A Case of Discursive Political Consumerism: The Nike E-mail Exchange

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Abstract
Discursive political consumerism, the newest and most understudied form of political consumerism, is the focus of this paper. It investigates how the anti-sweatshop movement engaged in discursive political consumerism by using the Nike Email Exchange (NEE), which is estimated to have reached 11.4 people globally shortly after it was released electronically, as its case study. The paper uses the 3,655 emails received by the NEE originator as its main empirical material. This material is examined with a triangulation of methods: quantitative content analysis, qualitative textual (discourse) analysis as well as by situating the NEE in the history of the anti-sweatshop movement and in the literature on social movements and Internet activism. The study shows that scholarship on social movements is not able to explain newer forms of activism taking place in the virtual public sphere because it understands movement activism mostly as targeted at the nation-state or governmental institutions. Discursive political consumerism, however, uses the market as a political arena, targets corporations and challenges life styles and values of fellow citizens. Moreover, the case study also demonstrates that several of the fears about Internet activism expressed by social scientists need to be modified.

Introduction

Political consumerism, formally defined as the choice among producers and products with the goal of changing institutional or market practices that one finds ethically or politically objectionable (Micheletti, Follesdal & Stolle, 2003, xiv-xv), has always played a role in social movement activism. Boycotts and buycotts (explained below) have played a role in the union, environmental, student, peace, abolition, and women's movements. Particularly boycotts have been a central form of political expression for groups who have been marginalized in conventional politics (cf. Micheletti, 2003, ch. 2). Boycotts and buycotts reflect the expression of attitudes and values about issues of justice, fairness, or non-economic issues that concern personal and family well-being and ethical or political assessment of favorable and unfavorable business and government practice. Boycotts and buycotts continue to be important for social movements. But globalization and the increasing power of transnational corporate enterprises has led activists to pursue another kind of market-based political involvement, discursive political consumerism. Discursive political consumerism is not defined as monetary transaction or denial

of monetary transaction. Rather, it acknowledges that citizens who problematize the politics of products by seeking and relaying information on corporate policy and practice act as political consumers as well.

Discursive political consumerism reflects how citizens understand and react to the changing role of corporations and even governments in the world today. Also, it highlights how new forms of information communication technology have become important in the marketplace arena for politics. More than boycotts and buycotts, it shows how people both inside and outside social movements attach political messages to corporate brands and how support is mobilized by holding corporate brand image hostage (cf. Bennett, 2003b, 106). In some cases, as illustrated in the discussion of Nike in later sections, activists may have gone as far as highjacking corporate logos and slogans. Discursive political consumerism is expanding the scope of political action to include communication campaigns that target corporate actors and mobilize participants into more awareness about the practices of corporations and even into further political action.. In doing so, it challenges many of the tenets of social movement theory and even some of the adamant conclusions about the role of Internet in civil society and the public sphere.

Purpose of the Paper

In this paper, we examine an important case of discursive political consumerism, the Nike Email Exchange (NEE). Although political consumerist campaigns against Nike have been a favorite focus of social scientists studying social and political activism (e.g., Shaw, 1999; Manheim, 2001; Knight & Greenberg, 2002; Friedman, 1999; Carty, 2002; Bullert, 2000; Bennett 2003ab) and the NEE is frequently offered as an illustration of the impact of communicative efforts (e.g., Blood, 2000; Boje, 2001), no scholar has yet been able to analyze the collected email responses generated by the initial exchange between Jonah Peretti, the NEE originator, and the Nike corporation. Jonah Peretti has given us his complete collection of the NEE emails for analysis.[1] Our case study involves only the emails sent to Jonah Peretti in response to his Nike culture jam and represents, therefore, an isolated instance of communicative efforts via email to discuss sweatshop issues. As witnessed by the high number of emails sent and the estimate that over 11.4 people globally received the NEE shortly after it was released electronically (Macken, 2001), the

[1] The Research Ethics Board at McGill University approved the content and discourse analyses of the emails provided by Jonah Peretti under the project title "Forwarding Justice."

Nike culture jam had a considerable impact in the virtual public sphere and shows how sweatshop issues are communicated broadly and globally through Internet email program systems.

Whereas several studies detail the activist and leadership networks of social movements and Internet campaigns (e.g., Bennett, 2003ab), no study has ever examined the character and structure of an Internet campaign for fair trade in the global garment industry at the micro-level. The analysis of the 3,655 individual responses received by the originator of the culture jam (explained below) Jonah Peretti between January and April 3, 2001 allow a triangulation of research methods, which has been noted as a necessary step in the analysis of digital networks (cf. Bennett, 2003a, 160). First, we use a *quantitative* content analysis of the nature and character of responses including the power of the NEE to mobilize people into action. In addition, we have conducted a websurvey with the respondents and are currently analyzing data from it. Second, we *qualitatively* examine the discourse surrounding the politics of production practices. Third, we embed the NEE case in a *historical* analysis of the sweatshop movement. The NEE case study is, therefore, a unique opportunity to examine the impact of discursive political consumerism on the recipients of the emails and on corporations, the targets of the campaign.

The paper is organized in the following way. The next section presents the different forms of political consumerism and discusses their strengths and weaknesses as political action and ability to affect change. Then a brief history of anti-sweatshop political consumerism is presented. This section is followed by one that explains why Nike has been a particular focus of this movement. The paper continues with a section on anti-sweatshop discursive political consumerism. The case study of the NEE emails is then discussed in two sections, one presenting descriptive results from the content analysis and the other presenting the discourse analysis of the main issues and actors communicated in them. The paper ends by addressing some of the challenges posed by the NEE for social movement theory, and it confronts some of the conclusions about the role of the Internet for citizen activism. The final section ends with a few reflections on why discursive political consumerism has become important for the global movement for social justice.

Political Consumerism's Three Forms

Previous research that takes its point of departure in the narrower definition of political consumerism makes a distinction between what has been called "negative" and "positive" political consumerism. The narrower definition of political consumerism focuses on the purchase of products based on ethical, environmental or political considerations and on attempts at influencing corporate actors directly through either boycotts or buycotts. The broader definition includes discursive political consumerism, which politicizes the market by giving preeminence to the importance of communication, opinion formation or deliberation, and framing of issues related to corporate practices—not monetary exchanges.

Consumer boycotts ("negative" political consumerism) are an old form of political action that can be dated back at least to the American War on Independence. Boycotts encourage people to disengage with corporate actors by refusing to buy their products, with the goal of forcing change in corporate or governmental policy and behavior. Although survey research shows a large increase in boycott use (and citizen consideration of its use) (see Stolle & Hooghe, 2004), many political consumerist activists voice concern about its mobilizing potential and effectiveness. Boycotts are viewed as problematic because it is increasingly difficult to decide on whom to boycott and to mobilize consumer support for them. The shift to "contracting-out" manufacturing diffuses the boycott target, thus making it hard to decide "who" to boycott. Boycotts are also problematic because it is not clear whether the targeted companies are sufficiently harmed by them. Their actual financial harm is hotly debated. Some studies find that boycotts are economically harmful (Pruitt & Friedman, 1986) while others, using different methodologies, show that they have no effects or may even lead to slight short-term increases in stock prices because they give the company name recognition (Koku et al., 1997). Boycotting may also economically harm more than help workers in contracted-out factories, which explains why many political consumerist transnational advocacy networks do not support them officially. Activists also fear that companies may use legal means to prohibit mobilization for boycotts outside retail stores and that the conservative court climate in the U.S. (a normative force in this context) will support such legal efforts. Moreover, the growing use of Internet shopping in many countries implies that "main street" department stores are declining in importance, thus making it more difficult for activists to publicize boycott calls widely face-to-face and, thereby, reach consumers directly for their support (Ballinger, 2004). Even though newspapers can be accessed

via Internet, declining levels of daily newspaper readership and subscription in many countries makes it difficult for activists to mobilize consumers (cf. Shaw, 1999, Ch. 6). Yet even when mobilization is successful, a boycott action against a particular corporation can gather ideologically different people and, therefore, lack a coherent message to send to corporate elites. The highly heterogeneous groups backing the Disney Boycott illustrate this problem well (see Micheletti 2003, 68f). Another problem with boycotts is that it may be hard for boycott organizers to demobilize supporters once the boycott has been called off (for an interesting discussion see Friedman, 2003). Finally, cross-corporate ownership makes it difficult to pinpoint specific corporations for boycotts, though it is still possible to target specific products as is now done in the on-going Nestlé boycott that focus on Nescafé (IBFAN, 2004).

"Positive" political consumerism (buycotts) or citizen use of labeling schemes to guide their consumer choices began to mushroom in the 1990s along with rising awareness about environmental destruction and corporate practices in Third World countries. Labeling schemes require a good working relationship among corporate actors, non-governmental organizations, the academic community, and even government (see Cashore et al., 2003, Micheletti, 2003, Ch. 3-4). The problems with this form for political activism are that it may be difficult to convince corporations and other actors to cooperate, many products—in particular brand name clothing and shoes—are not covered by labeling schemes, and buycotts lack the mobilizing bite of more protest-oriented forms of political consumerism. Finally, many labeled products are more costly than non-labeled ones, for example organically labeled olive oil in Finland and chicken in Denmark can be four times more expensive than conventional products (Hamm, et al., 2002).

These problems do not characterize discursive political consumerism, the newest and less-researched form, whose main goal is neither depriving corporate actors of payment for a good (boycotts) nor rewarding certain corporate actors for good behavior, policies, and products by purchasing their products (buycotts). Rather, it is the expression of opinions about corporate policy and practice in communicative efforts directed at business, the public at large, family and friends, and various political institutions. The discursive setting for these claims may be local, national, regional, global, or a combination of them. Examples of discursive political consumerism are culture jamming and adbusting, public dialogue about corporate policy and practice, and debates and negotiations with business on the need to develop business ethics, codes of conduct, and independent code monitoring systems. Discursive political consumerism

plays an important role in the "no sweat" movement. It confronts corporations without the use of boycotts that can jeopardize workers in garment factories, and it offers citizens a marketplace venue for their political activism even though labeling schemes are not in place.

Anti-Sweatshop Political Consumerism

Sweatshop conditions in the garment industry did not begin in the current era of free trade. Rather, they developed long ago together with industrialization and the factory system. In the early 1900s, political reformers lobbied governments to ban them, and trade unions fought them through unionization. This stage of the anti-sweatshop movement was mostly oriented towards domestic conditions. In the late 1980s, garment sweatshops were discovered in the contracted-out factories in Third World Countries used by transnational garment manufacturers and in immigrant areas in Western nations (Bender & Greenwald, 2003). Public revelation of this state of affairs led to collective action endeavors to stamp out sweatshops. Today's anti-sweatshop political consumerism has two roots—solidarity with the Third World and struggles by Western trade unions to keep manufacturing plants from leaving the country. This means that the movement has a value base that ranges from materialist protectionism to postmaterialist global solidarity. As shown in the NEE analysis discussed below, the anti-sweatshop discourse includes rhetoric from the fair trade as well as the international human rights' and workers rights' regimes. It demands workers' rights and good working conditions for all garment workers. Labor unions, women's, students and religious groups, policy institutes, international humanitarian associations, and networks focusing specifically on fair trade issues work together on these issues. Old civil society associations with their emphasis on membership strength, pressure group politics, and boycotts couple up with new PR-oriented civil society groups using the communicative skills of spin doctoring and Internet to mobilize consumers into action and to demand improvements from the global garment industry (Bullert, 2000; Manheim, 2001; Fung, O'Rourke & Sabel, 2001).

By the late 1990s their efforts had put the word sweatshop back into the public debate in North America and Europe.[2] Sweatshop also has been frequently used in the names of many North American civil society-based watchdog campaigns (see Micheletti, 2004 for examples),

[2] A common dictionary definition of sweatshop is a shop (that is, workplace) employing workers at low wages, for long hours, and under poor conditions. The word "sweat" is used to denote that work is sweated out of people.

and it is the rallying cry and common mobilizing frame uniting the diversified groups without a common ideological core that form the anti-sweatshop movement.[3]

This framing of the cause has been highly successful. National magazines began to report on dubious working conditions in the Third World in the early 1990s and then in the mid-1990s national television news programs and local newspapers and those with national and international readerships followed suit. Many journalists use the word sweatshop in their reports and began to cover sweatshop issues closely, which culminated in the second peak of reporting on sweatshop issues around the year 2000 (see Appendix 1, Figure 1, see also Bennett, 2003b, Figure 2 for more a more detailed graph of sweatshop themes in the New York Times and Washington Post). The NEE falls into this period, that can be characterized as a mounting fight against sweatshop conditions in outsourced factories. After the transnational advocacy network Global Exchange helped with the publicity blitz, a critical report written by Thuyen Nguyen (a Vietnamese immigrant in the U.S. who started the anti-sweatshop group Vietnam Labor Watch and who was invited by Nike to tour its Vietnamese plants), made headlines in the mainstream media and was picked up in the Doonesbury comic strip (with its strong popularity among university students and graduates), muckraker Michael Moore, and the Tonight Show.[4] The report opened a media and mobilization window of opportunity for the anti-sweatshop movement. Journalists began to write about the incoherence between Nike image-making and advertising and the reality in Nike outsourced clothing manufacturing plants. The phrase "to Nike" began to be used to mean taking out one's frustration on a fellow worker, which reportedly was a common practice in Nike's Vietnamese operations at the time, and some journalists began to write the name Nike as "N—e," implying that it was an obscene or offensive word (Shaw 1999, 48, 53), thus bedding the way for culture jamming efforts. Media coverage spurred on university students to mobilize their campuses for anti-sweatshop resolutions (see Shaw, 1999, 47ff).

[3] The lack of common ideological core characterizes many of the loose networks that use communication, and particularly, Internet-based communication, as their main political strategy. For a discussion see Bennett, 2003a, 150f.

[4] The comic strip can be viewed at http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/5232/comicmay97.htm and is partly reproduced in Shaw, 1999, 82, 86. Jay Leno joked on his show in 1998: "It's so hot out I'm sweating like a 10 year old Malaysian kid in a Nike Factory." Michael Moore interviewed Nike CEO Philip Knight in 1997, see his website "Mike & Nike" http://www.dogeatdogfilms.com/mikenike.html

The Political Consumerist Nike Focus

The anti-Nike campaign started in 1992. Figure 2 in Appendix 1 traces general media interest in matters concerning the Nike corporation, and it shows how it culminated in the New York Times in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see also Bennett, 2003b, Figure 2 for information on the sweatshop issue). Although not the only brand name clothing corporation targeted, the Nike Corporation has been a particular favorite of anti-sweatshop political consumerism. Anti-sweatshop activists are careful to point out that Nike is not the only global garment company with questionable labor practices, but they argue that there are several rational reasons for choosing it as a favorite strategic vehicle for the struggle. For one, Nikes' logotype has image power. Its name recognition in consumer society—the stickiness of its logo (cf. Bennett, 2003a, 152)—ensures that critical voices will be attention-getters. Nike has also boasted publicly about its progress in labor practices in the Third World. Thus, not only can Nike be held accountable for its ambitions, it provides a good rhetorical target for criticism.[5] Furthermore, Nike has supported several progressive campaigns, including promotion of women in sports and community improvement. This meant that Nike was held in high esteem in progressive circles, which had high expectations of the corporation on social issues (see footnote 14). Nike has also not dealt with media relations well. Particularly Nike CEO Philip Knight has reacted defensively—at times hostilely—to negative reporting, and he has tried to suppress negative publicity[6], a reaction which has provoked journalists in their search for more spectacular Nike news (Shaw 1999, 58, 62ff, 85, 93). Another important reason is the character of corporations like Nike that are highly dependent on publicity, which makes them very vulnerable to counter-publicity (see Stabile, 2003; Knight & Greenberg, 2002 for interesting discussions).

Moreover, Nike's corporate development represents a typical process in the global garment industry—outsourcing in overseas countries with poor labor conditions—that anti-sweatshop political consumerism wants to change. As stated by Medea Benjamin (2001, ix-x), Global Exchange's founding director:

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[5] Corporations that listen to political consumerist concerns are often monitored more carefully than other ones that do not pay heed to them. The Clean Clothes Campaign argues that Nike is a good target for just this reason: "…Nike not only refers to its position as a market leader, but also sees itself as leading the industry in labour practices initiatives. They take their leading position very seriously. On their website, Nike says they are the first one to implement independent monitoring and the only one to pay minimum wage in Indonesia." (CCC, 1998, 1). For an interesting discussion on the demands put on corporations with an ethical profile see Kennedy, 2003.

[6] The Nike Corporation unsuccessfully asked Doonesbury cartoonist Garry Trudeau's University Press Syndicate to prevent further anti-Nike columns (Shaw 1999, 56).

> Nike became the poster child for this new-age company where the product itself was somewhat incidental. Nike owned no factories at home or overseas but purchased millions of pairs of shoes from Asian factories. So disinterested was CEO Philip Knight in these overseas factories and workers that he never even bothered to visit the countries…where Nike was setting up shop. Nike did, however, put billions of dollars into selling a lifestyle, a brand name, a logo. The swoosh became ubiquitous. And Philip Knight, worth over $ 5 billion by the 1990s, was the epitome of the savvy businessman who knew how to steer his company through the shoals of the global marketplace.

Global Exchange's Nike Campaign page "Why pick on Nike, if other shoe companies are just as bad?" contributes three final reasons (Global Exchange, 2003). More Nike workers and local labor groups than others have filed complaints with the AFL-CIO in Indonesia; unlike other companies it can afford the cost of improvements without increasing its retail prices, and as the largest shoe company in the world, changes it makes will have industry-wide effects. So the argument is that if Nike "falls" so will the entire global garment industry. Finally, Nike's high market profile and proclivity to contract sports, political, and other celebrities keeps it on the public scene and, therefore, the anti-sweatshop movement can use discursive actions to free ride in Nike's general limelight. Nike's high profile also means that freelance journalists know that they can sell their story if they write about Nike's profits, profiles, and problems.

Timelines and track records of Nike's corporate practices are available on many anti-sweatshop websites and in the numerous publications now available on Nike campaigns.[7] They begin in the 1960s with Nike CEO Philip Knight's decision to close Blue Ribbon Sports'[8] U.S. plants and outsource production to Japan, continue in the 1970s when the Nike brand was launched and Nike decided to terminate its Taiwanese and South Korean contracts after workers organized for better wages and to move to Indonesia, the People's Republic of China and Vietnam, jump to the late 1980s and highlight media reports on poor working conditions, and give considerable attention to the 1990s which is rich with dates, events, and continue to the present date. In the 1990s, Nike's sweatshop woes really began to hit the media fan.[9] The media information struck the nerve of politically-sensitive students (Featherstone & USAS, 2002, 9), who were displeased and provoked with Nike's proclivity to adopt a hostile and blame avoiding strategy.

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[7] For examples see *Nike's Track Record 1988-2000* http://www.cleanclothes.org/companies/niketrack.htm, accessed January 28, 2004, *Boycott Nike*. http://pweb.jps.net/~dcasner/SFSANikeChronology.html, accessed November 1, 2002, *Nike Updates* http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/5231/newnike.htm, Shaw, 1999; Manheim, 2001.

[8] Blue Ribbon Sports is the forerunner of Nike.

[9] The expression "Nike's sweatshop woes" comes from an article by Corbett Miller, "Just Sue it," *The Golden Gate [X] Press Magazine*. Publication of the San Francisco State University Journalism Department (no date). Accessed April 29, 2003. Online at http://express.sfsu.edu/custom/magazine/nike2.html

A series of different strategies have been pursued by the anti-sweatshop's anti-Nike campaign. Nike has been successfully sued for its offshore labor practices and false advertising[10], boycotted, bombarded with consumer messages, honed (see next section), criticized at shareholder meetings[11], and forced to answer critical questions when meeting the press[12]. Activists have pressured the U.S. government to enact laws to regulate American-based multinational garment industry corporations. Nike's attempts to develop an image of corporate social responsibility and later its attempts to develop and improve its corporate practices have been watchdogged and the focus of numerous field and academic investigative evaluations.[13] In particular, Nike's corporate image—the swoosh logotype and slogan "Just do it"— became the prey[14] stocked by political consumerist actors who began to combine the word sweatshop, the swoosh, slogan, and sports metaphors to publicize their activities. Journalists hungry for catchy story titles had a field day.[15]

[10] The best-known court case is Marc Kasky v. Nike, Inc., et al. that was heard and settled in Nike's disfavor. It concerns the status of commercial speech. For brief information on the case see ReclaimDemocracy, no date.

[11] No sweat groups have purchased stock in the Nike Corporation to give them access to shareholder meetings. See for instance Industry Week, 2001 and Worldwide Faith News, 2002.

[12] A good example is Philip Knight's special presentation at the National Press Club in May 1998.

[13] In-the-field, expert, or activist investigations of Nike include Community Aid Abroad's *Sweating for Nike* (1996), Global Exchange's *Still Waiting for Nike to Do It* (2001), and Press for Change's *Behind the Swoosh* (1997). An example of an Academic report is Elliot J. Schrage's *Promoting International Worker Rights Through Private Voluntary Initiatives: Public Relations or Public Policy?* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Center for Human rights, 2004). See also the bibliography for journal articles, reports, and books on the garment industry authored by academics.

[14] They are prey because they are very strong identity symbols. Advertisement experts consider the slogan, coined incidentally in 1988, the "most famous and easily recognized [one] in advertising history" to be about Nike's own renaissance: "'Just do it' succeeded in that it convinced Americans that wearing Nikes for every part of your life was smart…and hip… (CFAR, 1999), and the swoosh first drawn in 1971 and used by Nike's predecessor (NikeBiz, no date) came to be synonymous with the lifestyle Nike wants to promote (COB, no date). But even before they became part of the political consumerist discourse, the logo and slogan appeared on business pages, in advertising courses, and in book titles as a way of summarizing Philip Knight's successful leadership and Nike's ability to lift itself after an economic slump in the 1970s and 1980. Nike had other successfully forceful slogans— "If You Let Me Play" that promoted the personal and social benefits of women's participation in sports, "It's My Turn" that featured inspiring and aspiring young Asian athletes as endorsers, and the Nike-sponsored project "Play Zones" to upgrade adopted playgrounds. These endeavors positioned Nike as a corporation engaged in its community and completed "the linkages among the product, the brand, sport as an activity and value, and societal benefit" (Knight & Greenberg, 2002, 549, 547-49).

[15] Examples of titles of news articles are "Nike is a Four Letter Word" (San Francisco Examiner, February 1997), "Nike: The New Free-Trade Heel" (Harper's magazine, 1992), "The Glob-Trotting Sneakers" (Ms. Magazine), "Sweatshop Christmas" (U.S. News & World Report, 1996), "Making Nike Sweat" (The Village Voice, 2001), "Are You Ready for Some 'Unswooshing'?" (Salon.com, no date), "Sweatshops: Finally, Airing the Dirty Linen" (Business Week, 2003), "Is Nike Still Doing It?" (Mother Jones, 2001)

Anti-Sweatshop Discursive Political Consumerism

Discursive political consumerism concerns the use of symbols and signifying practices (i.e., a semiotic view of language) to communicate information and values on politics in the marketplace (on semiotics see Ryder, 2004). Some discursive political consumerist actions, such as culture jamming, are highly ideological and aim at breaking corporate power and changing the fundaments of consumer society. Other actions seek direct contact with corporations to create a dialogue about sweatshop issues. A final group of discursive actions involves constructive negotiations between anti-sweatshop groups and garment manufacturers. As this paper studies a culture jam, culture jamming will be presented more fully (see Micheletti, 2004 for a discussion of the other forms of discursive political consumerism).

Culture jamming is the most ideological, flamboyant, and contentious form of discursive political consumerism. It uses humor and symbolic images from the corporate world in order to break corporate power and hegemony. Its activists have an anti-corporate ideology, stressing the distrustful nature of corporations and capitalism and their aims at manipulating consumers (Lasn, 1999). Ideologically, culture jamming "represents a more radical rethinking of the assumptions that drive the capitalist global system" (Carty, 2002, 140). As stated by its foremost spokesperson and founder of the magazine Adbusters:

> We call ourselves culture jammers. We're a loose global network of media activists who see ourselves as the advance shock troop of the most significant social movement of the next twenty years. Our aim is to topple existing power structures and forge major adjustments to the way we live in the twenty-first century. We believe culture jamming will become to our era what civil rights was to the '60s, what feminism was to the '70s, what environmental activism was to the '80s. It will alter the way we live and think. It will change the way information flows, the way institutions wield power, the way TV stations are run, the way the food, fashion, automobile, sports, music and culture industries set their agendas. Above all, it will change the way we interact with the mass media and the way in which meaning is produced in our society (Lasn, 1999, xi).

Culture jammers view themselves as an international grassroots effort that uses the logic of commercial images to critique corporate hegemony and rampant consumerism (Baker, 2003).[16] It aims at co-opting, hacking, mocking, and re-contextualizing corporate messages to discuss the problematic nature of consumer society and to encourage consumers to rethink their consumption practices. Culture jammers wage war on expensively-crafted logotypes and

[16] Two important sources of inspiration are the Canadian media scholar Marshall McLuhan ("World War III will be a guerilla information war…") (as quoted in Lasn, 1999, 1) and the Italian cultural critic Umberto Eco who coined the phrase "semiotic guerilla warfare" which allows individuals to "trace a tactic of decoding where the message as expression form does not change but the addressee rediscovers his freedom of decoding" (Eco, 1999, 150).

marketing slogans and, thus, threaten corporate images in discursive boomerang effects that throw the carefully-crafted messages in reinterpreted fashion back into corporate faces. Reacting to these stunts by laughing is an important goal of the reinterpretation process, with humor and laughter as an important step in hegemony-breaking processes.

The Nike Corporation has been an open target for culture jamming and other forms of discursive political consumerist action. As discussed earlier, journalists have played with the Nike slogans, and many culture jamming parodies focus on the Nike Corporation, with "the swoosh" and the slogan "Just do it" as favorite targets of attack, as shown in Figure 3 in Appendix 1.

Forwarding Justice: The NEE Email Content Analysis

The Nike Email Exchange began when Jonah Peretti, a former MIT graduate student working at the MIT media lab decided to test Nike's electronic customer service by ordering a pair of customized shoes with the name "sweatshop" on them. Appendix 2 includes the entire email communication between Peretti and Nike. Peretti has explained his actions in different ways. He has stated that his interests were only professional, that he wanted to test the electronic filter mechanisms used by the Nike corporation. He has also acknowledged in interviews and conversations that he was part of the anti-sweatshop movement and had, in his younger years, been involved in billboard liberation or modification, which is a form of culture jamming. His familiarity with the anti-sweatshop cause and its campaign against Nike are very clear in his argumentation for his name choice. When the Nike customer services' department repeatedly denied his request by stating that his choice was unsuitable for different reasons, Peretti challenged this decision with the following culture jamming argument:

> Your web site advertises that the NIKE iD program is 'about freedom to choose and freedom to express who you are.' I share Nike's love of freedom and personal expression. […] My personal iD was offered as a small token of appreciation for the sweatshop workers poised to help me realize my vision. I hope that you will value my freedom of expression and reconsider your decision to reject my order.

Peretti collected his email exchange with Nike and sent it to a dozen or so friends. Then the emails—completely independent of his control or encouragement—went from inbox to inbox and reached an estimated 11.4 million people around the globe (Macken, 2001). Peretti was surprised that his communication with Nike had gone global. Over a four month period he received 3,655 emails from people who decided to contact him and offer various responses to it.

Once the NEE became public, Jonah Peretti became a media celebrity bearer of the anti-sweatshop cause. Through his publicity on television and radio programs as well as through interviews with newspaper journalists in many countries, Peretti has proved to be an important vehicle for the global anti-sweatshop movement.

The email collection is not a representative sample of opinions and voices on sweatshop issues. Only 0.02% of all estimated receivers sent an email to Peretti. Yet, as shown below, their messages document what aware people think about a broad array of sweatshop issues.

Our research on the entire collection of emails involves an extensive quantitative content as well as a qualitative discourse analysis of the responses.[17] The websurvey, which is not reported on here, further investigates how the original culture jam was contextualized in their general understanding of "no sweat" issues and whether it triggered the responders into further political action. The email collection along with the websurvey show the impact of a culture jam whose initial purpose was neither movement mobilization nor consciousness-raising.

Table 1 shows the topics addressed in the emails.[18] The responses have been categorized in four general categories: whether they offered assessments of or judgments on the NEE or Jonah Peretti's culture jam; sought or offered information; motivated the receivers to take political action on sweatshop issues, and offered Peretti suggestions about how to deal with the Nike customer service unit. Although the emails cannot be seen as truly reflecting the distribution of opinions about sweatshop issues, they do convey the nature of opinions and attitudes as well as arguments that float in the virtual (and real) world of discursive political consumerism. Table 1 presents information on the topics of the email responses.

[Table 1 about here]

As Table 1 shows, most of the responses include a judgment or evaluation about the culture jam or about anti-sweatshop issues. Several responders (41%) applaud Peretti for his use of humor, acknowledge the power of the Internet, or are impressed by the fact that he

[17] The emails form the Nike Email Exchange Data base (NEED). Matthew Wright coded them on the basis of a codebook formulated by Dietlind Stolle and Michele Micheletti. Barbara Hobson offered useful comments on the codebook. The codebook contains over 100 variables.

[18] The actual number of emails analyzed was smaller then 3,655 because many of them came from the same author. Multiple messages from the same author were collapsed into one email item. The final email database contains2,384 email items. Data in the second column in Table 1 do not always add up to 100% as many emails have multiple contents.

found an effective way to raise awareness. Their responses range from very short ones like "Well done, Jonah" or "You are the best, Nike got the thumb" to longer messages over several pages. A smaller group of emails (7%) offers supportive comments about the anti-sweatshop movement. The sweatshop issues most often addressed concern exploitative labor conditions, corporate ethics, the increasingly dangerous power of multinational corporations, and child labor. These concerns have also been found in surveys that ask about multinational corporations and political consumerism (Micheletti & Stolle, 2004; Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti 2004). Several messages include supportive comments about both the culture jam and sweatshop issues.

A minority of responders (about 12 %) view the sweatshop cause or Jonah Peretti's culture jam in a critical light. What is interesting is that a significant number of them express some concern for sweatshop conditions, but they are critical of Peretti's decision to order a pair of Nike shoes from a company whose values he does not cherish. Even though Peretti never bought a pair of customized Nike shoes, many responders believe that one should adopt a consistent approach to political consumerism. For them, the discourse on labor and sweatshop conditions should be accompanied by similar consumer behavior. Corporations should either be punished (boycotts) or rewarded (buycotts) for their stance and policy on labor standards. This group is interesting because it signifies a unified political consumerist approach including the two prominent forms of market-based activism. Other critical messages include attacks about Peretti's middle-class, MIT-educated view of international production conditions that lose track of the actual benefits of inexpensive labor and foreign investment in developing countries, or are hate messages against liberal values.

Many messages (25 %) are informational in character. They either share or seek information about the culture jam or the corporate and labor practices in other companies or countries. About a fourth of these messages also inquired about the truthfulness of the Peretti-Nike exchange. This concern is nurtured by the endless influx of email hoaxes and spam, and the relatively high proportion of spam inquiries in this category questions the assertion from critics of virtual communication that the Internet and email can only promote public gossip and urban legend without mechanisms for source criticism (cf. Ayres,1999; Deibert, 2000). Shortly after the NEE began to spread virtually, it was investigated and confirmed by Shey.Net, a website which assesses the validity of stories (urban legends) sent via email (www.shey.net).

For students of political participation, it is of particular interest whether a communicative effort as the Nike Email Exchange can encourage people to take further political action. Figure 1 shows the general distribution of the political mobilizing effects of the NEE culture jam.

[Figure 1 about here]

Analysis of the Nike Email Exchange Data shows that a relatively large group of responses contains indications of mobilization efforts. The responses give us a good overview of some of the types of mobilizing effects that can be expected of culture jamming campaigns. In Table 2, three mobilization efforts—use of conventional political methods, exchange with others, and explicit political consumer strategies—are distinguished. Contacting others and forwarding the NEE or posting it on a website are the most frequent form of mobilization activities. These forms of "armchair activism" (Deibert, 2000, 263) do not require much time and effort. Fewer responders mentioned that they used the NEE as an opportunity to talk to others in person. Some indicate that they have or will become political consumers (that is, boycott Nike products, contact Nike, or follow similar campaigns), and very few became involved in conventional forms of political participation like contacting the media, politicians or organizations.

[Table 2 about here]

The Email Responders' NEE Discourse

The content analysis offers findings on the supportive and critical nature of the email responses and whether they have mobilized responders into political action. The discourse analysis reveals how sweatshop issues are discussed, framed, and deliberated via the Internet. This section presents an analysis of the issue frames communicated in the NEE email responses, the main actors discussed in them, and the suggestions they offer for alleviating sweatshops.[19] Quotations from the emails (with identification references for documentation purposes) as well as quotation marks around certain words and phrases appearing in the Nike Email Exchange Data (NEED) are

[19] Two types of messages were selected for the discourse analysis. The first type are messages containing more than ten lines and, therefore, deliberative in character. Messages of this type are 267 in number (11.2% of the NEED data). The section type includes 101 message items that were flagged Matthew Wright (who coded for the content analysis) because of their discursive content. The two message types overlap considerably in their content While reading through them, we conducted an exploratory analysis focusing on the assumptions, values and worldviews implicit in them.

used to illustrate the discourses identified in the analysis. Three discourses were found in the NEED. They are discussed in this section and compared to fair trade discourses on the problem frame, actor responsibility, and public debates on effective measures for ridding the world of sweatshops. Also, as the NEE is a culture jam, we compare and contrast the responders' discourses with the culture jamming ideology. This analysis shows how well the responders are embedded in "no sweat," fair trade, and culture jamming discourses. The section begins with a comparison of the culture jamming ideology and the NEED discourse narratives, continues with a presentation of the main NEED actors which are also contextualized in the general fair trade/no sweat discourse on actor responsibility, and ends with a look at the proposed solutions to the sweatshop problem, also compared with the general public discourse.

As discussed earlier, culture jamming is ideologically opposed to the pervasiveness of multinational corporations in the public sphere and naive acceptance of consumer society. It is noteworthy that little trace of this ideological commitment is present in NEED. In general, the emails frame the central problem in terms of the existence of sweatshops and the exploitation of Third World (child) workers. With the exception of child labor, the raised issues are economic in character (wages and vaguely undefined "working conditions"). The narratives surrounding child labor involve discourses on the "Third World," economic development, poverty, and equate cultural difference with economic disparity.

Instead of a comprehensive critique of capitalism, a reformist theme emerges in the NEED that reinforces discussions of political consumerism as focusing on changing the policies and practices of corporate actors rather than the capitalistic system itself (see Follesdal, Micheletti & Stolle, 2003). Culture jamming and most kinds of political consumerism are ideologically opposed. This tension may explain the lack of political consumerist activist email response to the NEE. Most likely, many and perhaps most political consumerist activists received the NEE, but few sent email messages to Peretti. Activists found the NEE to be fun but generally do not consider culture jamming as an effective method for solving sweatshop problems globally (Lindefors, 2004). Like the responders who supported Peretti's cause (but not necessarily his approach), they believe that the problem is the presence of sweatshops—not corporate domination, consumerism, or capitalism. The NEED discourse analysis shows that supportive responders seem to believe that pressuring corporations to improve working conditions and wages (albeit incrementally) is the optimal solution. With few exceptions, the

email responses outline a narrative of pressure for change within the system and an implicit hope that "corporations can change AND make more money" (ID 548) and that "maybe Nike will one day do something about sweatshop labour" (ID 1257). In the majority of emails, sweatshops are not seen as structurally endemic but rather as historical anomalies. We just need to "keep up the pressure" (ID 1082) and corporations will "change from within" (ID 603). Even those opposed to Peretti's discursive political consumerism hold the same reformist view.

Some of the critical responses express supportive views of free trade as a form of poverty reduction. They claim that the NEE is counter-productive because the benefits of job-creation and investment in developing countries outweigh any negative impacts of low wages or poor working conditions. "NIKE is actually a saint for continuing to employ those people despite the bad publicity… In (the ten-year-old Vietnamese girl's) economy, without the NIKE job, her parents would be instead sending her out to beg, or they would be waiting hopefully for her to reach puberty so they could sell her into white slavery like a piece of meat" (ID 484). Or less harshly: "To the workers who must travail in what you call 'sweatshops' the opportunity to eat on a regular basis may just compensate for the conditions that your well-fed imagination feels are inexcusable" (ID 478). Similar views are expressed by those supportive of Peretti's action, who—while decrying the "exploitation" of these workers—also envision the benefits that foreign investment and free trade can potentially bring to the Third World, although this is rarely stated explicitly. The pro-free-trade or tamed free trade approach is apparent in many of their proposed "solutions" to the problem of sweatshops.

Hope is also placed in socially responsible corporations—with The Body Shop and New Balance as commonly cited examples. In fact, the responders conceive of corporations in developing societies as filling the traditional roles of the state (e.g. education, health, welfare, economic "development," etc.). One person wrote:

> YOU (Nike) can make a difference. And you can do it in such a way that the world WILL listen AND you will increase your good will AND you will ultimately make MORE money! (…) Take part of the advertising funds that would ordinarily go to someone like Michael Jordan. Go to the village where your factories are. Create a Foundation to pay for a medical program for your laborers, an educational grant program so that they can better themselves and their community, a disability program to help those laborers who can no longer work, particularly if it is because of poor working conditions, improve their working conditions, etc. (ID 584).

Given this, it is not surprising that the email responses also reveal low trust in government action. The state is absent in their discourse and in the solutions they suggest to solve the

sweatshop problem, as are conventional forms of political participation that target governments (Table 1). General references to governments, regulatory bodies, trade organizations, and other institutions that could potentially hold corporations "accountable" are almost completely absent. While many emails grapple with the powerlessness individual consumers feel in face of multinational corporations, very few give recognition to those already-existing actors that can potentially play a role in solving the sweatshop problem.

It is quite interesting that there is no focus on the empowerment of garment workers to improve their situation in NEED. In stark contrast to fair trade and "no sweat" activists, the responders do not discuss the right of workers in outsourced factories to organize into unions. Perhaps this reflects an American bias, as many of the responders live in the United States and the American union movement does not have a strong presence as an actor for societal improvement. The lack of a "Southern" perspective of workers empowerment feeds into the critic's view that political consumerism (boycotts and labeling schemes) and transnational advocacy networks generally cannot have an empowering effect. Rather they are a "Northern" strategy to make guilt-ridden consumers feel better about their shopping desires and choices (e.g., Batliwala, 2002).

The NEED discourse analysis identifies three main characters—the consumer, the corporation, and the worker. A closer look at them reveals a great deal about how the responders conceive of the role of corporations in society as well as their imaginings of the Third World, their self-identification as consumers, and their understanding of market-based political action.

Generally, the email responses show a desire to hold corporations accountable for their practices. Nike is commonly described as tyrannical, unaccountable, anonymous, hypocritical, arbitrary, untruthful, inhuman, gutless and amoral. These accusations include an underlying statement that Nike should be accountable, personal, consistent, human, moral, honest and courageous. They condemn Nike for failing to meet these expectations and feel that Nike let them down by not living up to the image it creates of itself, which consists of a portrayal of itself as a socially responsible actor that promotes the rights and freedoms of women and minorities (Stabile, 2000; footnote 13).

An interesting contradiction is, however, present in the different responses as well as within individual ones. On the one hand, Nike is seen as a unified corporate entity with a single will and as a profit-making machine, as "a corporate Goliath" (ID 619) in contrast to "the little

people [who] are always watching, [demanding] that corporations act with a conscience" (ID 1086). On the other hand, several emails personalize Nike, address it directly in the second person, and talk to the individuals who make up the Nike corporate "machine." Many attempt to pin down the individual within the corporation who is responsible for the official reply to Peretti's customized shoe request (e.g. "Dear Nike personal service representative" (ID 797), and a few seek to hold the individual who responded to Peretti's request in accord for his/her actions. Some emails call for a "spiritual awakening of individuals" in corporate leadership more generally (ID 812) while others attempt, via email, to mobilize support for the anti-sweatshop cause among Nike employees. "NIKE, God of Victory and Glory, please help us make it a better World for everyone! YOU can make the difference! Thank you for listening. Please pass this to as many desks as it takes until it gets to that decision making table" (ID 548).

Personalization also appears in the second main character, the worker, through the character of the ten-year-old Vietnamese girl who supposedly made Peretti's sneakers. It is clear that Peretti's final, ironic exchange requesting that Nike send a picture of the girl who made his shoes had a significant effect on NEE receivers. Hypothesizing about the life of this imaginary girl occupies a good part of the emails and illustrates the importance of testimonials and personal accounts in transnational advocacy (cf. Keck & Sikkink, 1998, 19ff; Jordan & Van Tuijl, 2000). For instance: "We are all also more connected to the little girl who may have assembled Jonah's shoes, than we could ever know. Perhaps as we sit in our cushy western worlds, she is stitching the name of some American girl on some pointless shoes & that name is HOPE..." (ID 603). Opponents also focused on her but did so in discussions about her life chances outside the sweatshop factory and, thus, echo the critical view of political consumerism as situated in Western thought. "Consider, the alternatives. What if the 10 year old Viet Namese girl did not have the job in the Nike sweat shop? Her alternatives are two, she would be begging from tourists at some holy shrine as they are doing currently doing in the neighboring country of Cambodia at Ankgor Wat, or she could become a prostitute" (ID 484). Some responders viewed her as a symbol of child labor use, which they see as the primary NEE issue: "It hurts me for these children. I have worked on projects that involve children. It is painful to see children lose their childhoods. Children are hurt in many ways… I feel somewhat responsible for these children in developing countries" (ID 118).

The narratives of the ten-year-old Vietnamese girl and child labor also reflect the way people generally view the Third World. Often she is a stand-in for garment sweatshop workers, thus infantilizing and feminizing third world workers, which in some ways corresponds with reality as garment works are disproportionally young women. Even when the ten-year-old girl is not mentioned, the workers are "othered" and disempowered, that is, kept completely separate from those making claims on their behalf. They are generally depicted as lacking in agency, as exploited and downtrodden, and more specifically as lacking a voice. They become "young disadvantaged people… who should be in school" (ID 195) and are defined by their poverty, the underdevelopment of their bodies (due to their youth) and minds (due to their supposed lack of education), and a metaphor for their economic underdevelopment and their poor countries' standing in the world economy.

The NEE is seen as providing "voice" to these workers. A few responders "thank" Peretti "for being a voice for those unfortunate workers" (ID 1096) and for "his efforts on behalf of workers" (ID 2036) and his "concern for children" (ID 2040). A critic writes:

> I assume you know what's best for her--after all, you're a *graduate* student-- …Then after you figure out what's best for this Vietnamese girl and put her where you think she should be, then perhaps you can move on to better things, like telling me what I should be doing with my life. (…)Then, after you've implemented your plan for me, you can go on from there to bigger and better things like planning for whole societies like Vietnam and New York City (my place of residence). Vietnam could clearly use your skills, as they have a long list of unmet socialistic goals to fulfill. (…) Your concern about the ten-year old Vietnamese girl who is working in one of Nike's factories, oops I mean "sweatshops," is touching, but I really don't think she needs your help (ID 490).

Thus, whether perceived as benevolent or presumptuous, a common view is that Peretti is speaking *for* those workers and that solidarity actions are taken *on their behalf*. This lends credence to a common critical view of political consumerism and global NGOs and transnational advocacy that Westerners are intervening on behalf of others whose lives barely affect our own and that we do so more out of guilt, charity, sympathy, or altruism than solidarity or global social justice responsibility-taking (cf. Jordan & Van Tuijl, 2000). Many opponents who wrote emails perceive anti-sweatshop activists as white, middle-class youth who "have too much free time" (ID 488) (presumably due to their lack of real-life experience and their dependence on their parents' money) or "lazy rich kids that don't feel right about the luck God has bestowed upon them" (ID 470). Opponents also emphasize the difference between activists and workers, while the supporters' rhetoric of sameness (e.g. about the universality of human rights) falls up short

next to their objectifying and "othering" of the individuals and communities to whom they claim to give a voice.

The third character is the consumer. In the majority of cases, responders identify themselves as consumers. Whether praising Peretti for bringing people to "reflect on their behavior as consumers" (ID 1253) or arguing that "the accusing finger should be pointed at the mirror" (ID 4521), they consistently identify themselves in the role as "we the consumers." In the game of pronouns, Nike is *you,* the oppressed workers are *they,* and the consumers are *we.*

"Consumer" is both a collective and individual actor identity. Jonah Peretti is the individual consumer actor identity of "David" in the David and Goliath media version of the NEE (ID 5024). His strong underdog struggle not only fits with a strong national narrative from North American political culture, but it appeals to feelings of frustration, powerlessness, isolation, or what can be called a discursive action vacuum expressed in several of the emails. One woman thanks Peretti for "voicing what myself and I am sure many others feel;" another remarks that "now I know that I'm not the only one who questions Nike's methods" (ID 1201, 1147). There is a sense that by reading this message and passing it on, people become part of a discursive setting much larger than themselves. The NEE became a kind of virtual imagined community for like-minded people. Although forwarding the message took minimum effort, many of the emails allude to a sense of empowerment afforded by this form of Internet activism and by the culture jam in particular.

At the same time, it must be kept in mind that the individual responders had no knowledge of other people sending Peretti emails and their responses. A typical email begins with "I hope you opened this email even though you don't know me and possibly fear that I have sent you a virus" (ID 832) that was send by a responder fully unaware that Peretti received thousands of similar messages, and continues with the responder's overwhelming desire to be part of a larger movement, the collective consumer identity. While some responders advocate ethical purchasing, i.e., simply choosing "good" over "bad" corporations, many others emphasize that action must be collectively mobilized to be effective. They express the empowering nature of being "a link in a chain of CHANGE which will lead to ACTION… It's about US creating the communities that we wish to live in" (ID 603). "I will forward it to everyone I know" is a common response and many ask Peretti how many people in how many countries have received the email (ID 1218).

Many emails refer to the NEE's rapid spread as "a movement." For example, one person asks "may I forward it to everyone I know so that it will become a movement? I want it to be on the news" (ID 5103). Several suggest that "many of us should get together and make the same request" (ID 245). A widespread concern is how to be "counted" in this movement. As one boycotter writes:

> Sometimes boycotts just aren't effective because the vast majority of North American consumership is thoughtless and careless. I believe that thousands of people will read the forwarded emails of your correspondence and will share your views about transnational corporations and their sweatshops. But we have to make sure that they are aware of the many who object. I won't buy Nike shoes, and it is only when I am counted among the email protest crowd that my objection might be counted. (ID 18)

The NEED also reflects a sense of consumer power. Some go so far as to state that this is "the greatest power" we have against corporations and that "*if you don't like it, don't buy it* is how a person applies *real* power and gets things to change" (ID 392, 488) and that "If more people could only realize how much power we consumers have .... I had the thought ... years ago ... that consumers affect the quality of our world ... and that was followed immediately by the realization that we actually CREATE our world by our choices as consumers. Which gives us ultimate power, IF WE ONLY USE IT!" (ID 5540). The emails are, however, split between those that posit consumers as victims of evil corporations and those in which consumers ultimately control corporations. Alongside the helplessness many consumers feel *vis-à-vis* transnational corporations is a sense of or a desire for empowerment related directly to consumers' self-image as a community or a group that can act collectively.

Finally, different types of possible action to solve sweatshop problems are proposed in the email responses. Supporters frequently mention its humor as a positive quality that contributed to its rapid spread from inbox to inbox and to the mass media in many different countries. The benefits of this humorous discursive approach are well-articulated in one of the emails:

> Unfortunately in this busy world that we live in, too few of us have enough time on our hands to read long information filled articles containing statistics and facts […] However if one email, slightly humorous in its irony but memorable for it's ingenuity catches peoples attention and leaves them primed to bother to watch the next late night documentary on such a subject or take 15 minutes out of their day to read the next newspaper article on exploitation, then that email has done some good! […] it has caught our attention. Advertising and media companies realize this, they employ humor, irony and short snippets of things all the time. […] what matters is a window of opportunity has now been opened in people's minds (ID 400).

Another said that it is “the easiest read of a much-forwarded email I've ever had” (ID 812). Similarly, many supporters praise Peretti’s way of obtaining important publicity for current problems. Many of these positive responses applaud the public spectacle created by the NEE and its snowball effect. Emails that praise the tone and medium of Peretti’s message generally see the campaign as spreading information and raising consciousness. Others oppose Peretti’s approach and call instead for rationality, consistency, and material action: If you really want to accomplish your goal […] I recommend doing so in a civilized, logical, and effective method. That is how one accomplishes goals in this world” (ID 480). The solution discourse fits well with the framing of the problem in its reformist approach of privileging economic means of action. Some emails refer to this as “rational” and “civilized” methods for change.

An example of rational action are monetary donations, a form of political participation increasing in importance and popularity (see Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Some suggest donating money to poor countries: “Even if they do use sweatshops, how does it affect you? Do you donate money to unfortunate children in foreign countries? I didn’t think so” (ID 482). Yet the fact that monetary donations are viewed by some as the only valid course of action for those concerned with the situation of Third World workers is revealing in terms of the discourse of poverty. Since workers in these countries are viewed as objects of poverty, the obvious answer is to give them money rather than viewing them as subjects who seek help with self-empowerment.

Apart from rationality, consistency in words and deeds is also highly valued. Peretti is chastised for criticizing Nike but wanting to buy its shoes. Many responders feel that no matter how much publicity the NEE receives, no matter how many people stop buying Nike products because of it, the (mistaken) fact that Peretti bought the shoes discredits his entire argument. Thus, he is criticized for being inconsistent: his ideological words are not represented in his consumer deeds. In addition, responders express the opinion that his actions are nothing but talk: “What saddens me and compels me to write is that you have a lot of talent and opportunity - it takes both to get to MIT and the Media Lab - and are using them for a quick laugh instead of to come up with a *positive* solution to a very real problem” (ID 477).

Linked to rationality and consistency is the notion of authority (expert knowledge) and authenticity of claims (personal experience). Several responders believe that Peretti presents no “concrete” facts or statistics in his NEE, does not “[take] the trouble to present a balanced

argument backed by objective information" (ID 4846) and cannot offer personal experience for his claims. "I got the below email about you wanting NIKE to screw themselves by submitting to your sophomoric demand to 'make a statement' -- all for your daddy's $50 […] Being a 'Media' student or 'whatever' at MIT tells me you probably had not been out of your protected childhood neighborhood until it was time to go to MIT, courtesy of daddy's money. It also tells me you haven't been to South East Asia, or China, or Thailand, or Hong Kong, or Indonesia, Sumatra, the Philippines, Malaysia, or even the Ukraine" (ID 459). The question of Peretti's authenticity corresponds with the general somewhat correct image of anti-sweatshop activists as young, white, American, middle class students and a Northern bias in fair trade discourses.

Some responders consider Peretti's actions as irrational, inconsistent, and insubstantial. They maintain that boycotts are the preferred way to solve sweatshop problems. "Imagine if no one even BOUGHT Nike's products because he/she disagreed with what Nike is doing regarding sweatshops. This would send a much more powerful message to Nike than selecting a derogatory ID. Use the greatest power you have against Nike - buy another product whose values are in line with those you want to support while telling others about your experience with Nike AS WELL. Put your dollars where your mouth is, return the shoes, and tell them it's because they are defective" (ID 392). Boycotts are seen as rational action that results in clear and effective material changes (supposedly lower sales of the corporation's products) and consistent in that they unite words and deeds. This solution fits with other NEED discourses that frame the problem as economic in origin. What is interesting is that the discourse surrounding boycotts seems to range between those who place blame and responsibility on corporations and those who believe consumers should be made accountable for their shopping choices. This range of responsibility is currently discussed by scholars who make distinctions between cause and treatment responsibility (see Javeline, 2003) and those who focus on ecological and ethical footprints left by individual choice and action (Rees, 1998, Young, forthcoming).

Responders advocating consumer cause responsibility link boycotts to damage control and ethical consumerism. Consumers are seen as a group causing the sweatshop problem through their purchasing choices. The goal of boycotts is not so much to change the behavior and ethics of corporations as it is to refuse to take part in (that is, cause) particular systems of exploitation: "I too think we should never forget who makes our shoes, clothes, etc. But we all spend a lot of time criticizing the 'bad' companies that dominate our society and often miss the bigger point

about the individuals that make them up (us)" (ID 195). In the corporate responsibility cases, boycotts are viewed as treatment consumer responsibility, that is, necessary, positive, collective action to promote change within corporations to solve the sweatshop problem. Boycotts are combined with discursive tactics which are seen as "actively throw[ing] this in people's faces" (ID 593) in terms of educating the public, mobilizing others to join the movement, and informing corporations of the reasons for boycott. While also using the language of consumer responsibility, these emails place more importance on the collective role consumers must play in holding corporations accountable and, thereby, the role of collective consumer action for solving the sweatshop problem (i.e., treatment responsibility). Faced with "corporate Goliaths," this community of consumers advocates the combined force of discursive and material involvement, with a focus on collective action initiatives.

The Role of Discursive Political Consumerism in the Global Social Justice Movement

Jonah Peretti created a culture jam that revealed the politics behind Nike's brand name sports' apparel. It reached millions of people around the world. Image-making consumer-driven corporations like Nike find themselves in a potentially vulnerable situation when faced with this form of branded political communication (for a discussion see Bennett, 2003ab). This vulnerability combined with the on-going postmodern shift from production to consumption as the structuring force in society has led to the creation of groups and loose networks that question the virtues of consumer goods as well as production and consumption practices. It is noteworthy that the Canadian group Adbusters, the most ideologically driven of all groups focusing on consumer society, has now branches starting up in different countries. Neither is it surprising that mass media, political communication, and business scholars want to study the market and corporations as an arena for politics. Many scholars have also used the NEE as an interesting example of new forms of communication and corporate-consumer relations (e.g., Knight & Greenberg, 2002, Stabile, 2000, Boye, 2003).

The NEE and the NEED analysis presented in this paper show how consumer and citizen activism has evolved from conventional notions and understandings of social movements, as collective challenges in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities" (Tarrow 1994, 4) to a new form of participation which emphasizes exchange of information, mutual mobilization and communication of values. This corresponds to other analyses of communicative

campaigns of the anti-sweatshop movement, which have been characterized by the rejection of conventional political solutions for common problems, a shift in focus from government as the arena and target for politics to transnational settings and the global marketplace, the lack of a unified or central ideological and organizational core, a focus on loose and more personal forms of association and lifestyle politics, and the polycentric order of the anti-sweatshop transnational network (cf. Bennett, 2003a, 147ff).

The NEE analysis reveals that governments and conventional political institutions do not play a role at all in the discussion about solving the sweatshop problem. Rather, the responders' ideas for societal change are focused on the role of consumers and consumer power and at corporate actors and their practices. This finding challenges scholarship on social movements, which even in more recent work on theorizing social movements in a globalizing world, continue to focus primarily on the importance of the nation-state arena and the role of government as the target of social movement activism (see della Porta, Kriesi & Rucht, 1999). The finding also confronts the nation-state focus of theories of transnational advocacy groups, whose "boomerang" model of influence is directed at governments (Keck & Sikkink, 1998, see esp. figure 1).

Focus on corporate advertising, branded political communication, the market, and consumer society opens up many new avenues for political groups to engage in politics. Their goal is to use these new political arenas to raise public consciousness on the effects of economic globalization and corporate power in the world today. As such, they view corporations as "private governments" (Vogel, 1975) that need to conform to universal norms for human and workers' rights. They use political consumerist tactics in their struggle to open up corporate doors and corporate minds to new and different interpretations of their policies and practices.

The NEE can also be situated in the academic discussion on the increasing role of the Internet for political activity and social interaction (Gronbeck, 2004; Norris, 2002; Putnam, 2000). Technology has generally been seen as an important source of and resource for movement activities (Tarrow, 1994), and the Internet has been praised for creating loosely-structured horizontal networks over the dense ones previously relied upon by movements (Bennett, 2003ab). It has, however, also been feared that the Internet only allows for "ultra-targeting" of single issues (Gronbeck, 2004), simplistic thinking, deliberative isolation (Barber, 2003), and gossip-spreading or what is called electronic panics and e-riots (cf. Ayres, 1999, 141, 135). The NEED content and

discourse analyses give some weight to the cry of "ultra-targeting" of single issues as the email responses zoomed into the issue of garment workers and sweatshop conditions and only rarely attempted to connect these problems to an encompassing ideological framework of global structural social injustice. But as the analyses also show, the speed of forwarding of the NEE globally did not lead to simplistic thinking and deliberative isolation. Rather, NEED is characterized by a complex deliberative communication with several frames. Moreover, the NEE made several responders feel connected and part of a collective movement. Contrary to certain assertions (Buchstein, 1997), it created new democratic public space for them to reflect on their political identities and become part of a virtual community of people alerted to global sweatshop conditions (cf. Bennett, 2003a, 145). The NEE struck the collective nerve of people who began to identify themselves as consumers with the ability to act on the issue. The websurvey mentioned in an earlier section will offer more findings on the effects of the NEE on citizen awareness, understanding, and actions on sweatshops.

The initial "sweatshop" culture jam in the request to Nike for a pair of customized shoes, the entire NEE, and its subsequent magnitude in various forms of media are important for research on political consumerism, corporate social responsibility, political responsibility-taking, and global governance. They demonstrate how citizens are using transnational corporations as a vehicle in their struggle for global social justice by targeting the prized resources of corporate image, logotypes, and marketing slogans (Knight & Greenberg, 2002; Boje, 2001). Thus, the NEE represents a form of political activism differing considerably from those of conventional social movements, which worked on worker rights' issues through unionization, strikes, and boycotts in defined territorial settings and through face-to-face contact. This kind of political activism has developed for two reasons. First, it is being created by the Internet, which gives newer, resource-poor organizations and networks a tool for political experimentation outside of conventional national political channels (cf. Bennett, 2003a, 144f). Second, it finds fertile ground in the global marketplace because corporate image is crucial for buyer-driven global commodity chains (like Nike) that sell a set of values and symbols to identity with. But as more time, effort, and resources are spent on image creation, transnational buyer-driven corporations become highly dependent on publicity and, therefore, vulnerable to publicity attacks about blame and responsibility avoidance.

Anti-sweatshop and other activists use this vulnerability to develop new strategies and tactics to confront global new age garment companies on their own turf. Through discursive political consumerism, they have found ways of targeting these companies that do not own factories in the country where they have their headquarters or in any other country and, instead, contract out production to overseas factories not necessarily imbued with the values and symbols that are used to communicate the brand name in consumer society. Discursive strategies and tactics that "jam" corporate messages, reveal the costs hidden behind the brand labels, make politics out of products, and force clothing corporations to debate and negotiate social justice issues are important in this regard. This makes them worthy of more scholarly attention in the social sciences.

Table 1. Topics Addressed in Email Responses to the Nike Email Exchange (percentages)

Topic category	*Sub-Category Illustrations and Percentages*
Judgment (45 %)	7 % Pure anti-sweatshop messages: explicit or general support for anti-sweatshop movement (e.g., against child labor, corporate ethics/behavior, exploitive working conditions, human rights and justice) 41% Pure culture Jamming messages: explicit support for Peretti's actions acknowledging the importance of raising awareness this way, the power of the Internet or humor. 40% Anti-Sweatshop and Culture Jamming combination 12% Pure Critical messages: offered an explicit critique of Peretti's actions or of the anti-sweatshop movement
Information (25 %)	42% Info-Culture Jamming messages: seek or share information about this case of culture jamming 12% Interview request by media 23% Info-Corporate Practice messages: seek or share information about Nike practices, other corporate practices in other countries or even provides personal testimonies of own experiences in factories. 29% Info Truth messages: like to confirm whether the jam has actually happened or not.
Mobilization (21 %)	27% Conventional: indicated that would or has contacted the media, politicians, written about the culture jam, published on it. 80% Sharing with others: talking to others, forwarding to others, posted the culture jam on a list or website. 33% Political consumerism: indicates that will or has boycotted Nike, will or has watched out for better companies, contacted Nike, followed similar campaigns, etc.
Suggestion (8 %)	40% Alternative suggestion messages: offered advise on how to could get around the Nike censors 21% Alternative types of activism 19% Suggestions regarding or directed at Nike 20% Suggestions to further publish this episode

Source: Nike Email Exchange Data (NEED).

Comment: The actual number of emails analyzed was smaller than 3,655 because may of them came from the same author. Multiple messages from the same author were collapsed into one email. The final email database contains 2,384 emails.

Figure 1. NEE Political Mobilization Effects in Percent

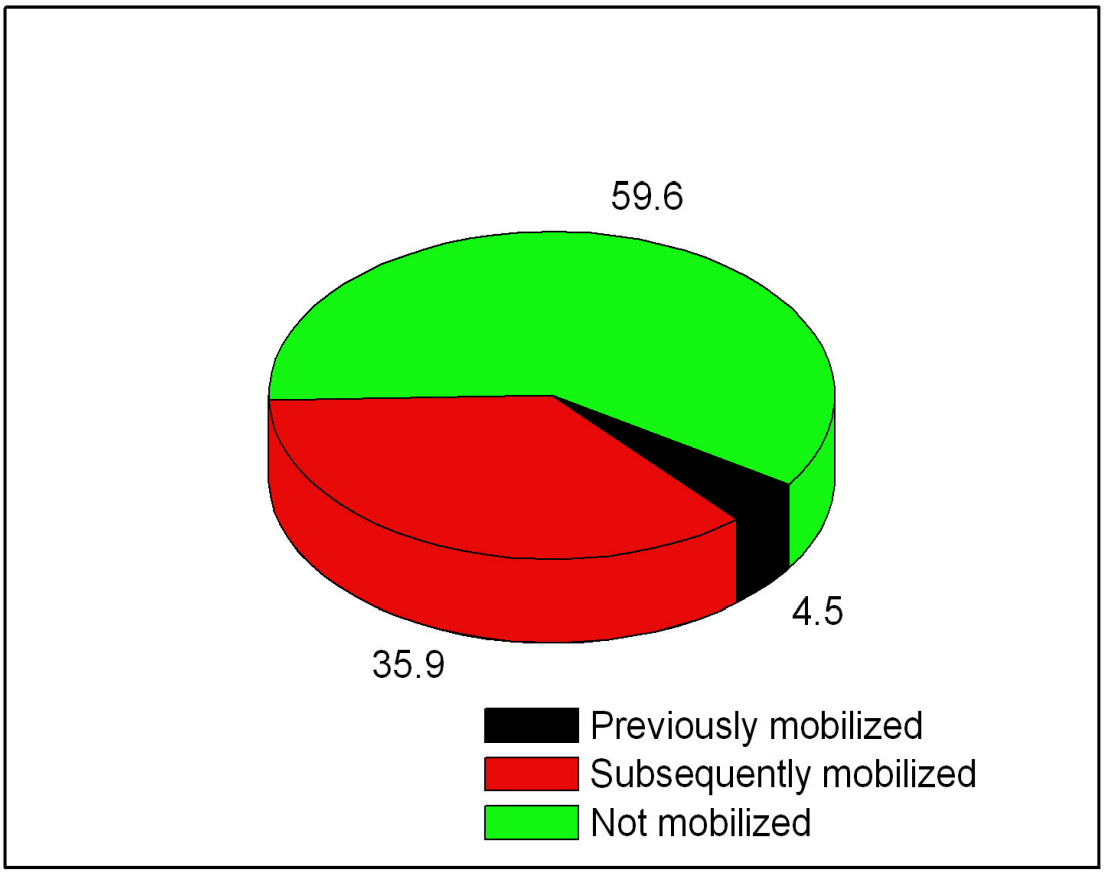


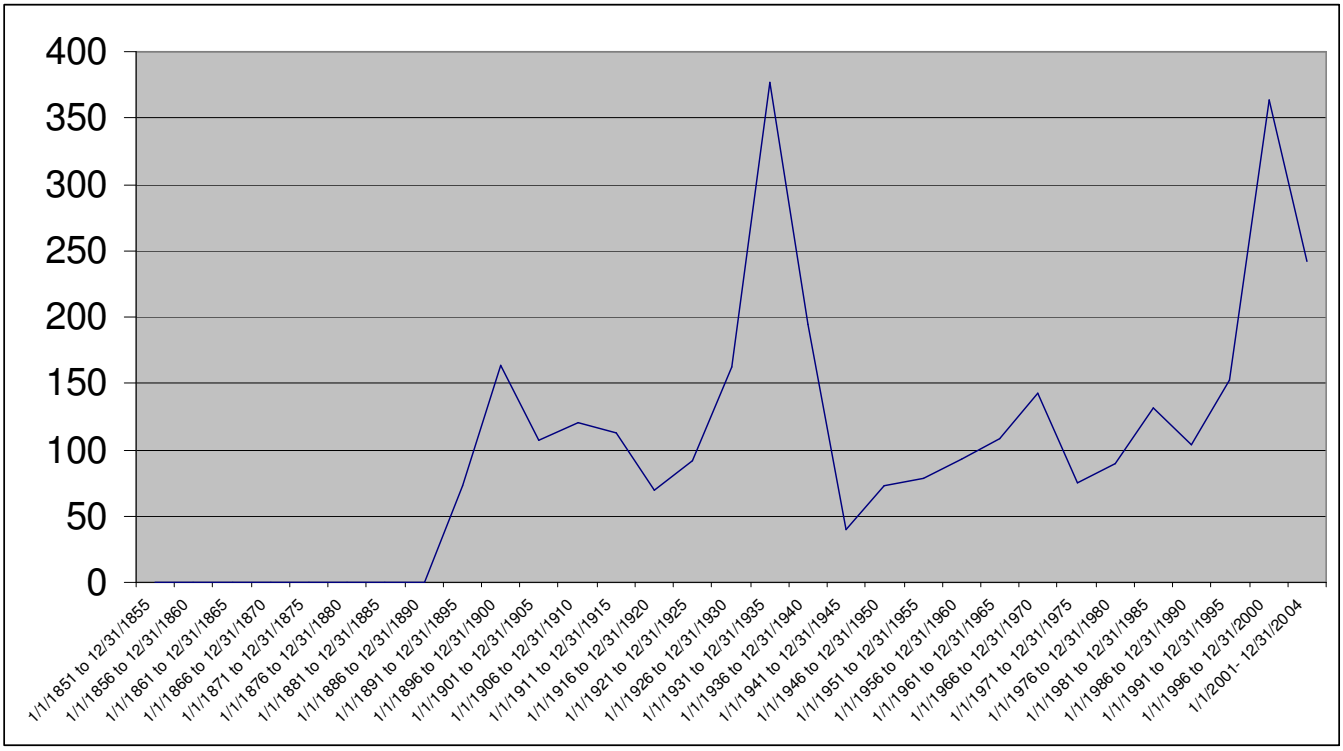
Table 2. The NEE's Political Mobilization Effects

Forms of mobilization	Number	Percentage
Conventional		
Published email offline	203	24
Posted email online	84	10
Contacted media	26	3
Contacted a politician	5	1
Contacted an organization	3	0
Joined a demonstration against sweatshops	2	0
Exchange with Others		
Contacted Other People	685	80
Forwarded the email	386	46
Talked to individuals offline about the emails	34	4
Explicit Political Consumer Strategies		
Contacted Nike	194	23
Boycotted Nike	66	8
Sent Nike a request for "Sweatshop" shoes	47	6
Participated in similar campaigns	19	2
Changed to more responsible shoe manufacturer (buycott)	3	0

Note: The data in the second column does not add up to 100 percent because many emails mentioned more than one form of political mobilization.

Appendix 1

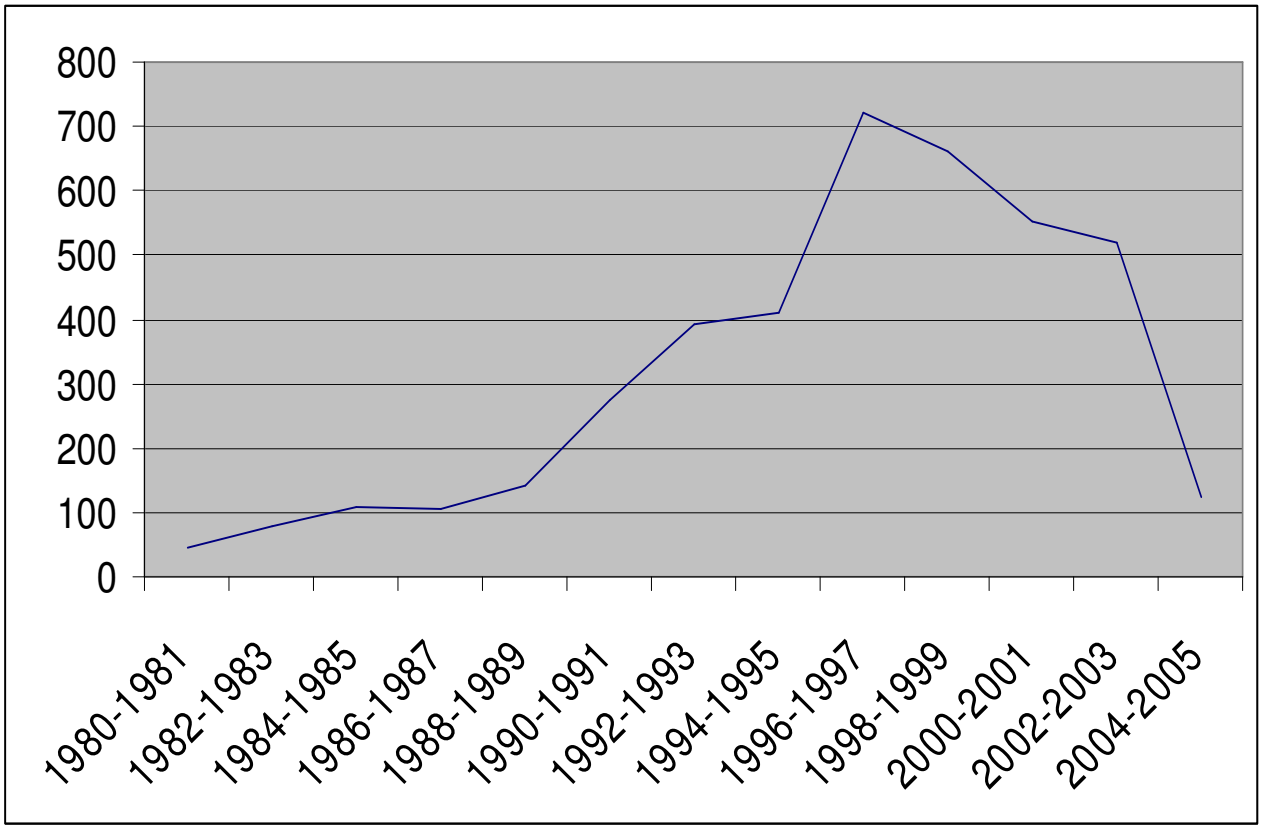
Figure 1 Articles from New York Times Using the Word "Sweatshop" (1855-2004)



Source: New York Times archive. Articles with the word sweatshop were counted in five year intervals.

The authors thank Arnav Manchanda for research assistance.

Figure 2: Articles in the New York Times on Nike (1981-2004)

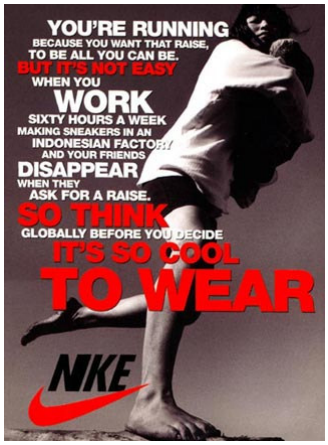


Source: New York Times archive. Articles with the word Nike were counted in two year intervals. The authors thank Arnav Manchanda for research assistance.

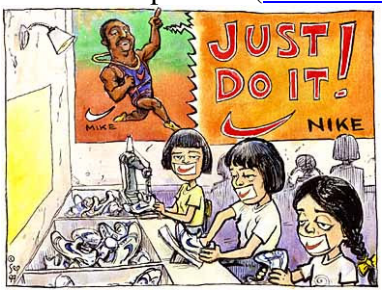
Figure 3. Nike Culture Jams

Postcard from the Clean Clothes Campaign Collection

Film poster from the group Educating for Justice



Adbusters' spoof ad (adbusters.org/spoofads/fashion/nike.ad.jpg)



Finnish cartoon (www.seppo.net/nike.html)

Appendix 2

The Nike Email Exchange between Jonah Peretti and Customer Service Representatives at Nike iD*

From: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
To: "'Jonah H. Peretti'" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Your NIKE iD order was cancelled for one or more of the following reasons.
1) Your Personal iD contains another party's trademark or other intellectual property.
2) Your Personal iD contains the name of an athlete or team we do not have the legal right to use.
3) Your Personal iD was left blank. Did you not want any personalization?
4) Your Personal iD contains profanity or inappropriate slang, and besides, your mother would slap us.
If you wish to reorder your NIKE iD product with a new personalization please visit us again at www.nike.com
Thank you,
NIKE iD

From: "Jonah H. Peretti" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
To: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Greetings,
My order was canceled but my personal NIKE iD does not violate any of the criteria outlined in your message. The Personal iD on my custom ZOOM XC USA running shoes was the word "sweatshop." Sweatshop is not: 1) another's party's trademark, 2) the name of an athlete, 3) blank, or 4) profanity. I choose the iD because I wanted to remember the toil and labor of the children that made my shoes. Could you please ship them to me immediately.

Thanks and Happy New Year,
Jonah Peretti

From: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
To: "'Jonah H. Peretti'" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Dear NIKE iD Customer,
Your NIKE iD order was cancelled because the iD you have chosen contains, as stated in the previous email correspondence, "inappropriate slang".
If you wish to reorder your NIKE iD product with a new personalization please visit us again at www.nike.com
Thank you,
NIKE iD

From: "Jonah H. Peretti" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
To: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Dear NIKE iD,
Thank you for your quick response to my inquiry about my custom ZOOM XC USA running shoes. Although I commend you for your prompt customer service, I disagree with the claim that my personal iD was inappropriate slang. After consulting Webster's Dictionary, I discovered that "sweatshop" is in fact part of standard English, and not slang. The word means: "a shop or factory in which workers are employed for long hours at low wages and

under unhealthy conditions" and its origin dates from 1892. So my personal iD does meet the criteria detailed in your first email.
Your web site advertises that the NIKE iD program is "about freedom to choose and freedom to express who you are." I share Nike's love of freedom and personal expression. The site also says that "If you want it done right...build it yourself." I was thrilled to be able to build my own shoes, and my personal iD was offered as a small token of appreciation for the sweatshop workers poised to help me realize my vision. I hope that you will value my freedom of expression and reconsider your decision to reject my order.
Thank you,
Jonah Peretti

From: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
To: "'Jonah H. Peretti'" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Dear NIKE iD Customer,
Regarding the rules for personalization it also states on the NIKE iD web site that "Nike reserves the right to cancel any Personal iD up to 24 hours after it has been submitted".
In addition it further explains:
"While we honor most personal iDs, we cannot honor every one. Some may be (or contain) others' trademarks, or the names of certain professional sports teams, athletes or celebrities that Nike does not have the right to use. Others may contain material that we consider inappropriate or simply do not want to place on our products.
Unfortunately, at times this obliges us to decline personal iDs that may otherwise seem unobjectionable. In any event, we will let you know if we decline your personal iD, and we will offer you the chance to submit another."
With these rules in mind we cannot accept your order as submitted.
If you wish to reorder your NIKE iD product with a new personalization please visit us again at www.nike.com
Thank you, NIKE iD

From: "Jonah H. Peretti" <peretti@media.mit.edu>
To: "Personalize, NIKE iD" <nikeid_personalize@nike.com>
Subject: RE: Your NIKE iD order o16468000

Dear NIKE iD,
Thank you for the time and energy you have spent on my request. I have decided to order the shoes with a different iD, but I would like to make one small request. Could you please send me a color snapshot of the ten-year-old Vietnamese girl who makes my shoes?

Thanks,
Jonah Peretti
{no response}

* Nike iD is an on-line service that lets people buy personalized Nike shoes. The dialog began when Nike cancelled an order for a pair of shoes customized with the word "sweatshop." For more recent information on this story see shey.net

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