

## **Social Media Use and Political Consumerism During the U.S.-China Trade Conflict: An Application of the O-S-R-O-R Model**

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Drawing on a national survey conducted among American adults, this study focuses on the trade dispute between the United States and China and explores the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism (i.e., boycotting and buycotting). Consistent with the Orientation-Stimulus-Reasoning-Oriented-Response (O-S-R-O-R) model, the findings reveal that social media news consumption (Stimulus) is indirectly associated with political consumerism (Response) via opinion expression (Reasoning) and supportive attitudes toward tariffs imposed on China (second Orientation) are directly related to engagement in political consumerism. This study contributes to the theory building of the O-S-R-O-R model and discusses the implications for the role of social media engagement in public opinion formation about foreign policy issues.

*Keywords: social media, political consumerism, foreign policy, U.S.-China relations, O-S-R-O-R model*

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The trade conflict between the United States and China initiated in 2018 is considered the “biggest trade war in economic history” (“How the ‘biggest trade’” 2018, para. 4). Accusing China of unfair trade practices, the Trump administration imposed tariffs on Chinese imports as a punitive measure, which led to reciprocal tariffs by the Chinese government on U.S. products. According to the Pew Research Center, the economic confrontation between the two countries has led to a new high (60%) in the share of Americans who hold unfavorable views of China amid the trade tensions (Silver, Devlin, & Huang, 2019).

The negative attitudes toward China caused by the trade conflict present an ideal setting for investigating the phenomenon of political consumerism in the United States, one type of political participation defined as citizens’ market-oriented engagements in selecting among products and producers based on political considerations and societal concerns (Boström, Micheletti, & Oosterveer, 2019). It is important to investigate the predictors of political consumerism because boycotting (i.e., avoidance of certain brands or products) and buycotting (i.e., deliberate purchase of certain brands or products) are often adopted by citizens during international trade disputes (Forno & Ceccarini, 2006; Hysing, 2019), and such acts of political consumerism could potentially lead to participation in other civic and political activities (Lee & Fong, 2021; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Carpini, 2006).

Previous studies have found that social media activities are important predictors of political consumerism (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, & Zheng, 2014). Indeed, social media have become increasingly important for Americans to obtain political news, including information related to the trade conflict between the United States and China (Bialik & Matsa, 2017). Recent studies have found that social media news consumption related to the trade conflict is likely to affect people’s attitudes toward China’s trade practices and even Chinese people in general (Bi, Lu, Ha, & Chen, 2021; Lu, Ray, Ha, & Chen, 2020). For most Americans, such foreign policy issues are considered unobtrusive, and thus they have to rely on news media and political elites to form opinions (Baum & Potter, 2008; Demers, Craff, Choi, & Pessin, 1989).

Along this line, this study applies the Orientation-Stimulus-Reasoning-Oriented-Response (O-S-R-O-R) model (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007a) to investigate the predictors of political consumerism by focusing on people’s social media activities and their attitudes toward the trade conflict. Previous studies have primarily examined the O-S-R-O-R model in the context of elections and domestic issues (Chen, 2021; Park & Kaye, 2019). This study aims to enhance the external validity of the O-S-R-O-R model by applying it to a foreign policy issue, on which the public has fewer personal experiences and weaker preexisting opinions.

Relying on a national survey conducted among American adults in 2019, we examined how the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism is mediated by social media opinion expression and attitudes toward the trade tariffs imposed on China. The findings of this study not only advance the O-S-R-O-R model in a foreign policy context but also provide a more nuanced understanding of the roles social media play amid the trade conflict between the United States and China.

### **The O-S-R-O-R Model**

The O-S-R-O-R model has been adopted by political communication scholars to investigate the relationships among individual predispositions, communication activities, and political participation (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007a). This model is an extension of the O-S-O-R model, which posits that personal background dispositions (e.g., interpersonal networks and political interest) determine one's engagement in communicative activities (e.g., news media use and political discussions) and that such activities exert an indirect effect on political participation via changes in factors such as political knowledge and efficacy (McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999). Specifically, the first "O" (i.e., orientation) refers to factors that determine "what stimuli are attended to and what stimuli are avoided" (McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 1994, p. 138), such as demographics, political interests, and network characteristics. The "S" (stimulus) refers to communicative activities that will stimulate political participation, including news exposure via different channels and engagement in political discussions. The second "O" (orientation) in the model refers to altered attitudes and developed cognitions caused by news stimuli and political discussions, such as political knowledge and efficacy. The second "R" (response) refers to involvement in offline and online political activities.

The O-S-R-O-R model advances the O-S-O-R framework by distinguishing news exposure from political discussion (Cho et al., 2009). While news exposure continues to be the Stimulus, expressive behaviors such as political discussions are conceptualized as the reasoning (first R) component in the revised model. As a subsequent stage of news exposure, the reasoning process involves mental elaboration and reflection of the received information (Eveland, 2002). Previous studies have often operationalized reasoning activities as political discussion and opinion expression (Chen, 2021; Jung, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2011). Overall, the O-S-R-O-R model is constructed to examine the mediating roles of political reasoning and orientations in the relationship between political news exposure and participation.

Previous literature has applied the O-S-R-O-R model to the political communication processes on social media. For example, Chan, Chen, & Lee (2017) found that the relationship between social media news consumption and political participation is mediated by social media opinion expression and political efficacy. More related to this study, Shah and associates (2007b) indicated that online news use is positively associated with political consumerism via the mediating effects of political discussion and attitude toward environmental issues. Along this line, this study investigates the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism in the context of the trade conflict between the United States and China.

It is worth noting that some paths theorized in the O-S-R-O-R model could be bidirectional (Chen, 2021), even if its causal structure has been empirically supported through different types of data (e.g., cross-sectional data, multi-wave panel data) and different analytic approaches (e.g., cross-sectional model, auto-regressive model; Chan et al., 2017; Cho et al., 2009; Lu, 2021; Waeterloos, Walrave, & Ponnet, 2021). For example, while the model proposes that reasoning activities (e.g., political expression) tend to affect people's outcome orientations such as political knowledge and efficacy, the reverse causal direction is also possible. Indeed, some previous studies have found that political knowledge and efficacy are strong predictors of political expression (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Scheufele, 1999). Therefore, this study allows

opinion expression and outcome orientations to be correlated with each other, instead of proposing a causal relationship between them.

### **The O-S-R-O-R Model in the Trade Conflict Context**

The first "O" is related to an individual's motivational orientations that affect media use behaviors, such as demographics and political interests (Chen, 2021). As in much previous literature (Chan et al., 2017; Jung et al., 2011), these orientation factors served as control variables in this study. The "S" (stimulus) is operationalized as social media news consumption related to the trade conflict. The first "R" (reasoning) often refers to expressive behaviors that involve intrapersonal reflection and interpersonal discussion on political news and information (Chen, 2021; Chen & Chan, 2017). Along this line, the reasoning activity examined in this study is social media opinion expression about the trade conflict between the United States and China.

The major theoretical advancement of this study is on the second "O" (orientation) and the second "R" (response). The second "O" has been often operationalized as cognitive orientations (e.g., political efficacy and political knowledge) caused by media use and reasoning activities (Chan, 2016; Kim, Barnidge, & Kim, 2019). Nevertheless, this outcome orientation was originally conceptualized as both developed cognitions and altered attitudes (Cho et al., 2009; Shah et al., 2007a). In this case, this study advances the O-S-R-O-R model by examining an attitudinal orientation in the context of the trade conflict: Attitude toward tariffs imposed on China. It is important to investigate the mediating impact of attitudinal orientations, as people's behaviors (e.g., boycotting and buycotting) are largely shaped by their attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1973; Ho et al., 2020). Given that foreign policy issues are often considered unobtrusive for Americans (Baum & Potter, 2008), it is likely that their attitudes toward the trade tariffs are shaped by news consumption on social media. Indeed, one recent study has found that consuming news about the trade conflict on social media is likely to polarize Americans' attitudes toward China's trade practices (Lu et al., 2020).

The second "R" (response) or the dependent variable in this study is political consumerism, which is defined as citizens' market-oriented engagements in selecting among products and producers, based on political considerations and societal concerns (Boström et al., 2019). Considered as one type of political participation, political consumerism is grounded in the assumption that citizens can collectively affect market practices and policy making through their consumption behaviors (Boström et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2007b). It generally takes four forms (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013): Boycotts (i.e., avoidance of certain brands or products), buycotts (i.e., deliberate purchase of certain brands or products), discursive political consumerism (i.e., confrontational culture jamming of corporations' logos and slogans), and lifestyle political consumerism (i.e., overhauls of lifestyle practices such as veganism). Given that the former two forms of political consumerism are more prevalent and relevant in the context of the U.S.-China trade conflict, this study operationalizes political consumerism as avoiding products made in China and intentionally purchasing products made in the United States.

### **Mediating Roles of Social Media Opinion Expression and Attitude Toward Tariffs**

Applying the O-S-R-O-R model, previous research has found that the relationship between social media news use and political participation is mediated by reasoning activities such as online discussion and social media opinion expression (Cho et al., 2009; Li & Chan, 2017). Social media facilitate news consumers to express their views and opinions via commenting and chatting (Yoo, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017). These reasoning activities help social media news consumers better understand the news content and enhance their self-perception from being an observer to a participant (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). By engaging in expressive behaviors on social media, individuals become more confident about their competency to participate in politics (Jung et al., 2011).

In addition, political expression on social media enables individuals to encounter more opportunities for political mobilization (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005), and the participation habit acquired from online expression could lead to involvement in other political activities such as political consumerism (Becker & Copeland, 2016; Jung et al., 2011). For example, during Hong Kong's Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement in 2019, online discussions and expressions mobilized movement supporters to use political consumerism as an important way to respond to ongoing events (Lee & Fong, 2021). Indeed, previous research has found that online news consumption is indirectly associated with political consumerism via the impact of online opinion expression (Cheng, Zhang, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2022; Kelm & Dohle, 2018). Given the aforementioned theoretical propositions and evidence, we propose the following hypotheses.

- H1: Social media opinion expression about the trade conflict between the United States and China is positively associated with political consumerism.*
- H2: Social media opinion expression mediates the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism.*

Based on the O-S-R-O-R model, social media news consumption can be indirectly related to political consumerism via attitudinal orientations (second "O"), namely, attitude toward the tariffs imposed on China in the context of this study. As a reasoning behavior, opinion expression on social media is likely to form people's attitudes on the trade conflict as it allows individuals to carefully think about the topic and reflect on the newly obtained information meaningfully (Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014; Yoo et al., 2017). This process of mental elaboration is particularly important for attitude formation on unobtrusive issues, such as the trade conflict between the United States and China (Bi et al., 2021; Demers et al., 1989). Indeed, a recent Pew Research Center study indicates that Americans rely on social media activities to learn about and form opinions on important issues that may not get much attention otherwise (Perrin, 2020).

With an attitudinal orientation in mind, individuals will subsequently decide whether to engage in political activities such as boycotting and buycotting (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1973; Ho et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2007b). Indeed, previous literature has found that social media news consumption is likely to affect people's political attitudes, which is a critical predictor of involvement in various political activities such as political consumerism (Lee, Chen, & Chan, 2017; Lee & Fong, 2021). Therefore, it is conceivable that social media news consumption about the U.S.-China trade conflict could be indirectly associated with political

consumerism via attitudes toward tariffs. Given the aforementioned theoretical propositions and evidence, we propose the following hypotheses.

*H3: Supportive attitude toward tariffs imposed on China is positively associated with political consumerism.*

*H4: Supportive attitude toward tariffs imposed on China mediates the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism.*

### **Method**

To test the hypotheses, this study uses data from an online national survey conducted among U.S. adults ( $N = 1,046$ ). The respondents were randomly selected from online panels administered by Qualtrics. The sampling strategy in the panel followed the demographic breakdown of the U.S. Census data. We implemented various procedures to ensure the response quality of the sample. First, an attention-check question was included halfway through the questionnaire asking the respondents to pick one specific answer. Those who failed the attention-check question were excluded from the sample. In addition, respondents who sped through the survey (i.e., spent less than four minutes on the survey) were excluded from the sample. To yield a diverse sample mirroring the general U.S. population, the national sample was stratified by demographic variables including gender, age, ethnicity, income, and education. Detailed information about the sample breakdown can be found in the appendix. Data were collected from February 3 to February 28, 2019. During this period, China and the United States held several rounds of trade talks about the \$500-billion tariff implementation, which was postponed eventually. The survey design and the procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board of Bowling Green State University.

### **Measurement**

*Social media news consumption* was measured by two items (5-point scale: Never, rarely, sometimes, often, or always). Respondents indicated how often they engage in the following activities on the social media platform that they use most frequently: (1) get information about the trade conflict between the United States and China; (2) click on news links related to the trade conflict between the United States and China (Beam, Hutchens, & Hmielowski, 2018). Each respondent's scores on these two questions were combined to represent the frequency of their social media news consumption (Spearman-Brown coefficient = .86;  $M = 1.59$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ , range = 0–4).

*Political consumerism* was determined by asking participants about their consumer behaviors related to products made in the United States and China: (1) I avoid purchasing products made in China; (2) I intentionally purchase products made in the United States (Neilson, 2010; Shah et al., 2007b). The two 5-point items (i.e., options include 0 = strongly disagree, 1 = disagree, 2 = neither agree nor disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree) were combined to measure political consumerism (Spearman-Brown coefficient = .69;  $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ , range = 0–4).

*Social media opinion expression* was determined by asking respondents how frequently they express their opinion on the trade conflict on social media. This was measured by three items (5-point scale: Never, rarely, sometimes, often, or always), with respondents indicating how often they engage in the following activities on the social media platform that they use most frequently: (1) post personal thoughts about the trade conflict between the United States and China without sharing news, (2) share news related to the trade conflict between the United States and China AND post personal thoughts on them, (3) talk with friends and family about the trade conflict between the United States and China. Each respondent's scores on these three questions were combined to represent the frequency of their social media opinion expression (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ;  $M = .80$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ , range = 0–4).

*Attitude toward tariffs* was determined by first asking respondents whether they thought the tariffs on Chinese goods would help the United States in reducing the trade deficit with China (5-point scale; range = 0–4; options include definitely not, probably not, might or might not, probably yes, and definitely yes). Then, respondents were asked about their views on the United States in this trade dispute by indicating their agreement with the statement: The tariffs are needed to protect the United States (5-point scale; range = 0–4; options include strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree). The two 5-point items were combined to measure each participant's attitude toward tariffs, with higher scores indicating more supportive opinions on the tariffs imposed on China (Spearman-Brown coefficient =  $.72$ ;  $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ , range = 0–4).

*Control variables* include: Age ( $M = 46.18$ ,  $SD = 17.01$ ), Gender (49.1% are male), Race (68.4% are White), Income ( $M = 2.31$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ , range = 1–5), Education ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ , range = 1–4), Ideology ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ , range = 1–7, a high score indicating more liberal), Interest in trade conflict information ( $M = 2.58$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ , range = 0–4), Social media use ( $M = 8.09$ ,  $SD = 6.65$ , range = 0–40; participants indicated how much time they spent on a typical day using any of the eight most common social media platforms used by Americans). All these variables are controlled in every regression model specified below.

## Results

This study employed ordinary least squares regression models to test the proposed hypotheses. Some control variables are significantly associated with political consumerism. Consistent with the literature (Newman & Bartels, 2011; Stolle, Hooghe, & Micheletti, 2005), individuals who are interested in the trade dispute issue are found more likely to engage in political consumerism activities. Although previous research found that liberals are usually more active in political consumerism (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020), the findings of this study indicate that conservatives are more likely to boycott products made in China during the trade dispute. This is no surprise because the tariffs were initiated by the Trump administration, which was primarily supported by conservatives in the United States. In addition, the frequency of social media news consumption is positively associated with political consumerism ( $B = .08$ ,  $t = 2.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) before mediators (i.e., social media opinion expression and attitudes toward tariffs) are added to the model. Findings are summarized in Model 1 of Table 1.

**Table 1. Regression Analysis of Political Consumerism, Unstandardized (S.E.).**

Predictor	Political Consumerism		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	.01 (.002)***	.01 (.002)***	.01 (.003)***
Gender (being male)	-.14 (.07)*	-.18 (.07)*	-.16 (.08)*
Education	-.04 (.04)	-.04 (.04)	-.04 (.04)
Income	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.003 (.03)
Race (being White)	.09 (.07)	.10 (.07)	.19 (.08)*
Ideology	-.08 (.02)***	-.08 (.02)***	-.01 (.02)
Interest in trade conflict information	.15 (.03)***	.15 (.03)***	.19 (.04)***
Social media use	.01 (.01)*	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01) <sup>+</sup>
Social media news consumption	.08 (.04)*	-.04 (.05)	-.08 (.05)
Social media opinion expression		.19 (.05)***	.21 (.06)***
Supportive attitude toward tariffs			.28 (.04)***
R <sup>2</sup>	.08	.10	.19

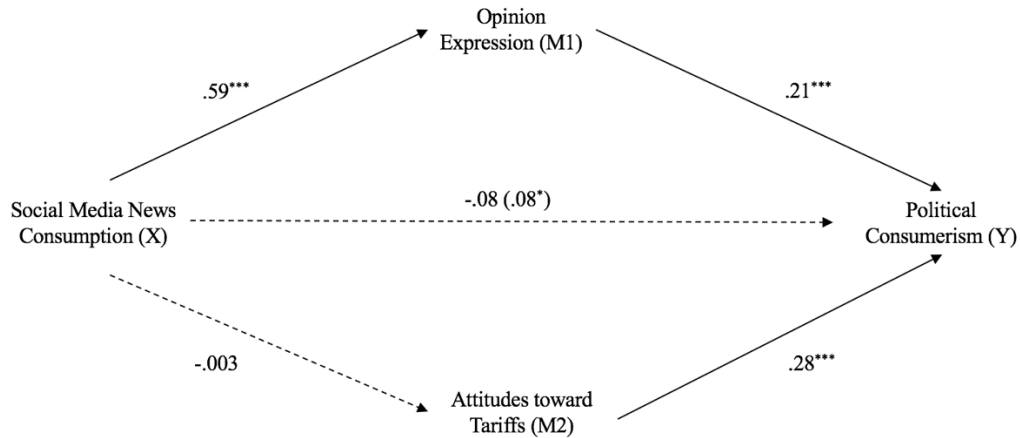
Note. Listwise, <sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

H1 and H3 propose that social media opinion expression and supportive attitudes toward tariffs are positively associated with political consumerism. As shown in Model 3 (Table 1), both social media opinion expression ( $B = .21$ ,  $t = 3.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and supportive attitudes toward tariffs ( $B = .28$ ,  $t = 7.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ) are significantly related to political consumerism. In other words, individuals who frequently express their opinions about the trade conflict on social media and those who hold favorable attitudes toward tariffs imposed on China are more likely to engage in political consumerism activities. Therefore, H1 and H3 are supported.

To test the predictions about the mediators in the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism, this study specified a multi-mediator path model using the PROCESS Macro (the Model 4 template) offered by Hayes (2013).<sup>1</sup> As shown in Figure 1, this model takes into account the separate mediation effects of social media opinion expression and attitudes toward tariffs in the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism (i.e.,  $X \rightarrow M1 \rightarrow Y$ ;  $X \rightarrow M2 \rightarrow Y$ ). Using the bootstrapping technique (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) with 5,000 bootstrap samples, this study analyzes the 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals associated with the mediating effects of social media opinion expression and attitudes toward tariffs.

<sup>1</sup> We have also tested the mediation model with structural equation modeling (SEM) and the results are almost identical. Indeed, the literature has demonstrated that the PROCESS Macro and SEM make little difference for observed variable models, as the results are largely identical (Hayes, Montoya, & Rockwood, 2017).





**Figure 1. Mediation model for political consumerism.**

Note. \* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; solid lines represent significant paths at  $p < .05$  or less; dotted lines represent nonsignificant paths; values are unstandardized point estimates; the numbers in parentheses are statistics before adding the mediators into the equation.

H2 proposes that social media opinion expression mediates the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism. The results in Table 2 indicate that social media opinion expression is a significant mediator in the relationship between news consumption about the trade conflict and political consumerism (confidence interval = [.0582, .1902]). The confidence intervals do not include zero, which suggests a significant indirect relationship (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Therefore, H2 is supported. Those who frequently consume news related to the trade conflict on social media are more likely to express their opinions on these platforms, which leads to increased engagement in political consumerism.

**Table 2. Indirect Relationship Between Social Media News Consumption (NC) and Political Consumerism (PC) Through Social Media Opinion Expression (OE) and Attitude Toward Tariffs (AT).**

	Dependent Variable: NC			
			Bootstrapping	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI
NC → OE → PC	.1234	.0339	.0582	.1902
NC → AT → PC	-.0007	.0127	-.0263	.0239

Note. Bootstrapping results are bias corrected and accelerated; 5,000 bootstrap samples. Demographics, political characteristics, and media use were included in the equations as control variables, but not reported here due to limitations of space.

H4 predicts that attitudes toward tariffs mediate the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism. As shown in Table 2, the results indicate that the mediating effect of attitudes toward tariffs is not significant (-.0263, .0239) because the confidence intervals include zero. Therefore, H4 is not supported. As illustrated in Figure 1, this result can be attributed to the insignificant link between social media news consumption and supportive attitudes toward tariffs. It is possible that the

social media environment is filled with both supportive and opposing information about the tariffs imposed on China.

### Discussion

This study investigates the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism in the context of a foreign policy issue, the trade conflict between the United States and China. The findings of a national survey conducted in the United States indicate that social media news consumption is indirectly associated with political consumerism via the mediation of social media opinion expression. Frequent social media news consumers tend to express their opinions on the trade conflict and this reasoning activity leads to subsequent involvement in political consumerism. Consistent with previous literature (Chen, 2021; Lee et al., 2014), this study suggests that social media opinion expression plays a critical role in the impact of social media communicative behaviors on political attitudes and engagement. The frequent mental elaboration and interpersonal interaction involved in social media expression may make individuals feel that the conflict between the two countries has become a norm, and such a perception could arouse nationalist sentiments and lead to more supportive attitudes toward their own country's policy on this international issue (Ha, Ray, Chen, & Guo, 2021).

The results also indicate that supportive attitudes toward tariffs do not mediate the relationship between social media news consumption and political consumerism. Specifically, while supportive attitudes toward tariffs significantly predict political consumerism, its relationship with social media news consumption is insignificant (see Figure 1). In other words, although the U.S. news media tended to blame China for the trade deficit and use "war journalism" practices to escalate the conflict, they did not exert significant influence on public opinion among social media users (Ha et al., 2021). This might be because the viewpoints about this issue expressed on social media are more diverse than those on traditional news media. A more reasonable explanation is that many Americans do not pay close attention to the political news that they come across on social media, especially those related to international affairs (Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017). In this case, it is conceivable that exposure to news related to the trade dispute does not have a direct impact on people's attitudes toward the tariff policy.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to the O-S-R-O-R model on two fronts. First, while previous studies have primarily examined the O-S-R-O-R model in the context of elections and domestic issues (Chen, 2021; Cho et al., 2009), this study extends the theoretical model by applying it to a foreign policy issue. Compared with elections and domestic issues, the public has fewer personal experiences related to foreign policy issues and needs to rely on news media and political elites for relevant information to form opinions (Baum & Potter, 2008; Demers et al., 1989). Therefore, the findings of this study offer empirical support for enhancing the external validity of the O-S-R-O-R model. Future research could extend the applicability of this theoretical model in contexts other than political communication, such as examining predictors of people's adoption of preventive behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, while the outcome orientations (second O) were originally conceptualized as developed cognitions and altered attitudes from news consumption activities, previous literature has primarily examined the second O by focusing on cognitive orientations, such as political knowledge and efficacy (Chan,

2016; Kim et al., 2019). This study investigates the attitudinal component of the outcome orientations by operationalizing it as people's attitudes toward the tariffs imposed on China. Future research could further advance the O-S-R-O-R model by examining cognitive and attitudinal orientations simultaneously. In addition to attitudes toward tariffs, it is possible that some cognitive orientations (e.g., trust in the U.S. government) are developed via exposure to news about international conflicts. Indeed, previous literature has indicated that foreign policy crises are likely to enhance people's trust in the government via the rally-around-the-flag effect, and trust in institutions is a strong predictor of political consumerism (Groeling & Baum, 2008; Neilson, 2010).

This study also has important implications for understanding the interactions among social media communication, public opinion, and foreign policy. The findings suggest that social media activities are likely to enhance Americans' engagement in political consumerism during the U.S.-China trade conflict. A post hoc analysis of the data examines boycotting and buycotting separately and indicates that social media news consumption and opinion expression predict boycotting but not buycotting. Indeed, previous studies have suggested that these two forms of political consumerism are predicted by different demographic backgrounds and citizenship norms (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014; Neilson, 2010). Compared with buycotting, boycotting is a more confrontational approach and exerts stronger pressure on the target (Boström et al., 2019), which is China in this context. Given the prevalence of social media in Americans' public life, it is conceivable that the hostile public opinion toward China on social media and the subsequent boycotting behaviors lend support to the U.S. government's hard-line approach in U.S.-China relations. The roles that social media play in the relationship between the two countries were also manifested in the tensions between the United States and China during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, when some Americans and politicians referenced the virus as "Chinese virus" on Twitter to create COVID-19 stigma (Budhwani & Sun, 2020). Future research could extend this line of work by investigating how politicians and governments take advantage of social media platforms in garnering public support for their policies on international affairs.

Some limitations of this study merit discussion and additional research. First, we cannot draw causal conclusions due to the inherent nature of cross-sectional surveys. For example, our findings suggest that social media news consumption about the trade conflict leads to more frequent opinion expression behaviors. Nevertheless, the reverse causal direction is also possible; that is, individuals who often express their opinions on social media may have a stronger need to follow news about the trade conflict to obtain more information to support their arguments. To confirm the causality, future studies could employ multi-wave panels or experiment designs. Second, this study does not investigate whether individuals primarily encounter news that supports or opposes trade tariffs on social media. Previous studies have found that right-leaning news media in the United States tended to support the government's tariffs in their coverage while left-leaning media adopted a mixed view of the tariff policy toward China (Ha et al., 2021). Along this line, future research could examine how different tones of news would affect social media users' attitudes and behaviors related to international affairs.

Despite these limitations, this study offers valuable insights into the relationships among social media activities, attitudinal orientations, and political participation. The findings not only contribute

theoretically to the O-S-R-O-R model but also have significant implications for understanding the interaction between the contemporary media environment and public opinion on international affairs.

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**Appendix. Demographic Information of the Sample.**

	n	% (n=1,049)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	515	49.1
Female	533	50.8
<b>Age</b>		
18–25	134	12.8
26–34	185	17.6
35–44	175	16.7
45–54	186	17.7
55–64	172	16.4
65 and above	197	18.8
<b>Education</b>		
High school or less	247	23.5
Some college/technical/associate degree	431	41.1
College	230	21.9
Postgraduate	141	13.5
<b>Income</b>		
Less than \$30,000	331	31.6
\$30,000 to \$59,999	304	29.0
\$60,000 to \$99,999	240	22.9
\$100,000 to \$149,999	103	9.8
\$150,000 or more	71	6.8
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	717	68.4
Black/African American	142	13.5
American Indian/Alaska Native	38	3.6
Asian	56	5.3
Hispanic	185	17.6
Other	25	2.4