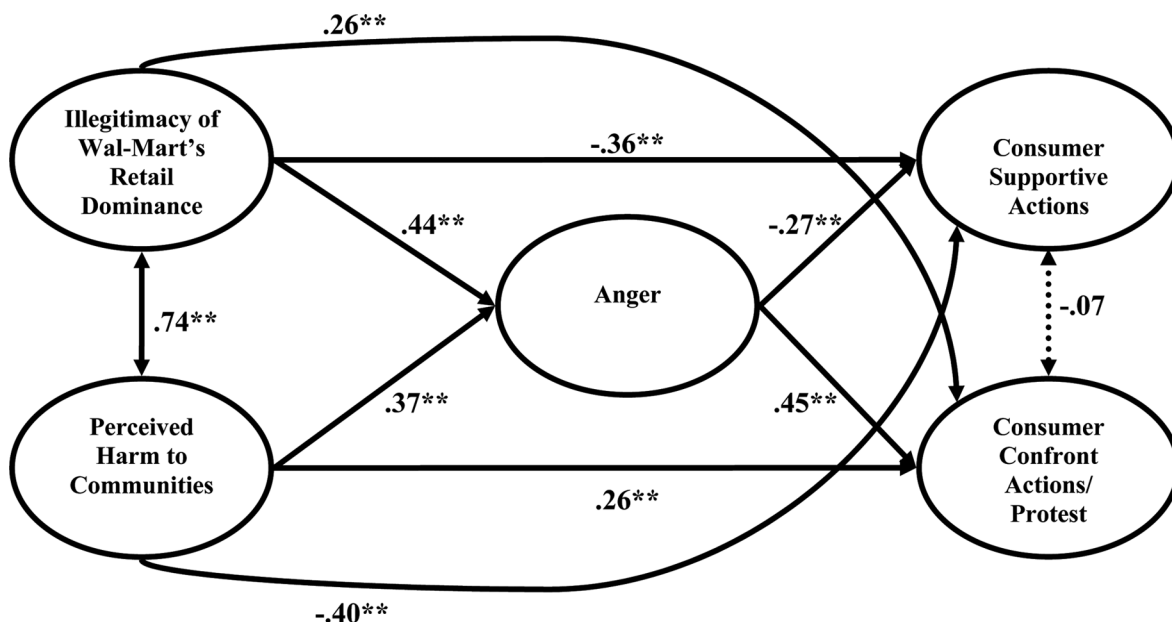

FIGURE 1   Study 1: The predicted structural equation model where anger mediates the effects of illegitimacy and harm appraisals on consumer support and confrontational consumer actions. Reported coefficients are standardized. $^{**}p < .001$. $\chi^2(746) = 1852.45$, $p < .001$; RMSEA $=.092$, CI [.086, .097], NNFI $=.961$, CFI $=.964$.
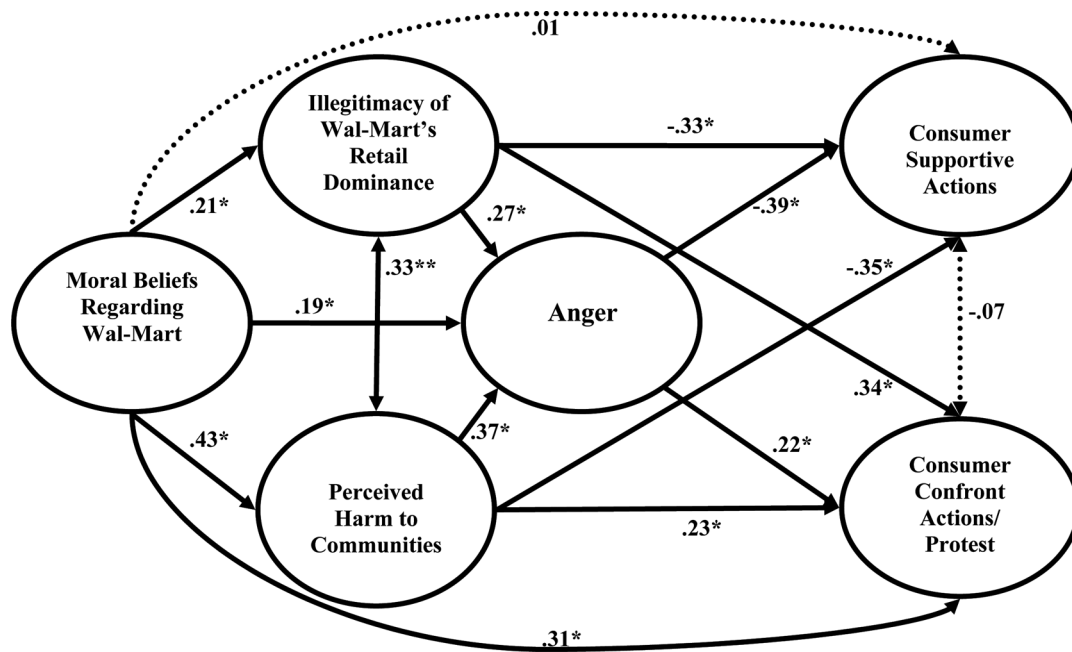
FIGURE 2 Study 2: The predicted structural equation model where appraisals and moral anger serve as mediators to the effect of moral beliefs on consumer support and confrontational consumer actions. Reported coefficients are standardized. $^*p < .05$. $^{**}p < .001$. $\chi^2(431) = 924.45$, $p < .001$. RMSEA $=.075$, CI [.069, .081], NNFI $=.952$, CFI $=.961$.

marketer-initiated stimuli (Cohen & Chakravarti, 1990; Holbrook & Batra, 1987), customer satisfaction (Tybout & Artz, 1994), and store environment (Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, & Nesdale, 1994; Sherman, Mathur, & Smith, 1997). Models of consumer behavior follow a C-A-B (cognition-affect-behavior) paradigm; that is, customers' cognitions are assumed to predict affective reactions, which are then thought to motivate behavior (Engel, Kollat, & Blackwell, 1968; Howard & Sheth, 1969). Nicosia (1966) proposed a model of consumer behavior where consumers' predisposition or perception of the company's attributes predict consumers' attitudes, and result in motivation (or lack thereof) to purchase a product. In this model, one aspect of consumers' appraisal of the company is the company's policies and procedures.

The C-A-B paradigm of consumer behavior is similar to appraisal theories of emotion (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 1984). Generally, this theoretical model stipulates that an event is appraised (on a number of dimensions), a specific emotional experience is then induced, which then elicits a corresponding action readiness. How an event is appraised does predict the type and intensity of the specific emotion experienced (Sonnemans & Frijda, 1995), and emotions do motivate behavior (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Gross, 1999).

Many other researchers have converged on similar antecedent appraisals that are associated with feelings of anger, such as goal incongruence (Ellsworth, 1994; Frijda, 1986), threat to one's ego (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Kemper, 1987), assignment of blame to another person (Bennett, Lowe, & Honey, 2003; Clore & Ortony, 1991), and belief that one can cope with the threat (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990). However, none of these known antecedents necessarily imply that feeling anger is connected to moral judgments. Although these antecedents may predict general anger, more specific appraisals related to moral judgments may be stronger predictors of *moral* anger.

ANGER AND THE MORAL MANDATE EFFECT

Research and theorizing about morality typically excludes anger (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). However, participants do express anger or "moral outrage" when their moral beliefs are threatened (Skitka, 2002; Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000). For example, Mullen and Skitka (2006) presented participants with either a morally congruent or incongruent court judgment and found that participants reported more anger when the court's judgment was incongruent with the participant's moral beliefs. Mikula, Scherer, and Athenstaedt (1998) asked 2,921 students in 37 countries to describe situations in which they experience anger. The anger-eliciting events were found to overwhelmingly describe perceived unjust and immoral events.

The emotion of anger typically entails antecedents (e.g., intention, blame) that can be described as

components of moral anger (Power & Dalgleish, 1997). For example, emotion theorists have suggested that perceptions of unfairness (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988; Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989) and illegitimacy (Roseman et al., 1990; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987) are important antecedents to anger. The fact that anger has been identified as a consequence of these appraisals suggests that illegitimacy and intentions on the part of another person (or corporation) are antecedents for feeling moral anger. Wal-Mart's protesters may view the company as blameworthy for intentionally harming the community with illegitimate business practices and, as a consequence, feel moral anger as well as a subsequent desire to take actions to confront the corporation.

The number of consumers who are taking actions against corporations that they deem to be committing egregious actions is rising (Higgins & Tadajewski, 2002; Putnam, 1993). Consumers have a number of options for expressing their dislike for what they may perceive to be morally corrupt corporations, including purchasing behavior based on perceived ethics of the corporation, boycotting, and forming pressure groups (N. C. Smith, 1990). The boycotting literature suggests a number of cognitive appraisals that predict willingness to boycott, including the perceived cost to the boycotter, perceived effectiveness of boycotting, social influence from like-minded others, and consumer guilt (John & Klein, 2003). Relatively little consumer research has focused on ethical concerns as an impetus for boycotting (for exceptions, see Burke, Milberg, & Smith, 1993; Klein, Smith, & John, 2004). Boycotting research that has considered ethical concerns typically uses vague language referring to companies that are "socially questionable" (K. E. Miller & Sturdivant, 1977) or are said to have committed "egregious" actions (Klein et al., 2004).

In line with the moral mandate perspective (Skitka et al., 2005), we predict that moral beliefs will serve to motivate protest because they are experienced by people as nonnegotiable, unwavering, and absolute truths. This perspective contends that people are strongly motivated to defend their deeply held moral convictions and will do so against people or situations that violate those convictions. Explaining protest behavior as resulting from moral anger is somewhat different from classic explanations of protest behavior, which focus on perceptions of group efficacy to bring about social change, as proposed by resource mobilization theorists (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Klandermans, 1997), as well as group identification and social comparison processes, as proposed by social identity and relative deprivation theorists (Stürmer & Simon, 2004). However, classic explanations also include perceptions of a collective injustice (see Walker & Smith, 2002, for a review), which can be construed as a moral appraisal of illegitimate action (injustice) at the group level that unfairly causes people harm. In fact, collective action theorists now measure anger as an emotional response to perceived injustice (what we are calling "moral anger"), as a mediator of the relationship between appraisals of injustice and willingness to engage in collective action (H. J. Smith, Cronin, & Kessler, 2008; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004).

According to Skitka et al. (2005), people specifically experience moral anger when their moral beliefs are threatened. Building on this perspective, we predict that respondents will report less consumer support and greater willingness to engage in collective actions against Wal-Mart when they appraise Wal-Mart as harmful to communities and believe Wal-Mart's dominance in the retail market is illegitimate. We measure both consumer support and consumer protest as outcome variables because these two types of consumer actions capture two critically important ends of consumer response possibilities. This study seeks to determine the extent to which consumers are willing to engage in more politically charged actions aimed at changing the way in which Wal-Mart behaves as a corporate entity (protest; see Walker & Smith, 2002), or to punish Wal-Mart for their actions (consumer un-support; see Carlsmith, Darley, & Robinson, 2002; Darley, Carlsmith, & Robinson, 2000). We are also able to examine the circumstances under which respondents are willing to support a corporate entity with their consumer dollars while encouraging friends and family to do the same. We expect moral anger to mediate the relationship between these appraisals and actions in support of or against Wal-Mart.

No studies have been conducted regarding the influence of Wal-Mart's business practices on consumers' beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. However, the company's rating as of 2007 was reported to be below industry average (ACSI, 2008). Wal-Mart Watch (2008), arguably an anti-Wal-Mart group, polled consumers in 2005 and again in 2007, and reported a drop in positive consumer ratings, from 76% to 71%. Participants who rated their opinion of Wal-Mart as "somewhat more negative" or "much more negative" in the past year were subsequently asked why their opinion was more negative (open-ended). The most frequent response was unethical labor practices, followed by poor customer service, negative impact on the local community, poor healthcare for employees, and employee sex discrimination. What is noteworthy about these responses is that four of the top five responses center on ethical issues regarding the company. Indeed, when asked why they rarely or never shop at Wal-Mart, respondents mainly offered complaints about the company's policies.

Beyond examining the relationship between perception of Wal-Mart ethics, moral anger, and consumer behavior, another purpose of our studies is to test whether moral appraisals predict cognitions regarding fairness and perceived harm. We integrate cognitive appraisal theory of emotion with Skitka and colleagues' (2005) moral mandate perspective and test whether these moral beliefs in fact drive people's post hoc reasoning regarding moral mandates (Skitka et al., 2005). In the present studies, we surveyed community members (Study 1) regarding their perceptions, emotional experiences, and behaviors concerning Wal-Mart. Participants were asked to rate their perception that Wal-Mart has fairly or unfairly gained their current market share (legitimacy), their view of present and future costs of Wal-Mart (harm), felt anger, and consumer actions in support of or against Wal-Mart. We also measured demographic variables such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and political orientation to serve as covariates because they could be significantly related to perceptions of and actions toward Wal-Mart. The purpose of our research is to test whether moral anger mediates the relation between legitimacy and harm appraisals and consumer behavior. We predicted that participants who view Wal-Mart as illegitimate and causing present and future harm will feel angry and will report greater willingness to boycott or protest the corporation. Participants who believe that Wal-Mart's current position in the retail market is legitimate and do not perceive present or future harm caused by Wal-Mart will react with lower expressions of anger and will report more willingness to shop at Wal-Mart and recommend Wal-Mart to friends and family. In effect, participants will respond to Wal-Mart with moral anger when they perceive Wal-Mart as responsible for illegitimately harming people and communities and will express their moral anger through protest. In Study 2 we test our assumption that people feel angry about Wal-Mart's unethical business practices because those practices violate their core moral values.

STUDY 1: COMMUNITY SAMPLE

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 355$, 52.5% men) were members of the Lawrence, Kansas, community and members of online message boards. Their mean age was 42.66 years ($SD = 13.11$), and 87.5% indicated that their racial/ethnic group was White. Participants leaned slightly toward a liberal perspective with a mean of 4.16 ($SD = 1.61$), on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The mean response for the respondent's as well as the respondent

partner's highest level of education was 2 years of college. The mean level of household income (respondent plus partner's income combined) was $60,000 to $80,000.

Procedure and Materials

We distributed 200 survey packets to community members' front doors. The packets contained a flyer explaining the purpose of our study, two surveys (in case there were two adult residents in a household), and an envelope with the mailing address and prepaid postage so that respondents could return the completed survey(s) to the investigators anonymously. Sixty-six envelopes (92 surveys) were returned, for a package response rate of 33%. We recruited the bulk of our respondents from online forums ($n = 263$), including larryville.com, a local online forum. Other forums included walmartblows.com, indystar.com, city-data.com, and topix.net. Respondents were invited to participate in our study, and they were provided with a link to the survey.

The survey included items regarding perceptions of harm, illegitimacy of Wal-Mart's dominance in the retail market, anger toward Wal-Mart, support for Wal-Mart, desire to protest Wal-Mart, and demographic items (e.g., age, sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and political orientation).

Illegitimacy. The legitimacy of Wal-Mart's current dominant position in the market was assessed using four items: "Wal-Mart earned their current position in the market," "I believe that Wal-Mart's dominance in the market is justified," "I believe that Wal-Mart's dominance in the market is legitimate," and "I believe that Wal-Mart's dominance in the market is fair." The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and was reversed such that higher scores indicate a belief that Wal-Mart utilizes *illegitimate* business practices to maintain their position in the market.

Present and future harm. The perceived costs of Wal-Mart was assessed using three items: "I think Wal-Mart is forcing smaller local stores to close," "I think Wal-Mart forces manufacturers to outsource labor in the long run," and "I think Wal-Mart has huge long-term costs." The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate a belief that Wal-Mart harms communities.

Anger. Anger felt when thinking about Wal-Mart was assessed using five emotion terms: angry, hostile, irritable, outraged, and mad. The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Approach action. The action tendency of approaching Wal-Mart was assessed using three items: "How often do you typically shop at Wal-Mart," "I often recommend Wal-Mart to friends and family," and "When the topic comes up, I have a lot of negative things to say about Wal-Mart" (reverse scored). Frequency of shopping was rated on a 7-point scale from 1 (*once a year or less*) to 7 (*once a day*). The two Wal-Mart support items ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Confrontation action. Action against Wal-Mart was assessed using seven items: "I would tell everyone I know not to shop at Wal-Mart," "I would shop at Target in order to avoid shopping at Wal-Mart," "I would join a picket line to protest Wal-Mart," "I would sign a petition to prevent a new Wal-Mart from opening in town," "I would collect signatures to prevent a new Wal-Mart from opening in town," "I would attend a city commission meeting and express my views," and "I would take extreme actions against Wal-Mart." The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Results

Analytic Procedures

Structural equation modeling (SEM) using Lisrel 8.80 was used to test our mediational hypotheses in an overall single model. One advantage to this approach is that we can test for the indirect effects of the cognitive appraisals of illegitimacy and harm on both consumer supportive and confrontational actions through anger while accounting for collinearity between the variables of interest. Because of the way in which data were collected from the community sample (compared to the online sample), where multiple people in one household were able to return surveys, thus violating statistical assumptions of independence, we begin by testing a multiple groups model to determine if any structural differences exist between the community and online samples. We utilize an a priori measurement model to determine the reliability of the loadings of the individual items on our constructs of interest as well as the model fit of our hypothesized structural model for both groups, along with the beta coefficients of the paths we predict. We then compare this a priori model to an alternative model in which anger mediates the relationship between supportive and confrontational actions predicting the cognitive appraisals, illegitimacy, and harm. For both groups, we expect the alternative model to fit the data significantly worse than our a priori model, which follows appraisal theory of emotion; anger carries the indirect effect of the cognitive appraisals, illegitimacy and harm, on our outcome variables, consumer support and confrontational actions.

Table 1 presents the zero-order correlations between all variables. We evaluated model fit using the non-normed fit index (NNFI) and the comparative fit index (CFI), for which values greater than .90 are acceptable. Although many advise using a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) cutoff value of .08 (Brown, 2006), others warn against mechanically adhering to overly strict cutoff values (Browne & Cudeck, 1993), particularly when an SEM model is based on theory and the predicted pattern of relationships is replicated with a different sample. Thus, we

TABLE 1
Study 1 Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Political orientation	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Gender	.10	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Age	−.18	−.09	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Parent income	−.11*	−.09	.14	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. Mother education	.04	.02	−.03	.41**	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6. Father education	.09	.00	.10	.36**	.55**	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—
7. Ethnicity	.07	.01	−.07	.01*	.03	−.03	1.0	—	—	—	—	—
8. Illegitimacy	.14**	.17*	−.11*	−.12*	.05	.09	−.03	1.0	—	—	—	—
9. Future harm	.17**	.13*	−.13*	−.09	.08	.14**	.04	.70**	1.0	—	—	—
10. Anger	.09	.08	−.14**	−.08	.06	.15**	−.06	.69**	.66**	1.0	—	—
11. Protest	.12*	.10+	−.11*	−.07	.01	.11*	−.04	.72**	.69**	.79**	1.0	—
12. Support	−.13*	−.05	.11*	−.04	−.23**	−.31**	−.04	−.72**	−.71**	−.70**	−.74**	1.0
M	4.16	1.47	42.66	3.95	5.10	4.87	1.12	4.03	5.04	3.56	3.55	3.31
SD	1.61	0.50	13.11	1.62	1.34	1.41	0.33	1.96	1.85	1.97	1.71	1.91

Note. Higher scores on political orientation indicates a more liberal orientation; gender was coded as 1 = male and 2 = female; ethnicity was coded as 1 = White and 2 = Ethnic minority.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

report the RMSEA, for which values less than .10 are deemed acceptable (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The RMSEA 90% confidence intervals are also reported, as is the expected cross-validation index (ECVI) and its confidence interval, as well as the model Akaike information criterion (AIC) for comparisons between the nonnested predicted and alternative models.

A Priori Measurement Model

We established the configural, or baseline model, by estimating the hypothesized parameters without placing any measurement or correlational structure invariance constraints (which test for meaningful differences across our two subsamples) for the online and community groups. In the configural model, all demographic covariates were specified to predict the mediator and outcome variables and they were free to covary with each other. The beta paths were specified such that the predictor variables—illegitimacy of retail dominance and perceived harm—predict the outcome variables consumer support, and confrontation, as well as the mediator anger. Anger was specified to predict consumer support and confrontation, and indirect paths were estimated via Sobel tests in LISREL 8.8. The configural model yielded a significant chi-square, although RMSEA, as well as the upper bound of the confidence interval, was below the acceptable value of .10, $\chi^2(666) = 1676.93$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .093, CI [.087, .098]. Because chi-square is extremely sensitive to sample size—in fact, Kenny (2010) asserted that models with even a modest sample size (anything more than 200) will nearly always produce a significant chi-square—we also include the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio, which can demonstrate acceptable model fit if the value is less than or equal to 3, $\chi^2/df = 2.52$. The other fit indices were well above .90 (NNFI = .959; CFI = .966; see Table 2).

Next, construct item invariance was tested for the two samples (online and community) by placing equality

constraints on the factor item loadings for both groups. Because a chi-square difference test is sensitive to sample size, and the sample size for the community is considerably lower than that of the online sample, we follow Cheung and Rensvold's (2002) CFI guideline (see also Little, in press) that if the difference between the CFI values is no greater than .01, then the factor items are considered invariant across groups. The CFI with the factor loading equality constraints is .965, producing a difference no greater than .01, rendering the factor loadings between groups invariant. Next, we tested for invariance of the structural paths we predict for the online and community samples by placing equality constraints on all of the paths specified in the model. We compare the CFI of the model with equality constraints of the structural paths (.964) to that of the model with only the factor item loading constraints (.965) and found a difference no greater than .01, rendering the structural paths invariant across groups. We therefore report the standardized coefficients from this model where the two subsamples are constrained to be equal. This final model again yielded a significant chi-square, but RMSEA and the upper bound of the confidence interval was below the acceptable value of .10, $\chi^2(746) = 1852.45$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .092, CI [.086, .097], NNFI = .961, and CFI = .964; however, the chi-square degrees of freedom ratio (2.48) was under 3. All items loaded satisfactorily on their specified construct, with loadings ranging from .80 to .93 for illegitimacy, .83 to .90 for harm, .89 to .96 for anger, .58 to .81 for consumer support, and .70 to .92 for protest.

Because illegitimacy and harm were highly correlated in these data, we conducted a separate confirmatory factor analysis to determine if we could distinguish between these two constructs. We specified a two-factor model in which illegitimacy and harm items loaded on their respective constructs whereas illegitimacy and harm, as well as all of the demographic variables, were free to covary. Although the two factor measurement model yielded a significant chi-square, fit indices were above .90, and RMSEA was acceptable, $\chi^2(48) = 126.63$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .068, CI [.054, .083], NNFI = .956, CFI = .977. All items loaded satisfactorily on their specified construct, with loadings ranging from .80 to .93 for illegitimacy and from .83 to .91 for perceived harm. We then tested a one-factor model in which all items associated with the two constructs, illegitimacy and perceived harm, loaded onto a single factor. The specified factor, along with the covariates, was free to covary in the model. The one-factor model yielded much less acceptable fit statistics compared to the two-factor model, $\chi^2(56) = 483.53$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .15, CI [.134, .159], NNFI = .830, CFI = .896, and a chi-square difference test indicated that the one-factor model yielded a significantly worse fit to the data, $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(8) = 307.41$,

TABLE 2
Fit Statistics Comparing the Predicted and Alternative Structural Path Models Using Multiple Groups Analyses for Study 1

Model	χ^2	df	p	NNFI	CFI	RMSEA	AIC
Configural model	1676.93	666	< .001	.959	.966	.093	2084.93
Loading invariance	1755.79	695	< .001	.959	.965	.093	2105.79
Structural invariance (predicted)	1852.45	746	< .001	.961	.964	.092	2100.45
Alternative	1896.61	746	< .001	.960	.964	.093	2152.61

Note. NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; AIC = Akaike information criterion.

$p < .001$. Thus, we can be confident that our illegitimacy and perceived harm constructs are distinguishable.

Even after controlling for effects of the demographic variables on the mediator and the outcome variables, there was a significant direct influence of illegitimacy appraisals on consumer support ($\beta = -.36$, $p < .001$) and consumer protest ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$) as well as significant direct influence of perceived harm on consumer support ($\beta = -.40$, $p < .001$), and consumer protest ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$). Both illegitimacy ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) and harm ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted anger, and anger significantly predicted consumer support ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$) and protest ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$). Sobel tests for indirect effects indicated that the effect of illegitimacy on consumer support ($Z = -3.40$, $p < .001$) and protest ($Z = 5.39$, $p < .001$) were reliably carried by anger. Similarly, the effect of perceived harm on consumer support ($Z = -3.34$, $p = .001$) and protest ($Z = 4.95$, $p < .001$) were reliably carried by anger.

Alternative Causal Direction

Alternatively, one could argue that people infer their emotions, and consequently justify their emotions through cognitive reasoning, based on the behavioral choices they make. That is, it may be that individuals who report less consumer support and more willingness to engage in confrontational actions against Wal-Mart will also infer more personal anger and then rationalize their anger through cognitive appraisals. Thus, we tested an alternative model (with loading and structural path constraints for the online and community samples) in which reverse causality is compared to our predicted model. Although the reverse causality model yielded similar fit indices to the hypothesized model, $\chi^2(746) = 1896.61$, $p < .001$; RMSEA $= .093$, CI [.088, .099]; NNFI $= .960$; CFI $= .964$, the predicted ECVI of the predicted model (5.95), CI [5.603, 6.320], as well as the predicted model AIC (2100.45) was lower than the alternative model ECVI (6.10), CI [5.734, 6.461] and AIC (2152.61); lower AIC values relative to an alternative indicate a better fitting model (Kenny, 2010). More important, in the reverse causality, model not all of the pathways were significant and/or in the expected direction. There was a significant direct influence of consumer support on illegitimacy ($\beta = -.83$, $p < .001$) and perceived harm ($\beta = -.94$, $p = .002$), but no significant direct influence of protest on illegitimacy ($\beta = .03$, $p = .88$, ns) or perceived harm ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .80$, ns). Both consumer support ($\beta = -.47$, $p < .001$) and protest ($\beta = .40$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted anger, but anger did not significantly predict illegitimacy ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .91$, ns) or perceived harm ($\beta = -.07$, $p = .38$, ns). Thus, anger cannot serve as a mediator in the reverse causality model. Sobel tests for indirect effects further indicated that the effect of consumer support on illegitimacy ($Z = .07$, $p = .98$) and perceived harm ($Z = .07$, $p = .26$) were not reliably carried by anger. Similarly, the effect of protest on illegitimacy ($Z = .70$, $p = .42$) and perceived harm ($Z = -.82$, $p = .98$) was also not reliably carried by anger. In essence, the chi-square for different models, the AIC statistics, along with the nonsignificant pathways (particularly, protest predicting perceived legitimacy and harm appraisals, and anger predicting the perceived legitimacy and harm appraisals), and the Sobel tests for indirect effects all indicate that this alternative model does not describe our data appropriately.

Discussion

The purpose of Study 1 was to examine the relationship between ethical concerns, anger, and endorsed consumer behavior with respect to Wal-Mart. The hypothesis that consumers' perceptions and emotion would predict behavior was supported. As hypothesized, the relationships between appraisals of Wal-Mart (i.e., illegitimacy and harm) and endorsed consumer behavior (i.e., protest, support) were mediated by consumer anger. These results are consistent with the findings reported by Wal-Mart Watch (2008), where the most frequent category of reasons to dislike and refuse to shop at Wal-Mart involved ethical concerns. However, the assumptions of Study 1 that have not yet been tested are that legitimacy and perceived harm are *moral* appraisals regarding what is right and fair (see Skitka et al., 2005). Thus, we seek to test a model in which one's moral feelings regarding Wal-Mart predict cognitive appraisals. At the same time, we seek to replicate our findings from Study 1 where anger is a moral emotion in response to such appraisals which mediates the effect of the moral appraisals on preferred behavioral actions (consumer support or confrontational actions against Wal-Mart).

We argue that moral appraisals in regards to Wal-Mart reflect participants' core moral values which tend to be knee jerk and intuitive (Skitka et al., 2005); such moral feelings will then inform how people appraise Wal-Mart's actions. Thus, the main purpose of Study 2 is to test whether moral appraisals is an additional predictor of illegitimacy and harm appraisals, moral anger, and consumer support and protest.

STUDY 2: CONSUMER ANGER TOWARD WAL-MART IS A MORAL EMOTION

Method

Procedure

Undergraduates were given a survey containing the same measures used in Study 1 assessing perceptions

of harm ($\alpha = .72$), illegitimacy of Wal-Mart's dominance in the market ($\alpha = .90$), anger toward Wal-Mart ($\alpha = .94$), support for Wal-Mart ($\alpha = .73$), desire to protest Wal-Mart ($\alpha = .90$), and demographic items (e.g., age, sex, political orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic status). The core moral value items (moral mandates; $\alpha = .90$) adapted from Mullen and Skitka (2006) included (a) "My attitudes about Wal-Mart reflect something about my core moral values," (b) "My attitudes about Wal-Mart are central to my core moral values," (c) "My attitudes about Wal-Mart are closely related to my core moral values and convictions," and (d) "My attitudes about Wal-Mart are closely tied to how I see myself as a person." The socioeconomic items asked for were (a) parent's income, (b) mother's highest level of education, and (c) father's highest level of education. We predicted that moral values would mediate the relationship between the appraisals (i.e., illegitimacy and perceived harm) and the anger that participants express toward Wal-Mart.

Participants

Participants ($N = 216$, 83.8% men) received partial course credit toward their introductory psychology requirement. Their mean age was 19.40 years ($SD = 1.88$), and 88% indicated their racial/ethnic group was White. Participants leaned slightly toward a liberal perspective with a mean of 4.19 ($SD = 1.61$), on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The mean response for mother's highest level of education was 2 years of college and father's was a bachelor's degree. The mean level of their parents' combined income was $100,000+.

Analytic Procedures

As with Study 1, SEM using Lisrel 8.80 was used to test our mediational hypotheses in a single model; however, this time, we included moral beliefs as the main predictor variable. We thus test for the effects of moral beliefs on the cognitive appraisals—illegitimacy and perceived harm—and seek to replicate our finding that anger mediates the effects of moral appraisals on consumer behaviors. We again utilize a measurement model to determine the reliability of the loadings of the individual items on our constructs of interest as well as the fit of our hypothesized structural model and the beta coefficients of the paths we predict. A model that replicates Study 1 results, as well as the Study 1 alternative model, is tested and compared to the model that includes moral mandates as an additional predictor; although we expect both models (the moral mandate model and the Study 1 replicated model) to fit the data well, the moral mandates model should produce superior fit.

Results

A Priori Measurement Model

In the predicted model, all demographic covariates were specified to predict the mediators and the outcome variables and were free to covary with each other. The beta paths were specified such that moral beliefs predicted the appraisals—illegitimacy of retail dominance and perceived harm—as well as moral anger and the outcome variables consumer support and confrontation. Indirect paths were estimated via Sobel tests for indirect effects in LISREL.

The hypothesized measurement model yielded a significant chi-square; however, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (2.14) did not exceed 3. Fit indices were above .90, and RMSEA was below the value of .10, $\chi^2(431) = 924.45$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .075, CI [.069, .081], NNFI = .952, CFI = .961. As with Study 1, all items loaded satisfactorily on their specified construct, with loadings ranging from .79 to .93 for moral beliefs, .74 to .92 for illegitimacy, .69 to .79 for harm, .78 to .91 for anger, .60 to .75 for consumer support, and .52 to .86 for protest.

After controlling for any effects of the demographic variables as well as the mediators in the model, the direct influence of moral mandates on consumer support was no longer significant ($\beta = .01$, $p = .85$); however, there was a significant direct relationship between moral beliefs and consumer protest ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), as well as significant direct influence of moral beliefs on appraisals of legitimacy ($\beta = .21$, $p = .003$), perceived harm ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$), and anger ($\beta = .19$, $p = .007$). Appraisals of illegitimacy significantly predicted anger ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$), consumer support ($\beta = -.33$, $p = .001$), and consumer protest ($\beta = .34$, $p = .001$). Appraisals of harm predicted anger ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$), consumer support ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$), and protest ($\beta = .23$, $p = .002$). Anger predicted both consumer support ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$) and protest ($\beta = .22$, $p = .001$). Sobel tests for indirect effects indicated that all of the specified indirect paths were reliable. That is, illegitimacy reliably carried the effect of moral beliefs on anger ($Z = 2.36$, $SE = .03$, $p = .76$), as did harm ($Z = 3.32$, $p = .01$). As with Study 1, the indirect effects of illegitimacy on support ($Z = -2.77$, $p = .01$) and protest ($Z = 2.48$, $p = .01$) were again reliably carried by anger, as were the indirect effects of perceived harm on support ($Z = -3.18$, $p = .002$) and protest ($Z = 2.75$, $p = .01$). In addition, anger reliably carried the indirect effect of moral beliefs on support ($Z = -2.18$, $p = .03$) and protest ($Z = 2.05$, $p = .04$).

Study 1 Replicated Model and Its Alternative

A model in which paths associated with moral mandates were constrained to equal zero was tested to verify

TABLE 3
Study 2 Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Political orientation	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Gender	.10	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Age	–.06	.05	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Parent income	–.20**	–.02	–.06	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. Mother education	–.11	–.07	–.04	.24**	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6. Father education	–.20**	.07	.02	.28**	.36**	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
7. Ethnicity	.24**	.22**	.09	–.16*	–.11	–.12	1.0	—	—	—	—	—	—
8. Illegitimacy	.26**	.08	.06	–.03	–.04	–.09	.10	1.0	—	—	—	—	—
9. Future harm	.11	.06	.06	.05	–.02	–.07	.05	.42**	1.0	—	—	—	—
10. Moral belief	.05	.06	.04	–.07	.03	–.05	.09	.25**	.36**	1.0	—	—	—
11. Anger	.12	.21**	.03	–.06	.03	–.08	–.02	.46**	.49**	.39**	1.0	—	—
12. Support	–.16*	–.09	–.02	–.07	–.05	–.07	.02	–.56**	–.53**	–.29**	–.62**	1.0	—
13. Protest	.18**	.14*	.09	–.04	.09	–.07	.04	.60**	.57**	.52**	.62**	–.67**	1.0
M	4.19	1.16	19.40	5.06	5.36	5.74	1.12	3.49	4.96	2.88	3.23	3.94	2.65
SD	1.61	0.37	1.88	1.34	1.38	1.47	0.32	1.50	1.29	1.47	1.47	1.32	1.31

Note. Higher scores on political orientation indicates a more liberal orientation; gender was coded as 1 = male and 2 = female; ethnicity was coded as 1 = White and 2 = ethnic minority.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

that the same pattern of relationships in Study 1 also replicated in Study 2. We also compared this model against our predicted model to show that although the pattern of relationships replicated from Study 1 are an acceptable fit to the data, freeing paths associated with moral mandates provides a yet even a better fit. The replication model yielded acceptable fit indices, $\chi^2(450) = 1034.30$, $p < .001$, df ratio $= 2.30$; RMSEA $= .079$, CI [.073, .085], NNFI $= .945$, CFI $= .953$. This nested model, compared to the predicted model, produced a chi-square difference test that indicated that the moral mandates model provided a significantly better fit to the data, $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(19) = 109.85$, $p < .001$. The Study 1 predicted structural model, when compared to its alternative nonnested model (where consumer support and protest were specified as predictors of moral anger and the appraisals, illegitimacy and harm) produced a lower ECVI and AIC (Study 1 predicted/replicated model ECVI $= 5.98$, CI [5.534, 6.415] and AIC $= 1286.72$; Study 1 alternative/replicated ECVI $= 6.04$, CI [5.585, 6.472] and AIC $= 1298.35$).

Discussion

The purpose of Study 2 was to examine whether the anger expressed by participants is related to their core moral beliefs and tested this extended model against the Study 1 model and its alternative. As predicted, the centrality of one's moral beliefs concerning Wal-Mart's actions predicted how people would appraise Wal-Mart, their felt anger, and their willingness to take supportive or confrontational actions against Wal-Mart. The Study 1 model findings replicated in Study 2 with good fit to the

data; however, adding moral mandates as an additional predictor to illegitimacy and harm appraisals, moral outrage, and consumer support and protest provided yet even better explanatory power. These results provide evidence that anger is indeed a moral emotion when Wal-Mart's actions are appraised with reference to cherished values. Moral anger appears to drive the actions consumers take toward Wal-Mart, and predicts whether or not they will support Wal-Mart with their consumer dollars. Anger felt toward Wal-Mart is not simply a strong dislike for the company but rather involves the perceptions that Wal-Mart's retail dominance is illegitimate and that the corporation is doing harm and is violating participants' moral values.

TABLE 4
Fit Statistics Comparing the Replicated, Predicted, and Alternative Structural Path Models for Study 2 and Chi-Square Difference Test Between Replicated and Predicted Model Where Moral Mandate Paths Are Accounted for

Model	χ^2	df	p	NNFI	CFI	RMSEA	AIC
Predicted	924.45	431	< .001	.952	.961	.075	1223.42
Replicated study 1	1034.30	450	< .001	.945	.953	.079	1286.72
Study 1 alternative	1034.67	450	< .001	.945	.953	.080	1298.35

Note. $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(19) = 109.85$, $p < .001$ for the predicted and replicated models. Control variables were specified to predict anger and consumer support and protest (as with Study 1), whereas the predicted model controls were specified to predict illegitimacy and harm appraisals, anger, and consumer support and protest. NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; AIC = Akaike information criterion.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of Study 1 was to examine moral anger as a mediator between moral appraisals and endorsed consumer behavior. Our hypothesis was supported; moral anger mediated the relationship between ethical concerns and endorsement of supportive or confrontational actions by consumers. When consumers perceived Wal-Mart's business practices as illegitimate and harmful to communities, they felt greater anger and a desire to protest Wal-Mart's actions. However, when consumers did not view Wal-Mart as illegitimately harming communities, they felt little anger and were likely to shop at and support Wal-Mart by recommending it to friends and family. Our claim that participants were expressing moral anger toward Wal-Mart was further supported in Study 2. Moral mandates predicted illegitimacy and harm appraisals and anger mediated the relationship between each appraisal and reported behavior. Our studies suggest that consumers who view Wal-Mart as violating moral principles will report greater anger and willingness to protest. Further, moral appraisals can also be thought of as post hoc justifications for one's preexisting moral mandates, as moral beliefs about Wal-Mart were predictive of both appraisals of illegitimacy of Wal-Mart's retail dominance and harm to communities.

The results are consistent with the C-A-B model assertions (Engel et al., 1968; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Nicosia, 1966), appraisal theories of emotions (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 1984), and the moral mandate perspective (Mullen & Skitka, 2006; Skitka & Bauman, 2008; Skitka et al., 2005). Appraisal theorists have suggested that unfairness (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988; Frijda et al., 1989) and illegitimacy (Roseman et al., 1990) contribute to the experience of moral anger. Both perceived illegitimacy and harm were found to predict consumers' angry responses to Wal-Mart. Consistent with the moral mandate effect (Skitka et al., 2005), we suggest that consumers who view Wal-Mart as illegitimate and harmful are motivated to protest because Wal-Mart violates their core moral values, which are experienced as nonnegotiable and absolute truths. In effect, based on the mediation analyses from these two studies, we claim that Wal-Mart's protesters view the company as unjustly and intentionally harming people and communities and, as a result, feel moral anger and a desire to protest Wal-Mart.

Study 1 found that illegitimacy and harm were appraisals that predicted anger, whereas Study 2 supported the notion that these appraisals are experienced as central to people's core moral values. We do not suggest that these appraisals are *always* necessary for predicting anger; rather, we argue that they are essential antecedents to the experience of *moral* anger. We utilized Wal-Mart as our target of study because it is a unique corporation—both in size and impact on the economy—and is an entity to which people react very strongly. Although Wal-Mart dominates the retail market due to its low prices, there are people who feel very strong negative feelings, refuse to shop there, and even take actions against Wal-Mart in protest because they perceive the company as violating their core moral values. Our findings suggest that two important appraisals concern the perceived illegitimacy of Wal-Mart's business practices and the extent to Wal-Mart is seen as harming people and communities.

These studies highlight the importance of consumers' ethical concerns and emotions for consumer behavior. Participants' cognitive appraisals of Wal-Mart predicted their emotional experience, which predicted their behavior. Our findings add to the social psychological, consumer, and economic literatures in three ways. First, support was found for the notion that perceptions of illegitimacy and harm are appraisals that drive moral anger. The implication of this finding is that companies that do not engage in ethical business practices can inflame consumers' feelings of moral anger, which can undermine consumer support and create willingness to boycott or protest the company. Second, our studies support the notion that illegitimacy and harm are indeed moral appraisals that follow moral mandates. Greater attention should be given to consumers' perceptions of whether or not companies complement people's moral values and identities (see also Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). As our studies show, the emotions consumers feel toward companies that are not perceived as engaging in ethical business practices can encourage consumers to protest. Third, this research illustrates the folly of assuming people make economic choices solely on the basis of rational self-interest or attempts to maximize their personal utility (see Akerlof, 2007; Akerlof & Shiller, 2009 for macroeconomic reviews on the crucial role that identity and emotion play in predicting people's economic behavior). Our studies make clear that people are willing to act against their economic self-interest (i.e., boycott a retail outlet such as Wal-Mart where they can save money) to remain consistent with the core moral values that are central to their personal identity.

Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to note that there are limitations on the conclusions that can be drawn from our studies. Both studies are correlational. Although we presented mediational models that support the claim that moral appraisals of Wal-Mart are associated with moral anger and protest behavior, other variables not assessed might also play a role. Furthermore, despite our testing one

plausible alternative causal order against our predicted model using SEM, that does not rule out other possibilities. For these reasons, there are limits on our ability to make strong causal claims with these data. However, the advantage of being able to compare our predicted model to other theoretical alternatives provides us with greater confidence about the direction of the relationships we propose.

Although we did examine relationships in both an undergraduate and community sample, the community sample was self-selected. We lacked a representative sample of potential Wal-Mart shoppers. Indeed, it is possible that those who returned our survey may have shared characteristics on some unmeasured variable. In addition, one could question whether or not actions toward Wal-Mart are really a representative case of consumer behavior in general because its practices have been widely discussed in terms of its ethics—more so than most companies, and most obviously Wal-Mart occupies a unique position in the market—it is the world's largest retailer. Although we do not have comparison data for another corporation that has received less media and public attention, moral appraisals appear to affect responses to other corporations. Recently, Target donated money to a pro-business political group that also supported a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. In response, gay rights supporters demonstrated at Target stores across the country, whereas 240,000 other gay rights supporters signed a petition threatening to boycott Target (The Week, 2010).

Last, it is difficult to tell whether perceived immoral actions against other businesses would operate differently than perceived harm against individuals predicting consumer responses to corporations. Nonetheless, our harm items operated as one would expect illegitimate harm against an individual to operate. So, although the mean reported moral outrage might be higher with perceptions of illegitimate harm against a person rather than a community, similar relationships could be expected.

Conclusion

Classically, a conscientious objector is an individual who, on religious, moral, or ethical grounds, refuses to participate as a soldier during a time of war (Kellogg, 1919). In a leaked internal Wal-Mart market segmentation research presentation, this term was used to describe 14% of the U.S. consumers polled regarding their attitudes and shopping behaviors toward Wal-Mart (they "consciensciously object" by boycotting or engaging in even more extreme behaviors; Popken, 2007). Wal-Mart management asserted that these conscientious objectors nevertheless base their purchase decisions on the positive practices of the company (e.g., charitable giving; Kabel, 2007). The results of the present studies not only suggest that consumers do indeed base their consumption decisions on their appraisals of the ethics of Wal-Mart's business practices but that they also experience and express strong emotions in reaction to the company's practices. We assert that Wal-Mart's conscientious objectors experience moral anger in response to Wal-Mart's business practices and, based on their own admission, are likely to express their anger by boycotting and/or protesting the company's practices. Future research attention should be given to people's moral appraisals, emotions, and behaviors regarding the ethics of business practices. As a self-interest model would predict, consumers will boycott retail entities that set their prices too high; however, our studies reveal that when people's core moral values are violated, consumers will also boycott and/or protest a corporation when they perceive that harm results from setting prices too low. Not only is it useful to understand when and why people will support companies with their consumer dollars, but it is also useful to understand the conditions under which they will not.

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