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Ivanka Trump's Brand Faces Unique Challenges with DC Women

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"It's a very loaded brand name right now in this city."

By **Eliza Brooke** | Mar 21, 2017, 9:02am EDT



Ivanka Trump attends a joint press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel at the White House. | Photo: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

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In Washington, DC, a city where political signaling means a lot, shoppers seem to be leaning away from clothing, shoes, and accessories bearing Ivanka Trump's name.

Last week, the clothing resale site ThredUp reported that the number of people discarding Ivanka Trump product through its system had risen 223 percent between 2015 and 2016, meaning it had declined significantly in popularity. When Racked asked ThredUp to slice that by geography, the place where that downtrend was most pronounced was less notable for the extent to which it deviated from the average (it grew 228.6 percent) than for which city it was: Washington, DC.

Early this month, the e-commerce aggregator Lyst found that Ivanka Trump was its 11th most-ordered brand in February, a massive leap from January, when it was No. 550. But when we asked Lyst to break down Ivanka Trump sales by city, it said that while orders rose most outside major cities and in states like Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Texas, they decreased in DC by 104 percent between February 2016 and February 2017.

Though some shoppers feel it's possible to separate fashion from politics, buying the Ivanka Trump brand has by many consumers' accounts become a stand-in for supporting the Trump administration more generally — boycotting it, the reverse. Nordstrom kicked this conversation into high gear in February, when it made public its decision to stop carrying the line due, it said, to declining sales.

A rep for the Ivanka Trump brand declined to comment on its DC sales for this story. Zappos also declined to comment on Ivanka Trump footwear's performance in DC, and reps for Bloomingdale's, Lord & Taylor, and Dillard's, which carry the brand, didn't respond to Racked's inquiries.

Lyst found that Ivanka Trump sales also dropped in New York (40 percent), Chicago (106

percent), and LA (207 percent), but shoppers in DC may have particular reasons for rejecting a brand on principle rather than look.

Abra Belke, a former Hill staffer who runs the blog [Capitol Hill Style](#), finds that among women who work in politics, the combination of high education levels, constant news consumption, and relatively low pay results in a consumer base that's very discriminating about the brands they support.

"It bleeds over from politics. If you're giving money in politics, you're endorsing that candidate. They feel the same way about brands and their practices," Belke says.

"The intelligence and education level about fashion and retail in DC is incredibly high," she adds. "Sometimes I'll post an item from a brand from a lower price point, and someone will comment citing some international study or federal government paper or article in a very obscure business publication about pollution from the factory it works with."

That's not just true of people who work in politics. Lauren Rothman, a DC-based personal stylist who works with executives in fields spanning finance, law, and sports, has noticed that her DC clients tend to be more actively informed about brands' businesses than those in other cities.

She has seen clients remove Ivanka Trump items from their closets or snip out tags to avoid scrutiny. Rothman also works with women who have continued wearing the brand because it fits their body type and lifestyle, but notes that even then, it's a well-considered decision made with an understanding of the political implications of doing so.

In the same way that Rothman asks clients whether they're open to certain cuts and styles before pulling pieces for them, she now asks whether they're comfortable wearing the Ivanka Trump brand.

“It’s a very loaded brand name right now in this city, and I think a lot of thought goes into wearing it,” Rothman says.

The Ivanka Trump brand used to be a reliable hit with Belke’s readers, 33 to 40 percent of whom live in the DC area. It ticked the right boxes for young professional women working long days in a conservative fashion environment: dresses that were-knee length and had sleeves, bags with battery chargers that kept files organized, and shoes that were comfortable and basic. (“I think one of the reasons it was a successful newcomer when it debuted was it brought chic style with a lower, more comfy heel,” says Rothman.) But early last year, Belke started getting emails from readers asking if she planned to keep promoting the line in light of President Trump’s incendiary comments during his campaign. By the primary, that rumble turned into a loud chorus of complaints, with very few voices on the other side.

After the *Access Hollywood* video that showed Trump talking about grabbing women “by the pussy” emerged, Belke wrote a [post](#) saying she wouldn’t be featuring the Ivanka Trump brand any longer.

Anecdotally, she’s found that even Republican friends of hers who voted for Trump have stopped wearing Ivanka Trump clothing. This is partly because women who work in politics don’t want it to invade every aspect of their lives, she says, and also because many of them believe he should have fully divested of his business and don’t want to support the Trump family financially. Ivanka Trump continues to receive money from her namesake brand, according to a recent [Refinery29 profile](#) of the company, though she is no longer involved with day-to-day operations.

And buying the brand can be construed as a political statement. “For ladies who work on both sides of the aisle or in a non-partisan shop, they really can't afford to have their clothing make subtle political statements that could unnecessarily bring a hot topic into

their working lives,” Belk says.

A female Hill staffer who works for a Democratic member of Congress says that she doesn't know any young women in DC who voted for Hillary Clinton and would wear Ivanka Trump product. Not because other people would recognize it and judge them for it — it's not particularly identifiable design, she says — but because it doesn't sit well with their personal values. She finds this goes beyond women who work in politics.

“[Young people in DC] are more socially conscious than other people our age. It goes beyond politics: Caring about a brand's work practices, or where it comes from, that information is just blasted at you,” she says.