

How Brands Become Activists

A critical analysis of Brand Activism

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Abstract

Consumer behaviors are shaped by a desire to express and support political and ethical perspectives. Therefore, brand advertising communication increasingly employs strategies that include social and political values. However, not only are they communicating social and political values, brands also voluntarily take a stance on what they think is good for society. This increasingly popular corporate strategy has been defined as brand activism. Through brand activism, values that are traditionally linked to social movements and are initially discussed in political or private conversations, enter the advertising sphere. Therefore, this strategy can be considered as ethically problematic: is it ethically 'right' to cover profit-raising goals with presenting social and political values connected to social activist aims?

Numerous critical studies have examined on micro-level how advertising mass communication "persuade" and "manipulate" consumers. Since brand activism is an emerging research field, the specific occurring advertising phenomenon has not been approached extensively critically by academics yet. This research aims to assess brand activism critically as a persuasive advertising strategy that creates political and social meaning by communicating political and social values and taking a stance.

The main research question reads: how do brands claim discourses of social activism and sets of moral values embedded in their visual video communication? A qualitative, critical discourse analysis is sufficient for answering the main research question. Critical discourse analysis is the appropriate method for this study since CDA typically analyses texts and visuals and exposes strategies that appear neutral initially, but which may actually seek to shape representation of events and persons with a particular goal.

Since this study concerns the in-depth study of brand activism, data selection had to match the predefined profile of brand activism in advertising. Furthermore, this study selected its data from the winner list of the Cannes Lions International Festival Creativity. This decision ensures a certain level of quality and professionalism of the selected data. During the analysis, the legitimization framework of Van Leeuwen (2007) was an assisting framework to identify discursive strategies that legitimize the claim on social activist discourses and sets of moral values.

The findings of this study present that brands claim activist discourses and sets of moral values by multiple discursive strategies: inclusion of third parties (The Media, The Famous and the Experts), by actually undertaking action with focus on specific outcomes, by creating a 'Us' vs. 'Them' framework through moral evaluation and by four different brand activist narratives ('Frontline Activist', 'Collaborator', 'Whistleblower', 'Hidden Activist'). The implications of these findings outline a brand activist discourse in which brands are not mentioning commercial activity. Brands are above all concerned about the activist brand image and undertaking action, which can be interpreted as misleading.

KEYWORDS: *Brand activism, advertising, cause marketing, advertising, legitimization*

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1. Introduction

We live in turbulent times with fast-pace technological innovations, emerging new media, and evolving consumer behaviors (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016). Consumer income has increased over the years, and basic needs are nowadays no longer a crucial factor (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). Moreover, consumers also gained access to increased knowledge. Therefore, contemporary consumers can no longer be viewed as a passive audience, but should instead be seen as powerful actors that act on the market with intelligence and self-confidence (Stehr & Adolf, 2010). This transformation is the foundation of the knowledge-based economy, in which products and services are increasingly knowledge-based. Therefore, the act of consumption communicates knowledge about the world (Stehr & Adolf, 2010).

The political activity of influential consumers is a relevant subject in recent academic literature (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Political consumerism is defined as "selecting among products and producers based on social, political, or ethical considerations" (Shah, McLeod, Kim, Lee, Gotlieb, Ho, & Breivik, 2007, pp. 219). Therefore, people nowadays participate in social activism by buying something (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). This kind of consumer activism can be effective in changing both corporate and governmental policy and behavior (Stolle et al., 2005). For example, by buying bottled water from the water industry brand Volvic during their '1L = 10L for Africa' campaign, consumers could support access to safe drinking water in Africa at the same time (Brei & Böhm, 2014). Being a social activist by buying is an activity that is named under the terms of 'lifestyle politics' and 'commodity activism' (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). These labels emphasize the difference between activism through 'buying things' and the traditional meaning of social activism.

As a result of these changes, the advertising industry evolved as well. Instead of 'selling,' advertising had to 'persuade' to anticipate on a newly formed market with influential consumers (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016). However, according to Dahlen & Rosengren (2016), advertisers are becoming more mindful and aim for effects beyond persuading a person to take action. Therefore, they define advertising as 'brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people' (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016, p. 343).

This aim to 'impact' people and the society they live in goes beyond 'selling' or 'persuading' and has been recognized in the trend of 'cause marketing.' Cause marketing initiatives create advertisements that are related to specific social causes (Hopkins, 2015).

Subsequently, a new strategy within this trend of cause marketing has been recognized. Some brand campaigns not only present a social cause as needing consumer attention but they also directly engage consumers in the frontline battle of social problems (Hopkins, 2015, pp. 185). Hopkins (2015) calls this form of cause marketing 'activist marketing.' Articles also recognize this trend under the term of brand activism: an increasingly popular corporate strategy through which companies voluntarily take a stance on what they think is "good" for society and subsequently make corresponding public statements (Cian, Parmar, Boichuk, & Craddock, 2018). Academics identify this as a 'corporate political shift': consumer brands broaden their communication by involving values that include core political and social issues (Manfredi-Sánchez, J. L, 2019).

Brand activism can be considered as ethically problematic. The radical change of brand activism is that brands offer wisdom and remind the audience of moral values. A moral value is 'a belief or idea that we, as people, hold dear as the basis for action' (Hopkins, 2015, p. 144). By preaching about those values, about what 'we should be' or what 'we should stand for,' advertisements are, as Hopkins calls it, 'selling morality' (Hopkins, 2015, p. 144). It aims to present itself as seeking to impact consumers and society, just as Dahlen & Rosengren (2016) described. However, a question that arises here is: is it ethically 'right' to cover profit-raising goals with 'impacting' through presenting moral values connected to social activist aims?

The traditional challenge of advertising is to create a commercial message that is both effective, increasing sales, and truthful (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). Truthfulness, in this sense, is highly normative of character. The concept of truth is especially hard when analyzing advertisements since advertising goes beyond only delivering information to consumers. Instead, it acts persuasively to create needs for them and create meaning to justify these needs (Campelo, Aitken & Gnoth, 2011). The complexity resides in developing consistent communication that is perceived as real, truthful, and genuine for both companies and consumers (Campelo et al., 2011).

Authenticity, on the other hand, it used to refer to the genuineness, reality, or truth of something (Kennick, 1985). However, for consumers, a commercial's absolute truth may

not matter (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland & Farrelly, 2014). Consumers experience authenticity differently and rate the authenticity of a message based on their interests and knowledge (Napoli et al., 2014). Mogensen (2017) states that when aligning social and political interest with commercial activity, it is essential to gain legitimacy, to attract partners to build robust alliances, and to have the ability to choose between collaboration and competition. Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser (2012) argue that marketing activity that involves social causes can either be interpreted as hypocrisy or as a self-fulfilling prophecy with positive outcomes.

At this point, a gap in the research field can be recognized. Since brand activism is an emerging research field, the specific occurring advertising phenomenon has not been approached extensively critically by academics yet. Previous research has been concerned with establishing a detailed definition and different forms of the concept (Cian et al., 2018; Kotler & Sarkar, 2018). Manfredi-Sáchnez (2019) has conducted a critical study of brand activism. However, this study has been mainly descriptive with the main research question concerning what political issues are broached by companies through brand strategies. This offers the opportunity to study brand activism on a deeper level, concerning the construction of brand activist messages and how these messages gain legitimacy and authenticity.

1.1 Research question and method

This research aims to study brand activism as a commercial strategy with a problematic ethical dimension of communicating moral values. Through, values that are traditionally linked to social movements and are initially discussed in political or private conversations, now enter the advertising sphere (Manfredi-Sáchnez, 2019). This strategy goes hand in hand with what has been identified above as 'political consumerism'. Through the communication strategy of brand activism, brands position themselves as social activists and take a stance on what they think is 'right' for society (Cian et al., 2018).

This study aims to analyse brand activism with a focus on how its messages gain legitimacy and authenticity. Therefore, this research will investigate how social and political values are communicated to consumers by for-profit brands. This research, therefore, asks the following research question:

RQ: How do brands claim discourses of social activism and sets of moral values embedded in their visual video communication?

There are internal communicative practices of social movements, that regard the communication of social movements, for example, their leaflets, symbols, and language, that express their identity and thus their internal system of knowledge (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016). With 'discourses of social activism' this study means these internal discourses of social activism that enable the communication of social movements their contribution to external existing discourses in society (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016). The concept of discourse and social activism will be further discussed in the theoretical section of this research.

Previous research established that through brand activism, values that are traditionally linked to social movements and are initially discussed in political or private conversations, enter the advertising sphere (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). Therefore, this study assumes that brands are claiming the discourse of social activism and corresponding sets of moral values. It aims to focus on *how* brands are doing this.

To answer the main research question, this research analyses a dataset of 25 brand activist advertisements that appear in either the 2019 or 2018 winner list of the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity. The Lion Award is one of the most prestigious advertising awards in the field, and winners of awards are labeled 'professional experts' by the academic field (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016).

Since this study is concerned about the construction of the brand activist discourse by claiming discourses of social activism, a qualitative, critical discourse analysis is sufficient for answering the main research question. Firstly, a qualitative research approach is appropriate since this research concerns an in-depth understanding of the social phenomenon of brand activism (Boeije, 2010). This study aims to analyse brand activist advertisements on a deeper level than on the descriptive level of recognizing themes. It aims to uncover the complex processes of brand activist advertising messages. These include the moral dimension of including social and political values to legitimate a message to consumers. These processes are represented in visual advertisements and transcend the categorical approach of thematic analysis.

This study is particularly interested in the visual video communication of brand activist advertisements since video marketing has gained popularity in the last years (Luo, Wang & Han, 2013). Since social media has introduced changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals, the popularity of video sharing sites has increased as well: 71 percent of online Americans used video-sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo (Moore, 2011). Business literature is abundant with evidence of successful video marketing via YouTube and other video sharing sites (Luo et al., 2013). Commercial video advertisements are, therefore, a contemporary and relevant dataset for this study.

Visual research methods in social sciences provide compelling insight into culture and societies (Pauwels & Manny, 2020b). Therefore, the critical discourse analysis conducted by this study analyses the data through a multimodel approach. For analyzing the visuals, it borrowed insights from the research field of social semiotics. Furthermore, it utilized an approach of visual rhetoric to uncover the meaning of visual aspects of the studied messages in the advertisements (van Leeuwen, 2007). As a result, this study utilizes a combination of theories to analyze both word and images of brand activist videos to analyse brand activist messages.

1.2 Academic and Societal Relevance

As illustrated in the visual below, the marketing system is shaped by society, and the marketing system also is shaping society itself (Laczniak & Murphy, 2006). Also illustrated by illustration below is, on the one hand, the analysis of effectiveness and efficiency of marketing activity on firm-level. In this context, there is a focus on managerial appropriateness rather than on the moral rightness of an action (Laczniak & Murphy, 2006).

However, building on the idea of marketing also influencing societal well-being, it is also essential to analyse the ethical side of marketing practices (Laczniak & Murphy, 2006). As already mentioned, brand activism can either be interpreted as hypocrisy or as a self-fulfilling prophecy with positive outcomes (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). However, it is possible to uncover the moral and complex dimensions of brand activist video advertisements' communication. By assessing the strategy critically and up-close, this study aims to shed light on how brands claim and present social activist and moral values. By uncovering the way brands are doing this, this study hopes to inform people about

advertising strategies that are, on the one hand, claiming to make an impact, but on the other hand, still be persuasive of nature. Since brand activism is an emerging communication strategy, this research hopes to add to the emerging discourse that is evolving around this subject and understanding the working of the phenomenon on a more profound and detailed level. Since advertising messages are displays of cultural values, ideals, and desires, this study will reveal a broader cultural context of values, ideals, and desires which dominate western consumer culture (Stehr & Adolf, 2010).

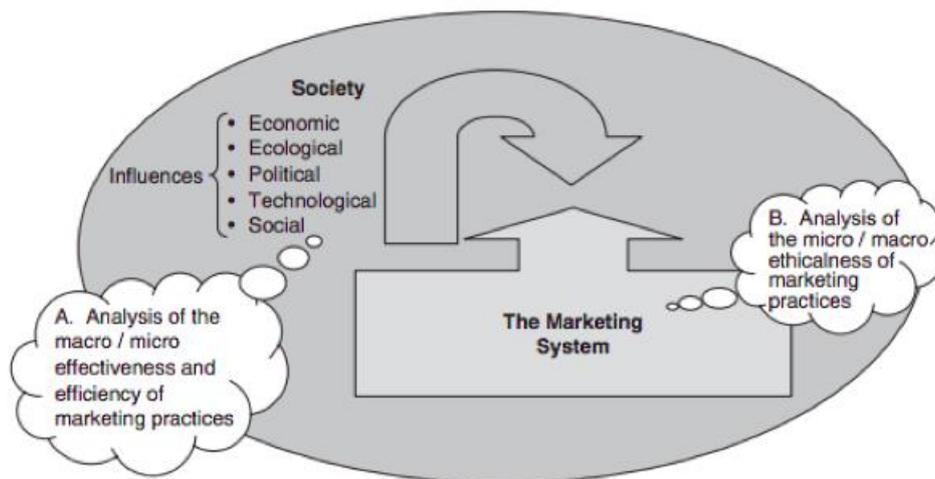


Figure 1 Visual of Laczniak & Murphy (2006) - Two types of analysis in marketing and society

1.3 Overview of Thesis Structure

The second chapter of this research discusses four overarching theoretical concepts that are relevant to this study. Firstly, it sheds light on previous research on cause marketing. Subsequently, previous studies on defining brand activism are discussed. The concept of a 'brand' defined by the brand equity model of Keller (2001), who identifies four layers of a brand: identity, meaning, response, and relationship. Moreover, the researches Manfredi-Sánchez (2019), Cian et al. (2018), Kotler and Sarkar (2017), Hopkins (2015), and Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser (2012) are assessed to define (the different forms of) brand activism.

Additionally, previous research on discourse theory is presented. The chapter

explains what the concept of discourse is and why advertising can be viewed as a discourse. The value of studying advertising messages is established. Moreover, the value of the concept of semiotics is discussed. In addition, two streams of critical academic studies that focus on the practice of advertising are identified. Furthermore, the term 'discourses of social activism' in the main research question is explained in-depth. Furthermore, the fact that the complexity of creating an advertising message that is both persuasive and truthful at the same time is addressed. The importance of the concept of legitimacy in advertising is approached.

In addition, the third chapter concerns the methodological choices of this study. This section justifies the research method of critical discourse analysis. Moreover, this section discusses the purposive sampling strategy of this method and the decisions made during the collection of data. Implications of these choices on research are addressed as well. In Addition, this chapter presents a detailed description of how the data was analysed. A multimethod approach to the data is justified and operationalized. Finally, concerns about reliability and validity of this study are addressed. The legitimization framework from Van Leeuwen (2007) is approached as an assisting framework during the analysis to uncover discursive strategies of brand activist messages.

Subsequently, the fourth chapter presents the findings of this research structured according to the framework of Van Leeuwen (2007). Discursive strategies are presented according to the categories of: authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation and mythopoesis. Moreover, the fourth chapter discusses the identified discursive strategies and formulates an answer to the main research question. Finally, the concluding chapter presents a summary of the findings and discuss the limitations and future recommendations of this research.

2. Theoretical Literature Review

The following section contains an analytical discussion of relevant theoretical approaches, and previous research relevant to this study. The first paragraph will discuss the concept of cause marketing. Brand activism builds upon this concept, and it therefore relevant to discuss insights from previous studies on cause marketing. Secondly, the concept of brand activism is defined by discussing previous research on the phenomenon. Subsequently, previous research on discourse theory will be discussed to gain a better understanding of the course of this study. Moreover, this chapter presents the concept of legitimization and the framework of legitimization (van Leeuwen, 2007). These concepts are essential for understanding how to assess brand activist messages and their claim on social activist discourses.

2.1 Cause Marketing

Businesses have increasingly linked their brands with causes/charities to achieve corporate and nonprofit objectives, which has been named under the term cause marketing (Samu & Wymer, 2009). As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, causes marketing includes advertisements related to specific social causes (Hopkins, 2015). Cause marketing communications feature a brand name or logo along with a nonprofit cause (Barone, Miyazaki, Taylor, 2000). The activity links product sales with donations to a social cause (Chaabane & Parguel, 2016).

An example is a cause-related marketing campaign executed by Volvic, a bottled water brand owned by the French multinational company Danone, between 2005 and 2010; this was the '1L=10L' campaign which presented a partnership with UNICEF and other aid and development charities in England ((Brei & Böhm, 2014). By buying Volvic's bottled water, consumers could simultaneously support the cause of access to safe drinking water in Africa. Previous experimental researches show that consumers will respond with a more favorable attitude and a higher likelihood of buying brands that have certain social-cause relations (Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller & Meza, 2006; Menon, & Kahn, 2003; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Feelings of affinity or identification with the social cause often have been found as

the drivers of these ratings and choices (Bloom et al., 2006; Lichtenstein, Drumwright & Braig, 2004; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Brei & Böhm's (2014) conducted a critical discourse analysis of Volvic's cause-related campaign '1L=10L for Africa'. Their most significant findings were that Volvic transformed the bottle of water into a tool for supporting a social cause. Second, the campaign also wanted to change consumers' status; the campaign discourse sought to transform them from passive shoppers into active, engaged consumers who participate in decisive social action by buying bottled water. Lastly, in this way (transforming consumers into social activists), companies strengthen their relations with their customers: capturing their imaginations and attention, binding them to their brand. Böhm and Brei (2014) argue that Volvic's cause-related marketing campaign can be an example of the ideological functioning of contemporary consumer capitalism, which allows companies to grow their profits by positioning themselves as social activists pursue to solve and address social issues.

Cause marketing goes hand in hand with the fact that consumer behaviors are shaped by a desire to express and support political and ethical perspectives (Shah, McLeod, Kim, Lee, Gotlieb, Ho & Breivik, 2007). Therefore, the nontraditional components of products, such as social cause, are becoming more critical for consumers. Initial studies have already tried to define this as "ethical consumerism" (Schlegelmilch & Öberseder, 2010). Ethical consumerism refers to the choices a customer makes based on social, nontraditional components of products (Auger et al. 2003) and personal and moral beliefs (Carrigan *et al.*, 2004). In this way, consumers can demand new goods that harmonize with their moral premises (Stehr & Adolf, 2010).

Another term for ethical consumerism is political consumerism, which is described as 'the act of selecting among products and producers based on social, political, or ethical considerations (Shah *et al.*, 2007, pp. 219). Consumers who engage in ethical/political consumerism hold companies and governments responsible for the way products are produced and the nature of this production's social and environmental consequences (Shah *et al.*, 2007). Regardless of whether political consumers act individually or collectively, their market choices reflect those material products that are embedded in a complex social and normative context, which can be called the politics behind products (Micheletti, 2003). Political consumerism is expressed by specific actions, such as buying or boycotting certain products to change the institutional or market practices by consumers (Shah et al., 2007).

This kind of consumer activism can be useful in changing both corporate and governmental policy and behavior (Stolle *et al.*, 2005). Within contemporary culture, it is unsurprising to participate in social activism by buying something (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). However, this phenomenon has been labeled as "lifestyle politics" and "commodity activism." These labels emphasize the difference between activism through buying things and the traditional meaning of social activism (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012).

2.2 Brand Activism

To accurately define brand activism, it is first and foremost essential to define what a brand is. In the contemporary consumer society, brands structure an economy of symbolic exchange that gives value to the meanings consumers attach to the brand, name, logo, and product category (Oswald & Oswald, 2015). Katsanis (1994) argues that brands are the most valuable possession of a company since positive attitudes and associations customers have toward the company's brands create value and attract new consumers. Keller (2001) outlines the Customer-Based Brand Equity model to understand what factors a successful brand out. mAs illustrated in the image below, Keller (2001) identifies four layers of a brand: identity, meaning, response, and relationship. Brand meaning relates to the concept of brand image. This concept deals with extrinsic properties of product or service and meets consumer's psychological or social needs (Keller, 2001). It is rather about how a person abstractly thinks about a brand than what the brand actually does (Keller, 2001). These brand associations that exist in a consumer's mind can be, to a certain extent, formed indirectly by the depiction of the brand in advertising (Keller, 2001).

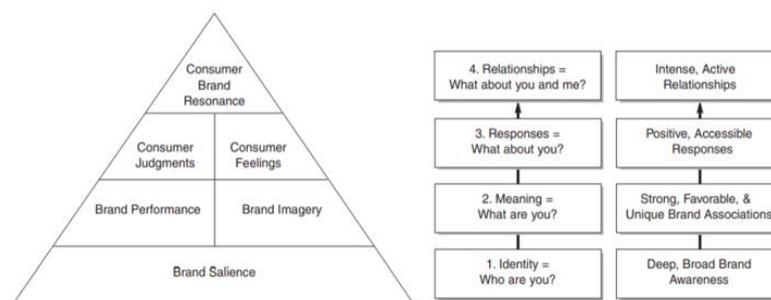


Figure 2 The Brand Equity Model - Keller (2001).

Thus, a specific brand image can be communicated in advertising to create positive brand associations in the consumer's mind (Keller, 2001). For example, cause marketing can be viewed as a way to shape a brand association in the consumer mind.

Kotler and Sarkar (2017) argue that brand activism is a natural evolution of cause-related marketing. Brand activism is an increasingly popular corporate strategy through which companies voluntarily take a stance on what they think is "good" for society and then make corresponding public statements (Cian et al., 2018). Brand activism often tackles societal, environmental, or human issues that are not directly associated with the company's core product or operations (Cian et al., 2018).

Moreover, the radical change of brand activism is that opposed to portraying happiness and prosperity and persuading consumers to buy products and become happy and prosperous, brand activist advertisements invite consumers to purchase a product to become "who they are" (Hopkins, 2015, pp. 160). The purchase shapes "who you are" as a person in this life, rather than who you are as a consumer. Brand activist communication anticipates, in this way, on the identified phenomenon of political consumerism.

Hopkins (2015) identifies the difference between cause marketing and brand activism. The first one is a form of brand charity that addresses or supports a social cause with donating (Hopkins, 2015). However, brand activism engages consumers in the frontline battle for a social cause (Hopkins, 2015). Manfredi-Sánchez (2019) defines brand activism as "a communication strategy whose aim is to influence the consumer through messages and campaigns created and sustained by political values" (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019, p. 348). He states that the strategy borrows from social movements campaigns, copying their aesthetics of authenticity (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). He identifies this as a "corporate political shift": consumer brands broaden their communication by involving values that include core political and social issues (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019).

Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser (2012) recognize this as a significant turn in the meaning of "social activism" and identify that the meaning is shifting shape into a marketable commodity. Instead of concerning more prominent institutions, nations, or state politics, social activism is now embodied by the individual consumer who can act on her own (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). Through brand activism, values that are traditionally linked to social movements and are initially discussed in political or private conversations, now enter the advertising sphere (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). A moral value is "a belief or

idea that we, as people, hold dear as the basis for action” (Hopkins, 2015, p. 144) By preaching about those values, about what “we should be” or what “we should stand for,” advertisements are, as Hopkins calls it, “selling morality” (Hopkins, 2015, p. 144). It aims to present itself as seeking to impact consumers and society, just as Dahlen & Rosengren (2016) described.

Thus, brand activism is a marketing activity of brands that recontextualizes political values traditionally linked to social activism in their brand communication. By doing this, brands voluntarily take a stance on what they think is “good” for society and then make corresponding public statements (Cian et al., 2018). Manfredi-Sanchez (2019) recognized four different themes of brand activism in advertisements:

1. Politics and regulatory affairs
2. Economy & Business (protecting the free market, wages, business ethics)
3. Societal (demands of social movements including feminist positions, the fight for equality, LGBTQ rights and other sub-policies)
4. Environment

Furthermore, through brand activism, it is established that values that are traditionally linked to social movements and are initially discussed in political or private conversations enter the advertising sphere (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). Therefore, this study aims to focus on *how* brands are doing this.

2.3 Discourse, Advertising and Social Activism

Since this study is conducting critical discourse analysis, it is essential to approach discourse theory. A definition of discourse reads: “in an abstract sense, a category which designates the broadly semiotic elements (as opposed to and concerning other, non-semiotic, elements) of social life (language, but also visual semiosis, 'body language' etc.)” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Advertising has become entrenched into social discourse with a tremendous rhetorical force because of the growing effectiveness of its persuasion techniques (Beasley & Danesi, 2010). Advertising can be referred to as a discourse in the sense that it has influenced not only the structure of language and lifestyles of people but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges (Beasley & Danesi, 2010).

Roland Barthes (1915-1980) drew attention in the 1950s to the value of studying its messages and techniques with semiotics' theoretical research tools (Beasley & Danesi, 2010). Semiosis has been defined as the relation between a Sign, its Object (an object, act, or event with which it interrelates), and its Interpretant (Queiroz & Merrell, 2006). One of the most famous definitions of semiotics is the one of Ferdinand de Saussure: A sign is, for instance, a frown. It would be a sign of disapproval. Another example is the color red as a sign of danger (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Signs have meaning on two levels: the signifier (an observable form such as a specific facial expression) and a signified (a meaning such as disapproval or danger) (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Commercials are interpretable at the same two levels - the surface and the underlying level (Beasley & Danesi, 2010). The former involves using specific types of signs in creative ways to create a personality for the product (images, words, etc.). These signs "trace" to the underlying level (Beasley & Danesi, 2010).

There is an extensive amount of critical academic studies that focus on the practice of advertising (Hamilton, Bodle, & Korin, 2016). Critical perspectives on advertising have emerged in media studies since the 1970s (Harms & Kellner, 1991). Critical analyses have examined advertisements' content and structures and identified their distorted communication and ideological impact (Harms & Kellner, 1991). Numerous critical studies have examined on micro-level how advertising mass communication "persuade" and "manipulate" consumers (Harms & Kellner, 1991). On the other hand, however, critical studies have argued that advertising has contributed to the development of social order by giving cultural power to corporations and individuals (Harms & Kellner, 1991). These two streams of the literature of critical media studies have gained insights into the social functions and ideological effects of mass communication, which was not exposed before (Harms & Kellner, 1991).

The goal of semiotics in the study of advertising is, ultimately, to unmask the hidden meanings in the underlying level (Beasley & Danesi, 2010). This study is concerned with how brands are claiming discourses of social activism and sets of moral values and norms embedded in their visual video communication. The next paragraph discusses the concept of discourse and social activism.

The research question of his study includes the concept of 'discourses of social movements.' Discourses define the boundaries of what can be thought of and communicated at a given time in a given society (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016). Social

movements not only observe discourse and strategically shape their communication accordingly. They are the product of discourse, too (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016). Through brand activism, values that are traditionally linked to social movements and are initially discussed in political or private conversations, now enter the advertising sphere (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Instead of concerning more prominent institutions, nations, or state politics, social activism is now embodied by the individual consumer who can act on her own (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). Manfredi-Sánchez (2019) states that brand activism borrows from the campaigns of social movements, copying their aesthetics of authenticity.

There are internal communicative practices of social movements, that regard the communication of social movements. For example, their leaflets, symbols, and language express their identity and, thus, their internal system of knowledge (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016). These are internal discourses of social activism that enable the communication of social movements their contribution to existing external discourses in society (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016). Manfredi-Sánchez (2019) recognized social activism as the societal demands of social movements, including feminist positions, the fight for equality, LGBTQ rights, and other sub-policies. Social movements aim to shape the individual's relations to itself and thus affect the mobilization for a specific cause (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016).

Therefore, this study aims to discover how brands claiming discourses of social activism, such as the demands of feminists or the fight for equality, shape an individual's relation to itself. However, the goal of a brand is commercial and advertising aims for creating a positive brand image. To analyse how brands are claiming discourses of social activism and sets of moral values. it is essential to understand how brands carry out their message. The concept of legitimation is connected to how brands communicate a commercial message. The following paragraph discusses this concept of legitimization.

2.4 Legitimization

The introduction of this paper already mentioned that the traditional challenge of advertising is to create a commercial message that is both effective, increasing sales, and truthful (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). The concept of truth is especially hard to define when analyzing advertisements since advertising goes beyond only delivering information to

consumers. It instead acts persuasively to create needs for them and to create meaning to justify these needs (Campelo, Aitken & Gnoth, 2011). The complexity resides in developing consistent communication that is perceived as real, truthful, and genuine for both companies and consumers (Campelo et al., 2011).

However, for consumers, an advertising message is not all about the absolute truth, but rather about authenticity (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland & Farrelly, 2014). Authenticity is a term used to refer to the perceived genuineness, reality, or truth of something (Kennick, 1985). For consumers, the absolute truth of a commercial claim may not matter, as long as it communicates authenticity (Napoli et al., 2014). Consumers experience authenticity differently and rate the authenticity of a message based on their interests and knowledge (Napoli et al., 2014)

To be perceived as authentic, companies must match stakeholders' social expectations, which can be a complicated task (Colleoni, 2013). Besides, stakeholder skepticism can easily be expressed on the internet (Colleoni, 2013). Previous studies have extensively researched this challenge of stakeholder skepticism (Du et al., 2010; Morsing, Schultz & Nielsen, 2008). A company's perceived legitimacy is, namely, vital for survival (Colleoni, 2013). When a company is consistent with representing values, norms, and expectations constructed in a society, the business and their action will seem natural and meaningful and, therefore, more trustworthy (Colleoni, 2013). Mogensen (2017) states that when a company aligns social and political interests with commercial activity, it is essential to gain legitimacy, to attract partners to build robust alliances, and to have the ability to choose between collaboration and competition. A detailed definition of legitimation states:

Legitimation provides the "explanations" and justifications of the salient elements of the institutional tradition. It explains the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meanings and (...) justifies the institutional order by giving a normative dignity to its practical imperatives (Van Leeuwen, 2007).

Legitimation means claiming validity and justification through attachment to values within a particular society (Van Leeuwen, 2007). It answers a "why" question: why should we believe you? Or why should we care, or why should we do this? (Mogensen, 2017). Van Leeuwen (2007) created a framework for analyzing these different aspects of legitimation.

The legitimation framework is a practical research tool to determine how legitimation is expressed through language and visuals (Van Leeuwen, 2007). This study applies the legitimation framework of Van Leeuwen (2007) to answer the main research question of this study. The framework exists out of the following four dimensions: authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, and Mythopoesis.

Firstly, authorization legitimation refers to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom the institutional authority of some kind is vested (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Van Leeuwen (2007) identified personal (status), impersonal (law or custom), expertise, role model, conformity, and tradition authorization as different forms of authorization legitimacy. Secondly, rationalization legitimation is a strategy by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action and the knowledge society that exists to endow them with cognitive validity (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Furthermore, Moral evaluation is legitimation by reference to value systems (Van Leeuwen, 2007). In this case, legitimation is based on moral values without further justification (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Lastly, with Mythopoesis legitimation, legitimacy is conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions (van Leeuwen, 2007). There are different types of storytelling to reach legitimacy. For example, a popular form of narrative is the moral story protagonists are rewarded for engaging in legitimate social practice (van Leeuwen, 2007).

This study is concerned with how do brands are claiming discourses of social activism and sets of moral values embedded in their visual video communication. Since advertising is inherently persuasive of nature, brands have to legitimize their message to consumers. In order to analyse how brands are claiming discourses of social activism and sets of moral values and norms, it is essential to understand how brands are legitimizing their message. Therefore, this research applies the framework of van Leeuwen (2007) to answer its main research question.

Concept	Definition
Cause marketing	Cause marketing communications feature a brand name or logo along with a nonprofit cause (Barone, Miyazaki, Taylor, 2000). The activity links product sales with donations to a social cause (Chaabane & Parguel, 2016).
Political Consumerism	The act of selecting among products and producers based on social, political, or ethical considerations (Shah <i>et al.</i> , 2007, pp. 219).
Brand Image	This concept deals with the extrinsic properties of product or service and meets consumer's psychological or social needs . It is rather about how a person abstractly thinks about a brand, than about what the brand actually does (Keller, 2001).
Brand Activism	An increasingly popular corporate strategy through which companies voluntarily take a stance on what they think is “good” for society (Cian <i>et al.</i> , 2018) by communicating values that include core political and social issues (Manfredi-Sanchez, 2019).
Advertising Discourse	Advertising can be referred to as a discourse, in a sense that it has influenced not only the structure of language and lifestyles of people, but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges (Beasley & Danesi, 2010).
Discourses of social activism	Internal discourses of social activism that involve communicative practices, for example, their leaflets, symbols, and language, that express their identity and authenticity, thus their internal system of knowledge and aim to contribute to existing discourses in society (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016).
Advertising Semiotics	Commercials are interpretable at the same two levels - the surface and the underlying level (Beasley & Danesi, 2010). The former involves the use of specific types of signs in a highly creative manner to create a personality for the product (images, words etc.). These signs “trace” to, the underlying level (Beasley & Danesi, 2010). The goal of semiotics in the study of advertising is, ultimately, to unmask the hidden meanings in the underlying level (Beasley & Danesi, 2010).
Legitimization	Legitimation is claiming validity and justification through attachment to norms and values within a particular society (Van Leeuwen, 2007)

Table 1 Overview of relevant theoretical concepts of this study

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed four overarching theoretical concepts that are relevant to this study. Firstly, it shed light on previous research on cause marketing. It identified the study of Brei & Böhm as one of the few critical studies that connect to the emerging field of brand activist research. It was established that cause marketing goes hand in hand with the fact that consumer behaviors are shaped by a desire to express and support political and ethical perspectives (Shah, McLeod, Kim, Lee, Gotlieb, Ho & Breivik, 2007).

Subsequently, previous studies on defining brand activism were discussed. Firstly, the concept of 'brand' was defined by the brand equity model of Keller (2001), who identifies four layers of a brand: identity, meaning, response, and relationship. Brand meaning is defined by brand image. This concept deals with extrinsic properties of product or service and meets consumer's psychological or social needs (Keller, 2001). These brand associations that exist in a consumer's mind can be, to a certain extent, formed indirectly by the depiction of the brand in advertising (Keller, 2001). Secondly, the researches Manfredi-Sánchez (2019), Cian et al. (2018), Kotler and Sarkar (2017), Hopkins (2015), and Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser (2012) were assessed to define (the different forms of) brand activism.

Furthermore, previous research on discourse theory was presented. This paragraph explained what discourse is and why advertising can be viewed as discourse. The value of studying advertising messages was established. Moreover, semiotics was established as theoretical research to assess these advertising messages in order to "trace" the underlying message of advertisements. In addition, two streams of critical academic studies that focus on the practice of advertising were identified. On the one hand, numerous critical studies have examined on micro-level how advertising mass communication "persuade" and "manipulate" consumers (Harms & Kellner, 1991). On the other side, critical studies have argued how advertising has contributed to the development of social order by giving cultural power to corporations and individuals (Harms & Kellner, 1991).

Besides, the term 'discourses of social activism' was explained more in-depth. Through brand activism, values that are traditionally linked to social movements and are initially discussed in political or private conversations, enter the advertising sphere (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Manfredi-Sánchez (2019) states that brand activism borrows from the campaigns of social movements, copying their aesthetics of authenticity. Internal

discourses of social activism involve communicative practices, for example, their leaflets, symbols, and language, that express their identity, thus their internal system of knowledge and aim to contribute to existing discourses in society (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016).

Manfredi-Sanchez (2019) recognized social activism as the societal demands of social movements, including feminist positions, the fight for equality, LGBTQ rights, and other sub-policies. Social movements aim to shape the individual's relations to itself and thus affect the mobilization for a specific cause (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016). However, the goal of brand activism is commercial since advertising aims to create a communicate a positive brand image.

Furthermore, In order to analyse how brands are claiming discourses of social and sets of movements and moral values, it is essential to understand how brands carry out their message. The complexity of creating an advertising message that is both persuasive and truthful at the same time was addressed. The difference between the absolute truth and perceived authenticity was identified. For consumers, an advertising message is not all about the absolute truth, but rather about authenticity. In order to be perceived as authentic, companies must match consumer's social expectations, which can be a complicated task (Colleoni, 2013). Therefore, it is essential for brands to gain legitimacy: they have to claim validity and justification through attachment to norms and values within a particular society (Van Leeuwen, 2007).

Since this study is concerned about how brands are claiming discourses of social activism and sets of moral values and norms, it is interested in how brand activist messages gain and communicate legitimacy. Therefore, it discussed the legitimation framework of Van Leeuwen (2007). This theoretical framework is a relevant research tool to find out how legitimation is expressed through language and visuals (van Leeuwen, 2007). The framework exists out of the four dimensions: authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, and Mythopoesis, and will be applied during the analysis of this study to answer the main research question.

The coming third chapter of this study concerns the methodological choices of this study. This part justifies critical discourse analysis as an appropriate research method for this study. Furthermore, this chapter explains the multimethod approach that was utilized to analyze the analysis of 25 brand activist videos, in which theories of semiotics and visual rhetoric are combined. Moreover, this section discusses the processes of the data collection

of this study and outlines the specific research steps that have been taken during the analysis of the collected data.

3. Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological choices of this study. This part will explain the origin of critical discourse analysis and argues why this research method is appropriate for this study. Furthermore, this chapter explains the multimethod approach utilized during the analysis of 25 brand activist videos, in which theories of semiotics and visual rhetoric are combined. Moreover, this section will discuss the processes of the data collection of this study and outlines the specific research steps that have been taken during the analysis of the collected data.

3.1 Justification of Critical Discourse Analysis

Since this study aims to find out how do brands claim discourses of social activism and sets of moral values embedded in their visual video communication, a qualitative research approach is appropriate since it is about an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon (Boeije, 2010). Thematic analysis provides a systematic approach to qualitative coding data and identifies specific themes (Clarke et al., 2015), but is not a sufficient research method for this study. This study aims to analyse brand activist advertisements on a deeper level than on the descriptive level of recognizing themes. It aims to uncover how brand activist advertisements are legitimizing their claim over social activist discourses. These processes are represented in visual advertisements and transcend the categorical approach of thematic analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis is the appropriate method for this study since CDA typically analyses texts and visuals and exposes strategies that appear neutral initially, but which may actually be ideological and seek to shape representation of events and persons with a particular goal (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The word “critical” means revealing ideas, absence, and taken-for-granted assumptions in text and visuals (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Since this study concerns advertising messages, a CDA approach is appropriate to uncover the underlying strategies of these messages. The theoretical chapter of this study already established that advertising has become entrenched into social discourse with an unparalleled rhetorical force because of the growing effectiveness of its persuasion techniques (Beasley & Danesi, 2010). Besides, advertising can be referred to as a discourse

in the sense that it has influenced not only the structure of language and lifestyles of people but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges (Beasley & Danesi, 2010). Advertising messages are interpretable at the same two levels - the surface and the underlying level (Beasley & Danesi, 2010). The former involves the use of specific types of signs in a highly creative manner to create a personality for the product (images, words, etc.). These signs 'trace' to the underlying level (Beasley & Danesi, 2010).

Furthermore, brand activism has been identified as an increasingly popular corporate strategy through which brands voluntarily take a stance on what they think is "good" for society (Cian et al., 2018) by communicating values that include core political and social issues (Manfredi-Sanchez, 2019). However, these values are traditionally linked to discourses of social activism (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). Therefore, a critical approach to this strategy is appropriate. The strategy borrows from the campaigns of social movements, copying their aesthetics of authenticity (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). However, brands are not social movements and have commercial goals. By conducting critical discourse analysis, this study aims to uncover the way brands claiming social activist discourses and values. Besides, this study hopes to inform people about advertising strategies that are, on the one hand, claiming to make an impact and be social activists. On the other hand, they are still persuasive with profit-raising goals.

3.2 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

Since this study concerns visual video advertisements, it does not only analyse language but also visuals. For conducting a thorough visual critical discourse analysis, the first step this study needed to take was establishing a multimethod approach of theories to analyze both the language and image parts of the video advertisements. A multimodal approach is sufficient to analyse semiotic resources (O'Halloran, 2011). Machin and Mayr (2012) state that the production of meaning through language as well as visual semiotic choices, since it provides an in-depth view of how an interplay between language and semiotics brings out the "how" and "why" of communication. To approach this interplay, this research followed the defined steps Critical Discourse Analysis described by Machin and Mayr (2012). They developed a systematic approach for analyzing semiotic choices in language and visual communication to achieve specific goals.

Two concepts retrieved from semiotic theory (Barthes, 1977) are central in this approach: denotation and connotation (Machin and Mayr, 2012), in the theory part of this study described as signifier and signified. Linguistic and visual resources can denote, or depict, certain objects, people, places, or events. Observing these aspects is analyzing a resource on a denotation level (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Since commercials are interpretable at these two levels - the surface and the underlying level- identify denotations and connotations to uncover the underlying meaning of advertisements. (Beasley & Danesi, 2010).

Moreover, this research relies on the theoretical approach of visual rhetoric. Visual rhetoric relates to the framing of messages and finding the method and manner for effective persuasion (Campelo, Aitken & Gnoth, 2011). Advertisements are inherently persuasive to create new needs for consumers and create meanings to justify these needs (Campelo et al., 2011). Visual rhetorical skills have been linked to analyse more dramatically and powerfully messages and values (Campelo et al., 2011). The legitimation framework from van Leeuwen (2007), already discussed in the theoretical part of this study, is a sufficient model to uncover legitimation strategies in both textual and visual messages.

3.3 Sampling and Data collection

Flick (2017) identifies the importance of the sampling method in qualitative research by explaining that it reduces all the potential materials to a selection of justifiable and manageable cases for the study. This research adopts a purposive sampling method. Flick (2017) argues that with purposive sampling, the sample is defined according to pre-analysis and that the selected materials are instructive for the study. The idea behind this method is to select data that is information-rich to answer the research question (Flick, 2017). Since this study concerns the in-depth study of brand activism, data selection had to match the predefined profile of brand activism in advertising. These have defined in the theoretical section of this study. Advertisements are considered purposive for answering the research question, when:

1. the data is sourced or produced by a for-profit brand
2. communicates values that include core political and social issues

3. take a stance on what they think is "good" for society

A political/social issue is here defined as an area that includes either political affairs, societal demands for equality and inclusivity or community issues (Manfredi-Sanchez, 2019; Kotler & Sarkar, 2018).

Furthermore, this study selects brand advertisements that appear the winner list of the Cannes Lions International Festival Creativity. This decision ensures a certain level of quality and professionalism of the selected data. Besides, by choosing from the archive of this award show, this research limits itself to studying western-oriented, global functioning brands. The Festival of Creativity, which derived in 1954 from the Cannes Film Festival, celebrates and rewards the creative products in the global marketing communications industry (<https://www.canneslions.com/about>). The festival highlights many of the creative ways in advertising with which organizations are reaching audiences and awards the best creative work with Lions (Turnbull, 2018). The Lion Award is one of the most prestigious advertising awards in the field. The festival has a record number of entries in 2015 and winners of awards labeled 'professional experts' by the academic field (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016).

This research started with the winners of 2019 and worked its way back. Finally, fifteen videos from the winners of the 2019 Cannes Creative Festival and ten videos from the 2018 event were selected (see Appendix C and D). Even though the selected dataset of 25 units seems small, in qualitative research, it is not unusual to use a specific selection of material based on the research goal to "explore in-depth the contextual dimensions that influence a social phenomenon" (Silverman, 2011, p. 392). Qualitative research typically limits itself to a few units, ranging a dataset size from around 20 to 40 (Schreier, 2018). Since this study aims to analyse brand activism in-depth, the saturation point was reached when the winner lists of 2019 and 2018 had been wholly studied, and a sample size of 25 was established.

The collected data is homogenous based on the set sampling criteria but differentiates based on other factors. Firstly, brands from eight different commercial industries were selected (See Appendix A). Secondly, since one of the sample criteria was to 'include a political or social issue', the selected data includes multiple political or social issues problems. This study divided them into eight themes:

Number of advertisements	Theme	Meaning
3	Racial Equality	Demand for equality between all people no matter what skin color or cultural heritage.
6	Gender equality	Demand for equality between different sexes.
4	Minority equality	Demand for equality for different minorities (disabled persons and the deaf).
2	LGTBQ equality	Demand for equality for persons from the LGTBQ-community.
1	Age equality	Demand for equality between people of all ages.
2	Inclusivity	Demand for inclusivity: acceptance of all people.
4	Community issues	Demand for change of certain community issues, like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infrastructure - Extensive alcohol consumption - Gun Violence - Water shortage
2	Political regulatory affairs	Direct demand for political change concerning regulatory affairs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corruption - Trump policy

Table 2 eight themes of social issues adressed in the data

However, this study is not mainly concerned with what social causes brand activist advertisements are addressing, but more about *how* they are addressing them. The next paragraph will explain how the main research question of this study is operationalized.

3.4 Data Analysis

For each unit from the dataset, the sequences are 'cut' into frames. If the videos have a voice-over, the text is transcribed. For each visual sequence and accompanied voice-over text, a list of denotations and connotations is created in order to find underlying

communicative goals. The list of connotations requires interpretation, which means “not only describing and explaining non-verbal and verbal behavior but also determining the knowledge that one needs to understand what is going on in a situation and identifying the visible conduct that constitutes the situation”(Knoblauch & Tuma, 2020, p. 137).

The list of denotations of the visual sequences is guided by the following visual semiotic, cinematographic aspects stated by Chouliaraki (2006):

1. Point of view (What point of view, above and afar or involved).
2. Composition (actors’ position; distance from camera; relationship to the overall visual composition)?
3. Movement (camera movement; between actors; towards the spectator; outside camera frame) (see Appendices C and D)

On the other hand, language regulates the flow of the edited images and creates a meaningful story out of a usually unrelated flow of images portraying people and places (Chouliaraki, 2006). The words that are spoken and presented during the sequence are transcribed and arranged under the accompanied visual denotations (See Appendices E, D)

Since this research aims how brand activist video advertisements construct meaning through claiming social activist discourses and corresponding moral values, it is interested in the legitimization processes in brand activist advertisements. How do brand activist advertisements convince the viewer that their relationship to a particular social cause and corresponding moral values is genuine?

Van Leeuwen (2007) created a framework for analyzing the strategies of legitimation. As already stated, legitimation is claiming validity and justification through attachment to norms and values within a particular society. The legitimation framework is a practical research tool to find out how legitimation is expressed through language and visuals. This study applies the legitimation framework of Van Leeuwen (2007) to answer the main research question of this study: how do brands create meaning through social activism and corresponding moral values? The framework exists out of the following four discursive themes: authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation, and mythopoesis. These four dimensions of legitimization form a sufficient framework for finding out how brand brands claim discourses of social activism and sets of moral values embedded in their visual video

communication. This means that during the interpretation process, the focus point is to uncover underlying meanings that relate to legitimization of a message. The framework from Van Leeuwen (2007) helps to structure the analysis and to uncover discursive strategies that are not directly visible on denotation level.

Legitimization strategy	Characteristics
Authorization	Reference to personal status, custom or law, expertise, role models or tradition
Rationalization	Reference to goals and uses of action.
Moral evaluation	Reference to value systems
Mythopoesis	Reference to narratives whose outcomes reward certain action and punish

Table 3 A Simplified overview of the legitimization framework from Van Leeuwen (2007)

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Qualitative studies should be convincing, persuasive, reasonable, and plausible (Riesman, as cited by Silverman, 2011, p. 351). Thus, particular attention was paid concerning the validity and reliability of the research throughout the study.

The reliability of a study refers to "the degree to which the study's findings are independent of accidental circumstances of their production" (Kirk and Miller, as cited by Silverman, 2011, p. 360). The term deals with replicability: could future researchers apply the same method and come up with the same results? Moisander & Voltonen (2006) argue that by making the research process as transparent as possible by describing the research strategy and data analysis methods in a detailed manner, the reliability of a study can be increased. Besides, making the theoretical stance of interpretation explicit add to the reliability of research as well. Moreover, Silverman (2011) argues that high reliability in quantitative research is associated with low-inference descriptors. This involves 'recording observations in terms that are as concrete as possible' (Seale, as cited by Silverman, 2011, p. 361). In light of these insights, multiple measures and procedures were taken during each stage of this research.

The methodology part of this analysis added to the level of reliability of this study. This section describes the purposive sampling technique of criterion sampling and the choices made during the data collection. Furthermore, it operationalizes the research question and describes the multimodal approach and steps of analysis. This section describes in detail which the semiotic, cinematographic aspects were paid attention to during the denotation process. Furthermore, it establishes the legitimization framework from Van Leeuwen (2007) as an assisting framework during the connotation process. In Appendix C and D, examples of the denotation and connotation process during the analysis, consisting of the executed described steps, can be viewed. This adds to the transparency of the study's research process.

Furthermore, in the theoretical section of this paper, the concepts that this research is built on are described in detail. It draws attention to the advertising discourse and the extensive amount of critical academic studies that focus on the practice of advertising. Besides, this section establishes that the goal of studying advertising is to unmask the hidden meanings in the underlying level. The critical theoretical perspective of this study uncovers how do brands are claiming discourses of social activism and sets of moral values and norms embedded in their visual video communication.

Moreover, Silverman argues that the validity of research is the "extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers" (Silverman, 2011, p. 367). Since CDA covers only a small dataset selected according to the researcher's interest, critics find CDA an interpretative exercise instead of an analytic one and criticize, therefore, the validity of the research method (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

However, there are standard criteria of assess and secure validity in qualitative studies. Jaipal-Jamani (2014) recommends that the researcher uses a common, shared set of rules, beliefs, or frame of reference to interpret the sign being analysed. This research applied the framework of van Leeuwen to guide its analysis. The researcher's interpretations are, therefore, grounded in the pre-researched legitimization codes van Leeuwen (2007) established. Furthermore, Silverman argues that the method of constant comparison during the data collection can add to the validity of the study (Silverman, 2011). Therefore, during the analysis of this research, findings are constantly compared to the previous cycle. The purpose of this is to 'describe the variation which is found within a certain phenomenon (Boeije, 2010, p. 83)'.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of the visual discourse analysis of 25 brand activist video advertisements that won a Golden Lion at the Cannes Creative festival in 2018 and 2019. As the previous chapter explained, the analytical approach consists of a multimethod approach to the data, in which both denotations and connotations of both image and text (visualized or spoken) are identified. The sequences of advertisements are 'cut' into frames and a list of denotations of what can be seen in the frame is established according to following visual semiotic, cinematographic aspects stated by Chouliaraki (2006): point of view, composition, and movement. The words that are spoken and presented during the sequence are transcribed and arranged under the accompanied visual denotations (See Appendix C, D)

The theoretical framework of legitimation from Van Leeuwen (2007) was an assisting framework during the connotation process. During this process, the semiotic and textual choices that were identified and documented as denotations, are interpreted, which means 'not only describing and explaining non-verbal and/or verbal behavior but also determining the knowledge that one needs to understand what is going on in a situation and identifying the visible conduct that constitutes the situation' (Knoblauch & Tuma, 2020, p. 137).

Attention is paid to semiotic signs or language that expressed either authorization, rationalization, moral evaluation or mythopoesis legitimization. Therefore, the findings are categorized and discussed according to the four different legitimization strategies: (i) authorization, (ii) rationalization, (iii) moral evaluation and (iiii) mythopoesis. These are discursive strategies that construct a overall discourse of brands claiming social activist discourses. The discussion section of this study discusses the discourses that are identified by analyzing legitimation strategies.

4.1 Authorization

Authorization legitimation refers to the authority of tradition, custom and law, and of persons in whom the institutional authority of some kind is vested (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Van Leeuwen (2007) identified personal (status), impersonal (law or custom), expertise, role model, conformity, and tradition authorization as different forms of authorization

legitimacy. In all of the studied advertisements utilizes a form of authorization legitimation. This paragraph outlines the findings.

Personal status/expert authorization: the media

In 12 of the 25 analyzed advertisements, real-life newscasts, headlines of the news, and other media outlets artifacts play a role in legitimating the message. Van Leeuwen (2007) states that in the case of personal authority, legitimate authority is vested in a person because of their status or role in a particular institution. In reference to the broader role, the authority of the institutionalized media sector is connoted by the status role of the news reporter in 12 of 25 analysed advertisements. However, at the same time, it could be argued that reference to media reports, casts, and headlines are forms of expert authorization.

The case of McDonald's 'The Flip' advertisement demonstrates that both views and utilization of reference to 'the media' in either a personal status or expert way can be utilized as a legitimating strategy. The news reporter and the certain 'news salience' appear several times in the video and has different legitimacy purposes. Figure 3, image 1 shows the first shot of the advertisement. A woman is speaking directly to the camera saying: 'Men are more likely, 30% to women, to actually get promoted for that first manager role, right of the bat.' The bar at the bottom of the frame says 'Women are less likely to be promoted than men: Mckinsey report'.

The first frame of the McDonalds advertisement connotes several levels of meaning that relate to authorization legitimacy. Firstly, the woman in the frame looks professional and serious into the camera, she is wearing a microphone on her shirt and her hair cuffed and her makeup done. The bar at the bottom of the frame helps to understand that she is a reporter: the bar shows the logo 'Bloomberg', a media outlet. She is reporting something in the name of this media company. What she is saying, therefore, becomes instantly more legitimate. The name of the source, the composition of the frame (news reporter in the center and a 'news' bar at the bottom) give credibility to what she is reporting. What she says 'men are more likely, 30% to women, to actually get promoted..' is rephrased in the bottom bar 'women are less likely to be promoted than men'. This gives the message more power since it is mentioned by the female reporter and by in-frame text.

In the bottom bar, a text saying: 'Mckinsey report' shows. Mckinsey refers most likely to Mckinsey & Company, which is a consultancy company for 'many of the world's most influential businesses and institutions (<https://www.mckinsey.com/>). Naming this report is a form of expert authorization, since it is a (well known) third party that conducted the research and made this statement.

Concluding, by using this shot at the start of their advertisement, McDonald's identifies a fact problem that needs more attention. This is not legitimized by the brand itself, but by a third party news source/reporter (status authorization) and by a research report (expert authorization) that reports a fact. This shows that the fact is newsworthy and, at the same time, is credible since it was provided by a research report. This way of authorization legitimation has as goal to identify a problem which should be tackled and is utilized by four brand advertisements of the dataset: McDonald's ('The Flip'), Dagoma ('Harmless Guns'), Domino's ('Paving for Pizza) and Nike ('The Swoosh Vote').

Furthermore, figure 3, image 2 and 4 demonstrate that the authorization legitimation with reference to newscasts presented by news reporters is utilized not only to legitimize the problem which the advertisement is identifying but also to legitimize the action that is taken by the brand (which is shown by the video advertisement). In the case of McDonald's 'The Flip' advertisement, McDonald's took action on International Women's day by flipping their 'M' logo and changing into a 'W' for women. After the sequence covered the middle section including describing and visualizing this action, the advertisement then showed different news reports on the action. Image 2 and 4 (See Figure 3). In both images, we see the flipped 'M' representing the action of McDonald's, both framed in a news setting.

Both image 2 and image 4 emphasize that McDonald's action is covered by news reporters and several news channels, which connotes that is newsworthy and, therefore, legitimizes the action through authorization legitimacy. By visualizing news reporters in news settings as personal status authorities referring to the bigger institutional authority of the overall media, who decide what is newsworthy in our society, McDonalds' action is legitimized. In image 2 (See Figure 1), we see a female news reporter 'live' at a McDonald's while holding a microphone with Fox 11 on it, the name of the news outlet. Image 4 (See Figure 3) we see a medium shot of a reporter in a recognizable news setting, within the back a visualization of what the new report is about: the flipped 'M' of McDonald's. Five brand

advertisements dataset utilize authorization to legitimize the brand action: Dagoma ('Harmless Guns'), Volvo (the E.V.A Initiative), Domino's (Paving for Pizza), Edeka (The Most German Supermarket Ever), Budweiser (Turning Beer into Water) and Microsoft ('Changing the Game').

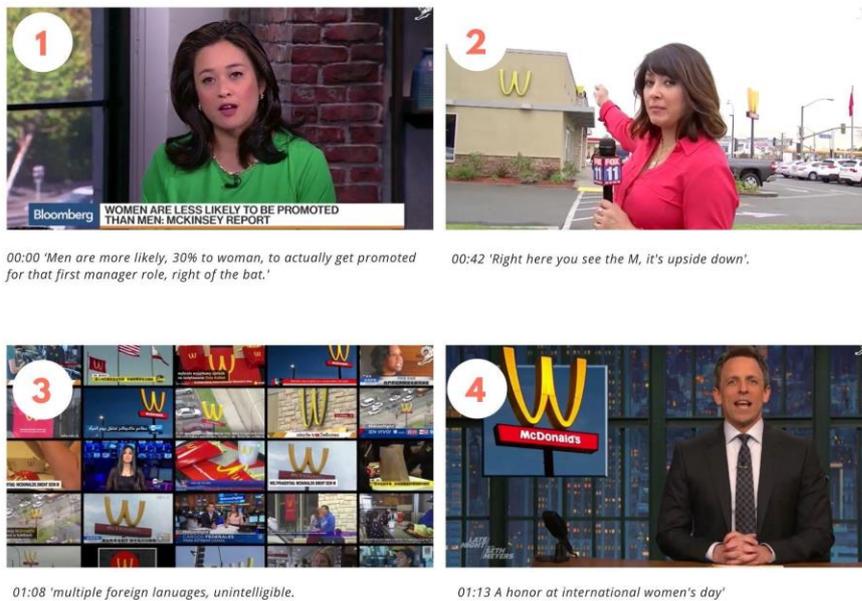


Figure 3 Shots from McDonald's 'The Flip' case (2018).

Moreover, there is another discursive strategy that utilizes authorization legitimacy with reference to the media, but to a slightly different visualization than named above. Eight units from the dataset also referred to 'the media' to legitimize their action, but instead of showing newscasts, they visualize headlines and quotes of media articles. In this way, there is more emphasis on the news outlet and on the positive comments they made on a brand's action. Beau Monde quoted several news sources (See Figure 4). The source and quote are visible in frame and quotation emphasize the fact that they are praised by a third party. The quotation "shows the world a model of how to fight cultural appropriation" connotes that the Wall-Street news outlet defines Beau Monde as the ideal 'fighter' for cultural appropriation or in other words: the brand is labeled as a successful activist by a third-party source.



Figure 4 Shot from Beau Monde's 'Bihor Couture' (2018)

Lastly, a factor that stood out during the analysis concerning authorization legitimacy was the strategy of 'multiplying'. Figure 3, image 3 shows a frame in which a lot of frames are visible in which news reports on McDonald's action are shown. In figure 4, on the background, we can vaguely see more media articles and headlines about the action of Beau Monde. This strategy gives the viewer the idea that countless news outlets are talking about the action and this has a legitimating effect. If all the news outlets are talking about it, the action must be important and legitimate.

However, this multiplying strategy gives the viewer an overload on information, which can not be processed all at once. Before the viewer can read all the headlines, the shot is already over. Domino's, for example, multiplied through really fast cuts between showing different headlines and articles. As a viewer, we cannot read the whole headline or the source. However, this reaches the goal of the viewer getting the impression that the action gets countless media attention. A closer look at a random frame of one of the articles demonstrates that a news outlet or source logo is not visible (see Figure 5). All that is visible is the writer's name, which could easily also just be an amateur blogger. Without showing the real news source, as Beau Monde did (See Figure 4), the authorization level of legitimacy becomes lower, but by fast-cutting into a sequence where there is no time to notice this, the advertisement still reaches its goal: giving the viewer the action is important since it is covered by a lot of news outlets.

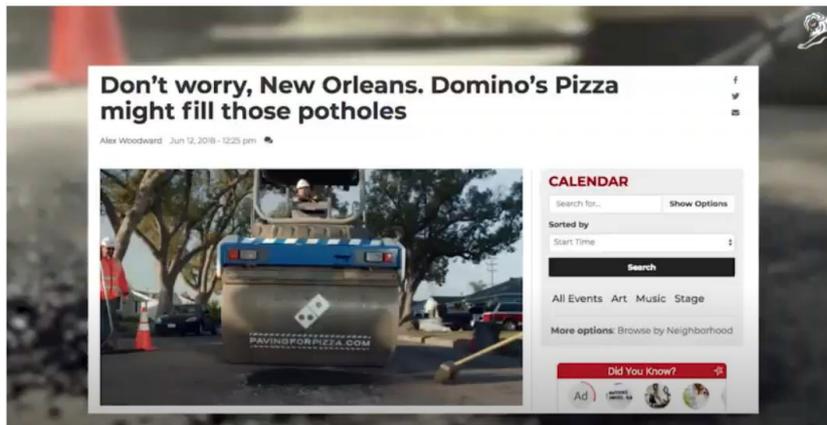


Figure 5 Shot from Domino's 'Paving for Pizza' (2019)

Expert authorization: professional & experiential

In the case of expert authority, legitimacy is provided by the expertise and can be mentioned explicitly or implicitly (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Van Leeuwen (2007) refers here to professionalism and explicit mentioning of experts or expert titles like Dr. However, this study also identified a new form of an expert: the experimental expert.

Firstly, the data shows that expert authorization legitimacy in the way Van Leeuwen (2007) describes it is utilized either through visuals or language. Figure 6, images 1 and 2 are representations of how four units from the dataset approached expert authorization. Three of the four advertisements utilize an interview-style shot, in which the expert is either on the left or right side of the frame talking to somebody outside the frame (See Figure 6, image 2). On the other side of the frame, the name and title of the interviewee is presented: "Executive Director - European Union of the Deaf". Since the case of Huawei approaches the social issue of deaf child illiteracy, the director of the European Union of the Deaf can be considered an expert on the subject and adds credibility and, therefore, legitimacy to the message of Huawei. The interview-style shot adds to the professional and credible image.

Figure 6, image 1 shows also a shot of a female expert who is talking to an audience instead of an interview setting. There are a lot of similarities with Figure 6, image 2, like the name and title that are visualized and their professional outfit. Only this time, there is an audience instead of an interviewer. This adds more to her image of status rather than of expertise and therefore, at the same time demonstrates that the roles of 'status' and a role of 'expertise' are closely linked to each other and are not always easy to separate.

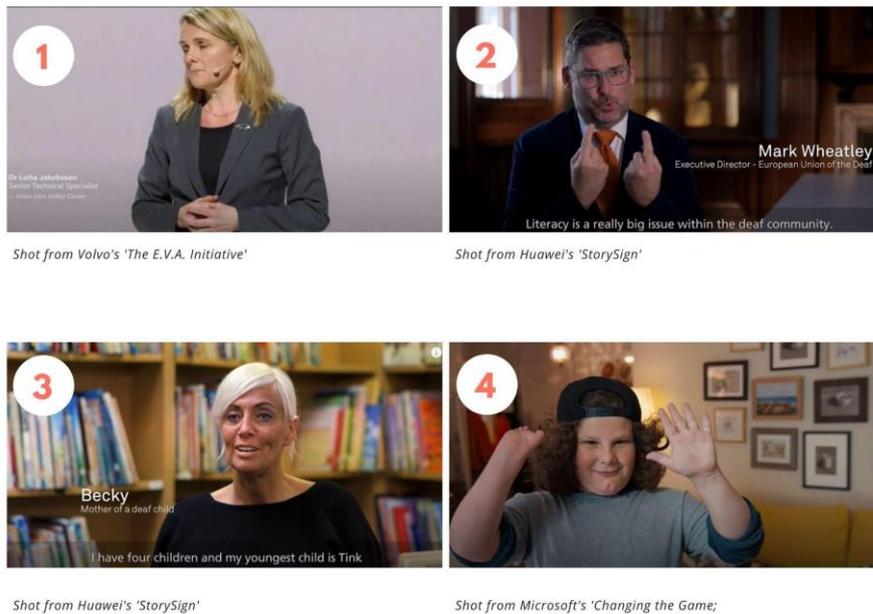


Figure 6 Several shots demonstrating expert authorization, professional and experiential

Furthermore, the data showed that expertise was also shown in a different way than professional. Figure 6, image 3 shows a shot of a ‘mother of a deaf child’. She is portrayed in the same way as professional experts: interview style. Figure 6, image 4 shows a shot from Microsoft’s ‘Changing the Game’ commercial. We see a child, also framed interview style, who shows that he has only one hand. Both frames show expertise by showing persons that possess experiential expertise, rather than professional expertise. Experiential expertise means that these persons are close to the social problem that the brand tries to tackle and have experienced the problem themselves. In that way, the brand legitimizes the social issue it wants to tackle by involving the people who have experienced the problem themselves. This convinces the audience that the problem is worth looking into and, at the same time, legitimizes the brand’s goal because real-life experiential experts, who are dealing with the problem, were included in the brand’s activist actions. This phenomenon was identified in five units of the dataset: Ikea (‘ThisAbles’), Huawei (‘StorySign’), Microsoft (‘Changing the Game’), L’oreal (‘The non-issue’) and Google (‘Gboard Morsecode’).

Lastly, expertise is also communicated through expressing team-mentality and brand capability. Especially in the innovative tech sector advertisements, professional/innovative expertise is visualized through shots as Figure 7, images 1 and 2.

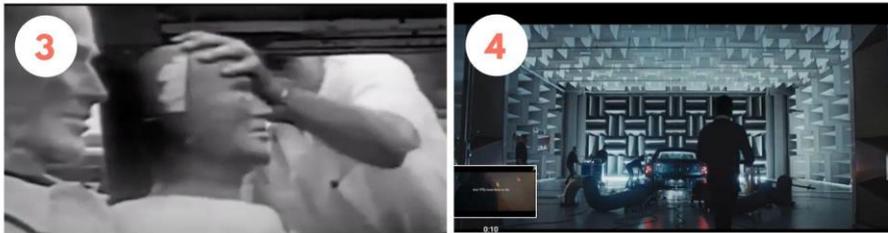
Dagoma's advertisement concerns the social issue of 3D printed guns. Image 1 (See figure 5) shows two men from the back, looking and pointing at a computer screen with a gun blueprint on it. The voiceover at the same time says "we modified these files to make them useless when printed". 'We' is here the Dagoma company who changed weapon blueprints for 3D printing to make them useless as a social cause. Image 2 (Figure 5) gives the viewer a closer look at what is going on on the computer screen. Both frames in combination with the voice-over communicate professional expertise. "We" connotes a team mentality, which is also visualized through the two men depicted who are looking and pointing at the same screen, working together. A close-up from the screen, which shows a blueprint and a lot of codes, gives the viewer the impression that the men and the Dagoma team overall are working with people who know how to code and that can actually 'hack' and adjust the blueprints of guns.

Moreover, images 3 and 4 (See Figure 7) are frames from Volvo's 'The E.V.A. Initiative' commercial. Image 4 follows directly after image 3 in the sequence. Image 3 is accompanied by the voice-over saying: "Most cars tested on male car crash dummies". Followed by image 4 the narrator states: 'But not at Volvo'. Image 3 shows a black and white frame and male crash dummies are visualized. This frame connotes that using male crash dummies is old fashioned and history, through the black and white effect which is associated with older films. The next frame, image 4, is the opposite: a high tech environment: dark and tl-lighted, a modernist design on the background, walls and the ceiling, and a lot of people walking around, all working on the Volvo car in the middle. The voice-over "But not at Volvo" implies that this high tech environment can be found at the Volvo company, where they not only test male dummies: Volvo is innovative, futuristic, and forward.



Shot from Dagoma's 'Harmless Guns'

Shot from Dagoma's 'Harmless Guns'



Shot from Volvo's 'The E.V.A Initiative'

Shot from Volvo's 'The E.V.A Initiative'

Figure 7 Visual Semiotic choices in visualizing professional/ innovative expertise.

Role model authorization: fame, success and activism

In the case of role model authority, people follow the exemplary behavior of role models or opinion leaders (Van Leeuwen, 2007). The fact that these role models believe certain things or behave a certain way, is enough to legitimize a message to their followers (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Six units utilized media celebrities to legitimize their message: Nike ('Dream Crazy' + 'The Voice of Belief' + 'The Swoosh Vote'), L'oreal (The Non-Issue), Adidas ('BJK your shoes'), Coca Cola ('This Coke is a Fanta') and McDonald's ('The Flip').

Both Nike and Adidas, competitors operating in the same sector of sports apparel, built their advertising message around famous, role model athletes. Not only are they athletes, but they are also social activists at the same time. Images 1 and 2 (See Figure 8) show two successive frames from the Adidas 'BJK your Shoes' advertisement. Billie Jean King is a female tennis player and the advertising refers back to a match she won in the 70s. Image one shows an in-frame sentence that claims that BJK "changed the male-dominated establishment". This sentence refers to abstractions (which will be further discussed in the next paragraph) but has one goal: defining her as an activist: she is a changemaker. With visualizing a group of men in the background, looking concerned at the tv on which we see

BJK winning the game, it implies that men were not happy that she won the game. This frame connotes that she is a rebel who single-handedly changed institutionalized patriarchy. The next frame shows the sentence “In a pair of blue Adidas”. This sentence connects BJK and her activist action to the Adidas brand. By mentioning this explicitly, visualizing the shoes during the game on the background and showing the sentence in-frame text, the advertisement is emphasizing that Adidas is connected to BJK, but also to her activism.

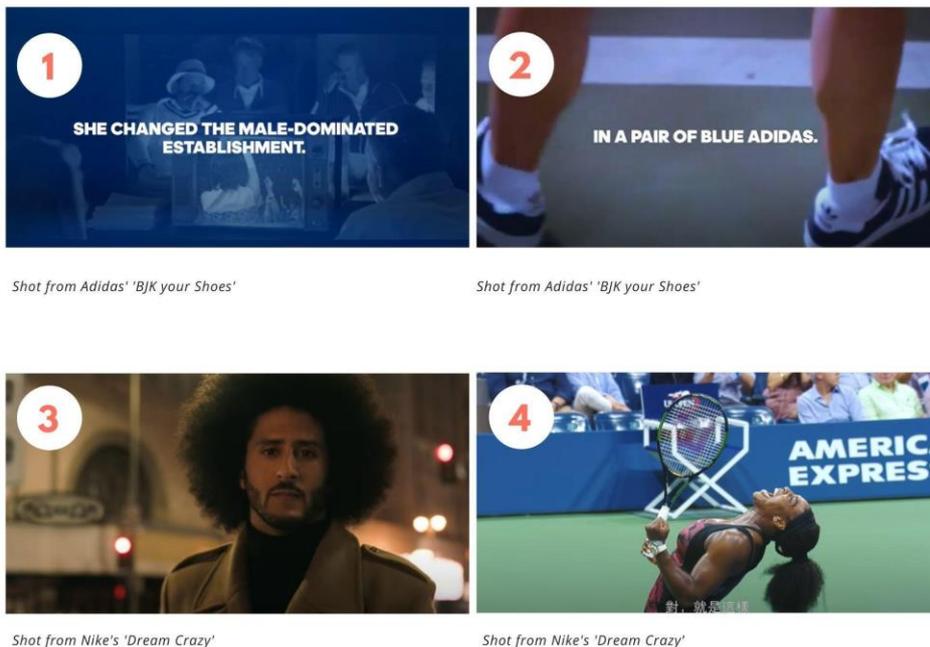


Figure 8 Shots from Nike and Adidas featuring activist role models

Furthermore, Nike is applying the same strategy. In the ‘Dream Crazy’ advertisement they show multiple, famous athletes. Footballer Colin Kaepernick (See figure 8, image 3) is the narrator in the advertisement and the ‘main’ face of the commercial. His shot is accompanied with him saying: ‘Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything’. This sentence connects to a broader context. Kaepernick’s contract at his former club ‘San Francisco 49’ was ended in 2016 because he kneeled during the playing of the American national anthem (RTL nieuws, 2019). This was an activist action from the player who spoke out against police violence against mainly black Americans (RTL nieuws, 2019). Through this sentence and a shot of his face, ‘the dream’ is not only related to sports (which was implied through previous frames in the sequence) but now also to social activism, in this case, the

fight for equality. ‘Sacrificing everything’ here refers to Kaepernick losing his contact while standing up for something: an activist who stands up for the rights of colored Americans. By making him the front face of the advertisement, Nike communicates that the brand supports his activist actions and, in that way, legitimizes their message of being an activist brand. Besides, Nike involves multiple famous athletes that, at the same time, are also representing an activist movement. Three other quotes from the advertisements demonstrate this:

(i) “If you are born a refugee, don’t let it stop you from playing soccer, for the national team, at age sixteen”.

(ii) “If you only have one hand, don’t only watch football. Play it, at the highest level”.

(iii) “And if you are a girl from Compton, don’t be just a tennis player, be the greatest athlete ever”.

The first (i) sentence is spoken by the voice-over of Kaepernick and is in the sequence accompanied by shots of footballer Alphonso Davies (See appendix C). The second quote (ii) is accompanied by shots of footballer Shaquem Griffin (See appendix C) and the third (iii) one by shots of female tennis player Serena Williams (See appendix C & Figure 8, image 4). These three successful athletes that all represent minorities (colored, disabled, females). These are successful athletes people look up to and are, therefore, not necessarily activist themselves, but Nike, by supporting and visualizing them despite their color, disability or gender, becomes their supporter and therefore an activist brand for inclusion and diversity.

Furthermore, brand activist commercials of the dataset also employ role models to justify the social problem they are tackling or to legitimize their brand action. For example, L’oreal started their commercial with a statement of media celebrity Oprah Winfrey (See Figure 9). She looks straight into the camera and makes the following statement:

“We live in a youth-obsessed culture that is constantly trying to tell us, that if we are not young if we are not glowing and we are not hot, that we don’t matter”.

The fact that Oprah speaks these words, makes the identified problem more legitimate than if they would have been written down in the frame. Oprah is world-famous, mainly for being a self-made, colored, female talk show host, and viewers would believe her more than just anybody, since she fulfills a role model position.



Figure 9 Shot of Oprah Winfrey in L'oreal's 'The Non-Issue'.

Lastly, a remarkable finding was that German supermarket Edeka utilizes role-model authority legitimation, but with a twist. The first shot of the advertisement is the frame of American president Trump (see Figure 10, image 1). He speaks the following words: 'I will build a great, great all'. Understanding this sentence in a broader societal context, we know that this refers to Trump's goal to built a wall between America and Mexico to keep foreigners out of the United States. For some people, Trump could be a role model, and the rest of Edeka could have supported his statement (like the example of Oprah for L'oreal above,) but the brand does the opposite. The successive frame (See Figure 10) shows the words: "Letters 2 Trump: 'Diversity matters Mr. president. A simple demonstration for a simple man: Edeka market in Germany". This sentence is quoted and is directly addressed to President Trump. 'Diversity Matters' is the statement that Edeka makes and is against the statement Trump made in the previous frame. Trump here actually fulfills the role of anti-role-model. Edeka speaks in this way to an audience that is against president Trump and legitimizes their actions by opposing him as a real activist brand.



Figure 10 Shots from Edeka's 'Most German Supermarket ever'

4.2 Rationalization

Rationalization legitimation is a strategy by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action, and to the knowledge society that exists to endow them with cognitive validity (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Rationalization refers to the idea of purpose. Expressions like 'it is useful', 'it is effective' are legitimate because they argue that purposefulness and usefulness/effectiveness are criteria of truth (Van Leeuwen, 2007) This kind of rationalization legitimation focuses on goals, means, usefulness and effects of a certain action, message or phenomenon. On the other hand there is theoretical rationalization. In this form, legitimation is grounded in whether it is founded on some kind of truth, on "the way things are" (van Leeuwen, 2007). There are three forms of rationalization legitimation: goal-oriented, means-oriented, and effect-oriented. In the case of goal-orientation rationalization, purposes are constructed related to people. The formula is "I do x in order to do (or be, or have) y" (Van Leeuwen, 2007). With means-oriented rationalization, the purpose is constructed as 'in the action', and the action as a means to an end. Lastly, effect orientation emphasizes the outcome of actions.

Commercial advertising is inherently bound to strive for profit. However, brand activists focus on tackling social issues as a goal to strive for. From the 25 analyzed brand activist advertisements, 20 depicted an actual action that was undertaken by the brand. All of them were focused on the effect of these actions (social good), but when comparing the units, some seemed to have more focus on action and brand than on the social good effect. In this paragraph, the exact difference will be discussed and outline the detailed findings in the data.

Effect-oriented rationalization: social good beyond the brand

Brand activist advertisements are different from 'normal' advertisements since they make social issues and social change the main aspect of their communication. Therefore, 20 units of the dataset explicitly utilized effect-oriented rationalization to legitimize their action and overall message. However, there is some difference identified when studying the data up closely. Some brands utilize social cause as the main focal point of their message. The brand is visible but serves the social cause rather than being the main point of attention.

For example, Microsoft's 'changing the game' visualizes disabled children who can't play games (Figure 6, image 4). The outcome that the advertisement depicts, concerns these children being able to play games (thanks to the controller Microsoft developed). Image 1 (See Figure 11) connotes that the action of Microsoft goes beyond its own profit. Their created controller for disabled children can also be used on The Switch (a game device from competitor Nintendo). The competitor's device is shown and its logo as well. With this frame, the advertisement emphasizes the fact that the action was focused on creating greater good that goes beyond the economic competition between for-profit brands. By showing a product of their competitor, they connote that the competition between the brand is irrelevant compared to the bigger goal: including disabled children.

Subsequently, a frame follows showing the inframe text: "But more importantly, the experience of playing games is now the same... (next frame) for everyone" (See figure 11, image 2). This frame emphasizes again the effect of action: videogames can now be played by everyone, disabled people are now included. This is an example of effect-oriented rationalization to achieve legitimacy: Microsoft emphasizes the effect of their action, which is not making a profit, but adding social good to society. They communicate this through, on the one hand, visualizing the disabled children and how they profit from their product and, on the other hand, through showing their competitors grace and by being 'the bigger brand' strives for a bigger goal: social good.

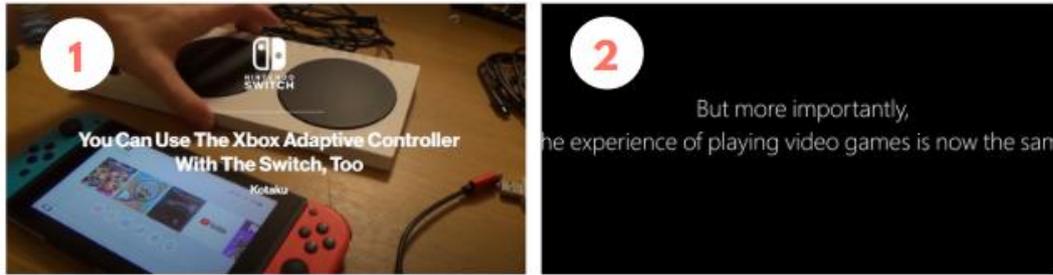


Figure 11 Shots from Microsoft's 'Changing the Game'.

Action-oriented Rationalization: brand central action

Some brands from the dataset also focused on the effect of their actions, but these effects were rather brand-related than social good-related. For example, in AeroMexico's 'DNA Discount' a voice-over announces: "So how do we increase USA flights to Mexico if a big part of Americans doesn't like Mexico". This is clearly a reference to the effect they want to reach: increase USA flights to Mexico. However, there is a deeper meaning underlying in the AeroMexico's advertisement, but they are covering it up with focusing on brand-related effect orientated rationalization. AeroMexico is, therefore, belongs to the group of 'undercover' brand activists that is recognized in the findings of the data. Chapter 4.4 Mythopoesis will go further into depth about this identified phenomenon.

Some brands from the dataset also focused on their actions rather than the overall positive outcomes for societal good. Another example of a brand that depicts a social good action, but focuses more on the brand than on the outcome for society, is Budweiser's commercial 'Turning Beer into Water'. As the title already implies, the commercial shows the process of replacing Budweiser's beer by water and changing its cans from red to blue. What is remarkable, is that the brand 'Budweiser' is clearly visible in several shots (See Figure 12). Image 1 and 2 (See figure 12) both show close-ups of the Budweiser cans and how they have changed the original into a water edition. The close-up emphasizes the product and also the process of change. Image 3 (See Figure 12) shows a Budweiser truck that drives away with the Budweiser water cans. Again the logo is clearly visible. Image 4 (Figure 4) is a shot in a living room in which the viewer sees a shot of the cans getting loaded out of the truck. The news bar at the bottom says "Disaster relief efforts in action". The shot

lasts two-second, just long enough to read the bottom bar. The frame connotes that the Budweiser water cans are a 'disaster relief effort'.

However, as a viewer, we do not know what disaster Budweiser is relieving with their water cans. We do not see victims or the effect of their action (only that the cans get carried out of the truck). At the same time, Budweiser's brand logo has extensively been shown to the audience throughout the sequence, but this is legitimized through action-oriented rationalization legitimization. The sequence is focused on the process of turning Budweiser's products into water. This emphasizes their activist behaviour instead of emphasizing the effects of their behaviour.

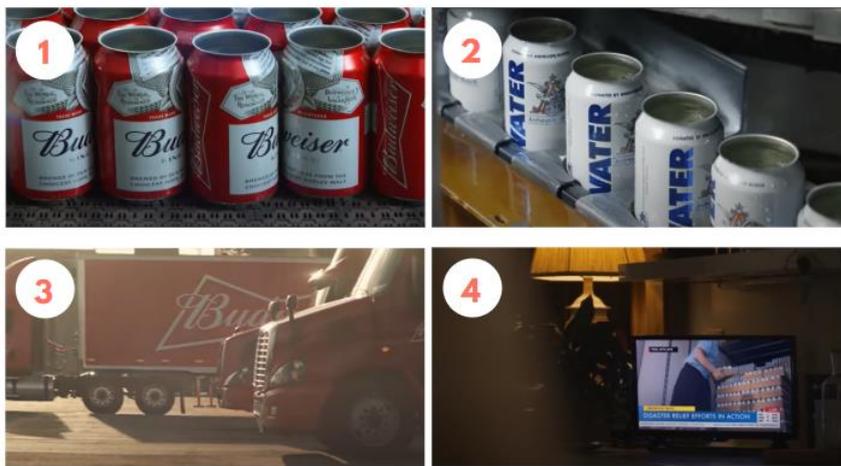


Figure 12 Shots from Budweiser's 'Turning Beer into Water'

Effect-oriented rationalization: relevance

Another form of effect-oriented rationalization is the claim of relevance. Of the 25 units, 14 refer to the relevance of their brand activity on social media. They legitimize their action by referring to the number of likes, comments, shares, or user posts of people that relate to their brand action, which connotes that the brand is relevant: a lot of people are talking about them on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

As an example, Guinness utilized the strategy of 'multiplying' to claim relevance and legitimize their actions through effect rationalization. Figure 13, image 1 shows a frame in which multiple social media posts are visualized. They appear in different sizes, overlap each other and during this part of the sequence, more and more posts are appearing in the

frame. Several 'sorts' of social media interactions are depicted: the hashtag #guinnessclear, memes, jokes, praise, and reviews, all written by personal accounts from the public whose names are also visualized. This frame connotes that their action dominated social media and a lot of people were talking about in a funny and positive way. Image 2 (Figure 13), highlights a social media post. We see a man tasting Guinness Clear saying "I like it". The voice-over says: "and the public posted their own reviews". On both sides of the video, we see even more posts about Guinness clear. The focus is on the video of the man. The voice-over implies that the public was engaged with the brand's action and therefore, legitimizes their action at the same time. Through visualizing social media attention for the brand's action, Guinness relies on effect-oriented rationalization for legitimation: their action is legitimate because everyone on social media is talking about it.

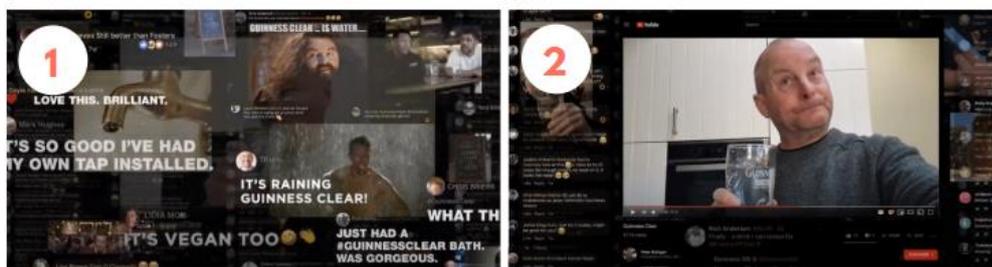


Figure 13 Shots from Guinness' 'Guinness Clear'

4.3 Moral evaluation

Moral evaluation, that is legitimation by reference to value systems (Van Leeuwen, 2007). In this case, legitimation is based on moral values without further justification (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Moral values are sometimes just referred to with words as 'good' and 'bad'. But in most cases, moral evaluation is linked to specific discourses of moral value. However, these discourses are not explicitly mentioned or debatable (Van Leeuwen, 2007).

Also for moral evaluation legitimation, there are different types that can be recognized. Firstly, evaluative adjectives play an important role in moral evaluation legitimation (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Secondly, another way of expressing moral evaluation is through abstraction: by referring to practices, actions, or reactions in an abstract way that links them to a discourse of moral values (Van Leeuwen, 2007). Thirdly, an analogy is a way

of expressing moral evaluation: the answer to: “why must I do this?” is not because it is “good”, but because it is linked to another activity which is associated with positive moral values. This comparison can be positive or negative (Van Leeuwen, 2007). This study identified several types of moral evaluation in the dataset. This paragraph will outline these findings.

This study recognizes elements in the data that supported an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ or ‘the other’ discourse in 14 of the 25 units. With this discourse, I mean abstractions or evaluative adjectives that refer to bigger value systems that either connect ‘us’, a group that refers the brand and possibly also the viewer or other actors, or to ‘the other’, a group who is not us and therefore different or even ‘bad’. Brands approach this kind of moral evaluation in several ways. Firstly, the case of AQUI’s ‘Corruption Detector’ demonstrates how a brand employs moral evaluation to connect to the public through evaluative language. An example is the following citation:

“More than 40000 candidates favored by a justice system designed to hide their acts of corruption from voters”.

This citation puts “40000 candidate” opposite to “voters”. The 4000 candidates are defined as ‘bad’ because through this sentence we know that the system hides the acts of corruption from these candidates. The word ‘corruption’ has negative connotations since the definition is: “illegal, bad or dishonest behavior by people in positions of power” (Cambridge Dictionary). This sentence connects the acts of corruption to the “40000 candidates”, which implies that all these 40000 candidates are “bad”. It refers to a bigger value system of the ‘bad, corrupt system’ to which all political candidates belong to. The “voters” are the victims of this corrupt system. Another quote from the commercial follows:

“For the first time, the hunt for dirty politicians was in the hands of the people”

This sentence implies the same idea: the “dirty politicians” opposed to “the people”. Besides, this sentence connotes that the power is given to the people, the first time in history (through the action undertaken by AQUI). “For the first time” implies that power

relations that changed are a remarkable event in time. Besides it refers to a bigger, political value system that depicts the fight of “the people” versus the vested political establishment. “The hunt for dirty politicians” is not something new, but is something that always has existed, just as the existence of “dirty politicians”. The commercial finishes with the statement from the voice-over:

“When corrupt politicians show their faces, we drop their masks”.

“We” is this quotation that connects the brand to “the people” who have been previously addressed. The brand makes itself part of the “people” as an activist group that stands up to the political establishment. The brand gives “the people” the power to drop the masks of corrupt politicians and, therefore, enabled them to stand up, together with the brand, against political injustice. Aquí legitimizes their brand action and message through morally evaluating politicians through evaluative words and creates this way a framework of ‘the bad politicians’ versus the ‘good, victimized people’ who they empower.

Another example of identified moral evaluation is the case of Procter & Gamble’s commercial ‘The Talk’. This advertising tackles the social problem of racism based on skin color. The advertisements feature colored women talking to their kids about racial bias. A citation from the commercial is:

“There are some people that think you don’t deserve the same privileges just because of what you look like. It is no fair, it is not”.

Accompanied with this voice-over, a mother that talks to her son (See figure 14, image 1). A boy look at a baseball game while he stays behind a fence. A crowd is cheering behind him. The voice-over of the mom connotes the boy was not able to play the game because of “what he looks like”. “Some people that think you don’t deserve the same privilege” is in this quotation ‘the other’. The sentence refers to a bigger overall social discourse of white supremacy and racism. “It is not fair, it is not” emphasizes en evaluates people who are racist as unfair. The sad face of the boy is filmed as a close-up, which emphasizes the fact that racial bias is unfair, especially for the people who deal with it and suffer from it. Another quotation from the same commercial reads:

“Remember you can anything that they can, the difference is that you have to work twice as hard and be twice as smart”.

This citation is accompanied by image 2, 3, 4 (See Figure 14). In this part of the sequence, a mother and daughter drive up the school parking lot and look at from a distance to the other kids and parents (See Figure 14, image 2). “They” refers here to ‘the other’ again, but now “they” are also visualized as white children and white parents standing in the schoolyard. The mother tells the daughter that she has to work twice as hard and be twice as smart if she wants to achieve what “they” can. “They” are the white children at her school. This is an example of moral abstraction. We just see a quick shot of white children in the schoolyard and they represent the whole value system of white privilege. The daughter looks worried and insecure while she listens to her mom (Figure 14, image 3 and 4).

Even though the brand wants to give attention to racial bias, in this part of the sequence they generalize ‘the other’ as white and privileged, by showing white kids in the schoolyard. As a viewer, we have not seen their actions or anything about them that identifies them as more than just ‘white kids’. The worried face of the mother and kid, however, emphasize the fact that the ‘other’ does not suffer from white privilege, while the mother and daughter do, which is unjust. This is an example of how moral evaluation, through reference to an abstraction (the shot of the white children) can communicate a broader value system, in this case: the injustice of white privilege.

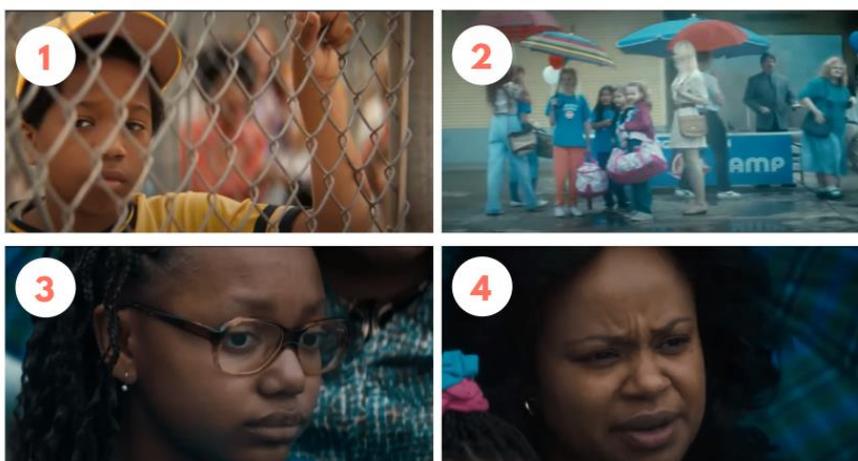


Figure 14 Shots from Procter & Gamble’s ‘The Talk’.

Furthermore, one more example of moral evaluation and creating an 'us' versus 'them' discourse is Nike's 'Dream Crazy' commercial. The first scene of the ad shows a man skating who fall down multiple times (Appendix C). The voice-over says: "If people say your dreams are crazy". "Crazy", in this sentence, is an evaluative adjective, which has in this sense a negative undertone. We see the skateboarder failing and at the same time we hear the voice saying "if people say your dreams are crazy:.. It gives the viewer the feeling that "people", an abstraction, are judging the skateboarder of being "crazy". This system implies that there will always be people existing who judge you when you trying.

The voice-over continues: "If they laugh at what you think you can do". This phrase is accompanied by a shot of a determined-looking boy looking straight in the camera (See Appendix C, image 6). This is a contrast. "They" in this context is the 'bad' guys, saying that you cannot do it. The boy who is looking determined and serious into the camera gives the viewer the feeling that he is standing up against 'those people' who "laugh at what he thinks he can do". In the following frame (See Appendix C, image 6), the boy is beating his opponent, who does have legs, in wrestling. This frame connotes that even when you are disabled you can do the same things as people without a disability and despite the people, the others, who tell you you can not.' You in this sentence refers to the boy who is depicted in sequence, but also to the viewer. The word involves the viewer into the story that is told since it could also be applicable to him. Another phrase follows:

"Because what non-believers fail to understand, is that calling a dream crazy is not an insult, it's a compliment".

"Non-believers: is here again an abstraction, referring to a 'the other. "They" do not believe in dreams or in "you", which means they are judgemental and 'bad' and will not achieve their dreams, because they do not believe you or they can realize those. "Insult" is here also a negative evaluative word, which confirms the negative charge of the word "crazy", from the perspective of the non-believers at least. Because the narrator now announces that calling a dream crazy, is a compliment. This example from Nike demonstrates that 'the other', which 'we' as the brand and viewers oppose, can be 'created' without visualizing them or showing any actions or references to appearance. All we know

about 'them' is that they "say our dreams our crazy" and they "laugh at what we think we can do". This refers to the abstraction of 'being judgemental' and being 'unsupportive' which is connotated by the viewer as something negative, since no one likes to be judged or unsupported. In this way, Nike legitimizes their actions and their message by morally evaluating 'the other', who is opposite to us and who we can prove wrong by connecting (and buying) the brand.

4.4. Mythopoesis

Legitimation can also be achieved through storytelling (van Leeuwen, 2007). In moral classical moral tales, protagonists are rewarded for a certain action or restoring the legitimate order (Van Leeuwen, 2007). With Mythopoesis legitimation, legitimacy is conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions (van Leeuwen, 2007). There are different types of storytelling to reach legitimacy. A popular form of narrative is the moral story protagonists are rewarded for engaging in legitimate social practice (van Leeuwen, 2007). This study identified four different narrative types which each employ a specific protagonist:

- (i) The Brand as Frontline Activist
- (ii) The Brand as Collaborator
- (iii) The Brand as Whistleblower
- (iiii) The Brand as Hidden Activist

Every unit that was studied fits in one of these four categories. This paragraph will discuss each one of them and explain their characteristics using the findings from this analysis.

The Brand as Frontline Activist

This study identified ten of the 25 units as a narrative in which the brand itself is the protagonist. The brand in this case is the hero of the story, who undertook a certain action that leads to success. An example that demonstrates this identified narrative is Nike's 'The

Swoosh Vote', a commercial that supports legalizing same-sex marriage in Australia. The advertisement starts off with an in-frame sentence:

"How the world's most iconic logo.."

Then the viewer sees the Nike logo, multiple times in a fast-cut sequence which shows the logo of Nike on different objects, like several posters and shoes. Then, the frame says:

"became a statement for marriage equality".

This beginning shows that Nike claims to be an iconic logo. This connotes the brand is important, timeless, recognizable, and most of all: the protagonist of the story. This is the story of how the brand became a statement for marriage equality. The word 'statement' implies that the brand is an activist and takes a stand in favor of marriage equality.

Subsequently, the social problem Nike is dealing with is identified by the commercial. It shows news reports from Australian news channels, which announce that the Australian people will have to opportunity to vote for or against legalizing same-sex marriage in Australia. The voice-over says: "The question on your survey form is simple: should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry? And you can tick either a yes box or a no box". With this sentence, the viewer sees the actual survey with the question on it and the boxes that say 'yes' and 'no' (See Figure 15, image 1). Here a political activity is portrayed a clear division between two political camps: "yes" and "no". The next frame portrays the sentence: "The country was divided". This sentence emphasizes the fact there were no predictions on which camp would win. And, therefore, the brand had to step in.

Another way of establishing the brand as the protagonist of the story, is by presenting the in-frame text: "Nike believes that equality should exist for everyone, on and off the field", the brand demonstrates that "Nike" is again the most important actor and protagonist of the story. Besides, this sentence emphasizes Nike's belief system (equality for everyone) and that this belief goes beyond their own (sport)brand (on and of the field).

Furthermore, Nike makes its logo a symbol for the fight for equal marriage and show several shots of the design portrayed in image 2 (see figure 15) on storefronts, shoe designs, and posters of Nike. The action of the brand is described, again by in-frame text: "So the

brand turned its logo into a reminder to vote and a symbol for equality”. Subsequently, a frame follows that can be viewed in Figure 15, image 2. We can see the Nike logo Inside the ‘yes’ box. With this part of the sequence, Nike makes a clear statement. By visualizing the brand’s logo into the ‘yes’ box, the make it clear that they choose the politically ‘yes’ camp above the ‘no’ camp, and stimulate their fans and customers to do the same.

Moreover, the advertisement does not portray other activists, social groups, or brands supporting this cause. At the end of the commercial, the viewer sees shots of a happy LGBTQ crowd who celebrate the fact that the ‘yes’ camp won and gay marriage is now legal in Australia. In the storyline, Nike is the protagonist, the activist that promoted to say ‘yes’ to same-sex marriage, which resulted in a reward: the ‘yes’ camp had a victory and gay marriage became legal. It is just Nike, the brand, that is shown fighting for this cause. By showing their action, visualizing their logo into the ‘yes’ box and displaying it at several locations and objects, and showing the result of the political survey straight after, the ‘yes camp’ cheering at the announcement that gay marriage would be legal in the future, implies that Nike was an important factor in achieving this goal.

Nike presents the brand as a frontline activist, taking action and achieving a goal which is not related to profit, but to social good. The brand is here the protagonist of the story, not the people who are part of the LGBTQ-community or certain role models. Nike is the hero who single-handedly convinced the Australian people to vote ‘yes’ and, therefore, the brand presents itself as a brand activist that fights for equality, not for profit.

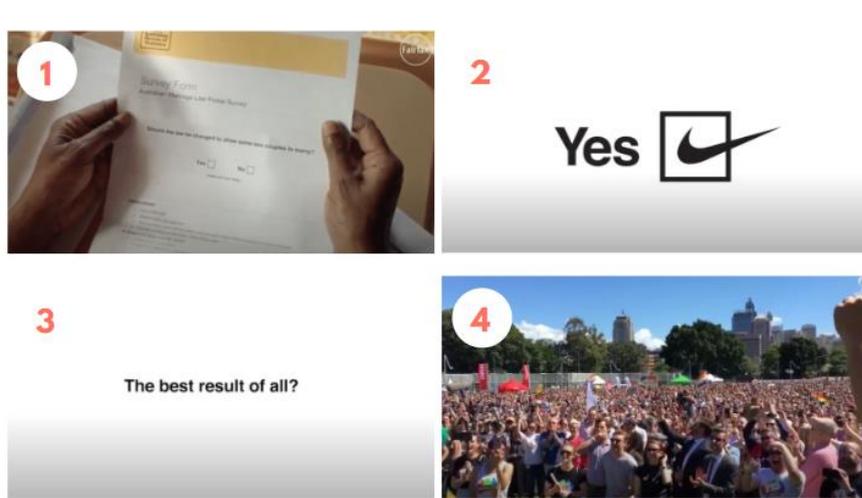


Figure 15 Shots from Nike’s ‘The Swoosh Vote’

The Brand as Collaborator

In eight of the 25 analyzed advertisements, a 'collaborator narrative' was identified. As opposed to the frontline activist narrative, the brand plays a less present role in the narrative. Their message is more focus on the brand's collaboration with either (i) role-model(s) who represent(s) certain activist and moral values, which the brand supports, or (ii) members of a certain group who are dealing with a certain social problem, for which the brand offer a solution.

Nike's 'Voice of Belief' features a narrative revolving around female tennis player Serena Williams. The commercial starts with a male voice-over saying: 'This is you at the US Open'. A man and a young girl are portrayed in a neighborhood tennis field (See figure 14, image 1). The girl serves the ball and at that exact moment cuts to a new frame (See Figure 14, image 2) where we see Serena Williams serving a ball. In the background, we see the logo of the 'US Open'. This editing strategy connotes that the little girl from the first shot is the same person as the grown-up Serena Williams, they are connected to each other. Throughout the sequence, this strategy repeats itself: shots from Serena Williams playing tennis in the present time alternated with shots of her playing tennis as a kid. The whole video we can hear the coaching, male voice on the background.

In this way, Nike emphasizes her growth and development as an athlete. By choosing to visualize her as a young girl and as the athlete she is today, accompanied by a guiding voice of her coach or father, Nike makes her the protagonist of the story. The narrative is about her, a female black tennis player, developing into a world-class athlete of the highest level.

Serena Williams represents a minority, being a colored and female athlete. However, Nike does not emphasize this fact. It emphasizes her development as an athlete, not paying special attention to her being female or being black. By collaborating with her, Nike does not have to make a statement about equality, as the brand did with 'The Swoosh Vote', Serena Williams herself represent these activist values already, just by being a black and female successful minority, she represents that, no matter what color or gender, you can achieve your dreams. By collaborating with her, Nike as a brand represents these values as well.



Figure 16 Shots from Nike's 'Voice of Belief'

The case of Ikea's 'ThisAbles' commercial demonstrates the strategy of how a brand utilizes a collaboration narrative which includes members of certain (minority) group who are dealing with a certain problem. Ikea approaches a problem of disabled people through protagonist Eldar, a 32-year-old disabled person who explains that he has a hard time with 'normal furniture', which is not designed to suit people with a disability (See Figure 15, image 1). The commercial focuses on him and his everyday struggles with 'normal furniture' and let Eldar explain himself through a voice-over. Another male voice-over takes over the story by introducing Ikea's ThisAbles project and says:

"The project was created in collaboration with two NGO's: 'Milbat' and 'Access Israel' and started off in the Ikea store with a hackathon of product engineers and disabled people that enabled better understanding of their needs".

This sentence shows two types of collaborations. First of all, the brand mentions two NGO partners. This shows the brand is a collaborator and team-player, rather than a brand that centers itself as the main driving force behind an initiative. Secondly, the sentence mentions a collaboration between product engineers and disabled people to enable a better understanding of their needs. This citation is accompanied by shots of engineers and people with disabilities together in the Ikea store, talking to each other, and measuring to find new opportunities (Figure 15, image 2). The collaborator narrative involving a member or more member of a certain minority group points out a social problem from the point of view of these group members and, in this way, legitimizes the brand's action.



Figure 17 Shots from Ikea's 'ThisAbles'

The Brand as Whistleblower

The 'Brand as Whistleblower' narrative was identified in four of the 25 analyzed units. This narrative does not employ a protagonist but rather visualizes situations, persons, actions or phenomena to portray a social problem or to make a statement about a certain social issue. These four recognized units are cinematic, visually strong, and esthetic, rather than that they are pragmatic, like the previous example of Ikea 'ThisAbles', which portrays a problem and solution given by the brand. 'The Brand as Whistleblower' narrative portrays problems through visualizing them rather than using words and, in this way, tries to tell the world which social problems need attention.

An example of the 'Whistleblower narrative' is Libresse's 'Vive la Vulva'. The sequence starts with a slow zoom-in shot of a naked woman holding a big seashell in front of her vagina (See Figure 16, image 1). While the shot zooms in, a woman's voice is singing the words:

"I have to celebrate you, baby,
I have to praise you like I should"

During the zoom in, we see that the shell starts moving like it is singing the song. The lyrics get more and more meaning while the sequence continues. The vagina is portrayed by several objects: fruits, knitted 'dolls' (see Figure 14, images 2 and 3), mussels, fortune cookies, and so on. The song goes on and it becomes clear that the sequence is a statement around vagina: women should love their vagina's more than they do.

By visualizing the vagina in several ways, the commercial connotes that the vagina is part of the body you should not be ashamed of, but should be celebrated. Figure 16, image

4 emphasizes this fact: a message from a fortune cookie writes out the song lyrics 'I have to praise you like I should'. Women should praise their vagina's. It only becomes clear that this video is a commercial from Libresse when in the last shot, a few of their products with the product name on it appear on screen.

The sequence is like an art-piece: visual, bold, and could be perceived as a bit uncomfortable or strange. Therefore, it is at the same time an activist narrative. Visualizing vagina's in such an explicit way is a risky move and could maybe be perceived negatively by more conservative people. But by still doing it and visualizing a certain problem, even if it might make people feel uncomfortable, the brand shows it wants to be bold and risky in order to change certain stigmatized beliefs around women's sexuality and appearance.

Libresse legitimizes its message by proposing a provocative and visual sequence, which can be in many ways by many different people. In this way, by provoking reactions and discussion, the brand addresses a social issue that might have less attention before this commercial.



Figure 18 Shots from Libresse's 'Vive la Vulva'

Another example of a, less explicit, 'Whistleblower Narrative' is Toyota's 'Start you impossible'. The sequence is characterized by fast cuts and a lot of camera movement. This emphasizes the main theme of the commercial: movement. A voice-over is speaking while many shots, all of people, are passing by. What is remarkable, is that a lot of 'different' people are portrayed. Image 1 (See Figure 17) for example, features a kid swinging on the hands of two women. We do not see their faces, but the dresses connote that they are

women. The whole shot connotes that they could be their mothers. Image 2 (See Figure 17) visualizes a scarfed woman driving behind the wheel of a car. This connotes that she might be Islamic and at the same time a strong, independent woman who drives herself instead of sitting in the driver's seat.

Moreover, Image 3 (see Figure 17) features a man in a wheelchair playing basketball. This frame connotes that when you have a disability, you are still able to play sports. Lastly, image 4 (See Figure 17) features a woman who is dressed in non-western costume. All these different shots feature different people: from different cultures, with disabilities, young and old, and different skin colors, everyone seems to be represented in this video. The voice says:

“We have a vision: to make movement better for everyone, to give everyone the same chance and the same hope to be their very best”.

This sentence connotes that Toyota is in business to make movement better for everyone. Their Toyota products might help people moving, for example by designing a wheelchair for a disabled person, or a car for the driving woman behind the wheel. By visualizing all ‘kinds’ of people, Toyota emphasizes that the company supports diversity. It gives more people a stage and a spotlight. Not only ‘white’ or ‘black’ people are portrayed, but also Asian, Indian and Mixed people are featured in the video. A citation from the voice-over reads:

“Movement is a human right,
it is something we all deserve,
which is why we have a vision,
to make movement better for everyone,
to give everyone the same chance”.

“Movement” is presented as a “human right”. To choose for the words “human right”, “movement” becomes something everyone deserves and should have with no exceptions. That is why in the following sentence, Toyota presents itself as a fighter for this

human right. Their vision is about movement, and making it better everyone, no one excluded, a claim that gets supported by the visuals.

Toyota presents itself as an activist for a human right: movement, which they pursue and try to make better for everyone, so they can give everyone the same chance. Through a ‘Whistleblower narrative’ Toyota visualizes many different people who ‘utilize’ movement in their lives and the brand emphasizes that this, sometimes self-evident right, is universal. However, the commercial shows that movement is different for everyone: do you move by yourself, in a wheelchair, or in the car? It does not matter to Toyota, as long as they can fulfill the role of delivering products that support all these different kinds of movements. It reminds the viewer that movement is not something to take for granted and how it is different for everyone. Toyota is the overarching protagonist which offers a cinematic, esthetic view on movement: something to fight for.



Figure 19 Shots of Toyota’s ‘Start your Impossible’

The Brand as Hidden Activist

This study identified three of the 25 studied units as displaying a ‘Hidden Activist’ narrative. In these cases, the brand is a protagonist, but does not present itself as an activist. However, at the same time, the opposite could be argued. The three cases of Aeromexico, Guinness, and Domino’s all handle their narrative with humor. This distracts the viewer from the fact that there is an underlying message to the story: activism. In the

case of Domino's 'Paving for Pizza' commercial, the brand started an action to repair holes in the streets of America. The voice-over legitimizes this action by saying:

"Not because we wanted to save infrastructure, but because bad roads can ruin good pizza".

This citation demonstrates that Domino's explicitly states that they do not want to solve a problem for the social good outcome of it, but they want to pave roads so that their products, pizza, would not get ruined if their customers would drive over holes in the roads. With this statement, Domino's claims to be a brand that cares about its customers, but not explicitly about infrastructure itself or adding to the social wellbeing of society overall. Moreover, the commercial sheds lights on how their action was received by the public. The voice-over says:

'Some of these people couldn't believe a pizza place was paving roads ... but many more believed us, invited us, welcomed us.'

The first part of the citation, demonstrates that the action of Domino's is perceived as playful and 'different', since why would a pizza company pave roads? The commercial answers: to help people bring their pizza home safely. This answer is simple and humorous, but therefore also a bit unbelievable: all that effort, just for that? The second part of the citation "but many more believed us, invited us, welcomed us" demonstrates that many people perceived their action as helpful and sincere. The part "Many more believed us" is paired with a visual of U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders' Facebook page and a post from him about the action of Domino's (See Figure 18, image 1). This shot takes less than two seconds, so it is impossible for the viewer to read the whole post. However, it does become clear that even political actors notice the action of Domino's.

Domino's action is presented as an action that sparks action. In the shot of Bernie Sander's Facebook post, the first sentence "It should not be up to Domino's to repair our country's infrastructure". The action is utilized, in this case, by a politician to make a political statement. Image 2 (See figure 18) shows a fast cut image of a twitter post with an image that shows a sign at a hole at the road which says: "who will fix first: the city or Domino's?".

This time, just ‘regular people’ are stimulated by the action of Domino’s to make a political statement that gets shared online.

Even though Domino’s is claiming to pursue their action for the sake of pizza, they do show examples of politically engaged reactions from people. In this narrative, they are the protagonist but do not display their brand as a lead activist, as opposed to Nike’s ‘The Swoosh Vote. Domino’s rather presents itself as a playful class clown who provokes reactions from the crowd and from the establishment. Domino’s is the hidden activist, which distract the crowd with humor and playfulness, but at the same time evokes a political debate with their action.

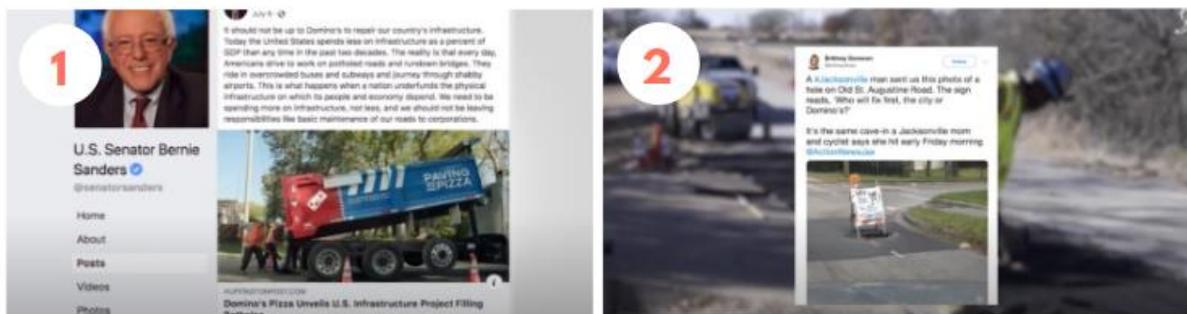


Figure 20 Shots from Domino's 'Paving for Pizza'.

5. Discussion

5.1 Main Findings

This study assesses brand activism as an increasingly popular brand strategy through which companies voluntarily take a stance on what they think is "good" for society (Cian et al., 2018) by communicating values that include core political and social issues (Manfredi-Sanchez, 2019). It views the strategy as evolved out of cause marketing and as a strategy to create a brand image that fits political consumerism. The claim of discourses of social activism by brands transfers values that are traditionally connected to social movements and initially discussed in political or private conversations to the advertising sphere (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to assess brand activism as a strategy with a problematic ethical dimension and argued that even though it claims to 'impact' or 'effect' people and society, it is at the same time a persuasive strategy with commercial goals.

Previous research identifies that the radical change of brand activism is that it invites consumers to 'purchase whom they are' by voluntarily making a statement of what they think is 'good' for society (Cian et al., 2018). It does not just present a social issue that needs attention; it actively takes a stance. It engages consumers in the frontline battle with a particular topic that should be battled according to the advertisement (Hopkins, 2015). Since the phenomenon has been identified but not assessed critically yet, this study aims to fill this research gap on brand activism. It, therefore, asks the question:

RQ: How do brands claim discourses of social activism and sets of moral values embedded in their visual video communication?

This study found answers to this question through critical visual discourse analysis that assess both words and images in the data through insights of social semiotics and visual rhetoric. Since the definition of legitimation is claiming validity and justification through attachment to norms and values within a particular society, the analysis of this study applied the legitimation of van Leeuwen (2007). These criteria were already identified in the dataset before the examination:

1. the data is sourced or produced by a for-profit brand
2. communicates values that include core political and social issues
3. take a stance on what they think is "good" for society

Therefore, the analysis focused on *how* brands justify their attachment to social activism discourses, making a social statement, and corresponding values to construct a brand activist discourse. The findings of the analysis demonstrate that brands claim discourses of social activism in multiple ways. The following section outlines the findings in the main categories of findings.

Including third-parties: the Media, the Famous and the Experts

Firstly, through visually presenting newscasts, news reporters, and quotes from news outlets, studied advertisements construct the idea that the social issue they address is newsworthy and essential in our society. In 12 of the 25 analyzed advertisements, real-life newscasts, headlines of the news, and other media outlets artifacts play a role in legitimating the claim over social activist discourses. By including a third-party news source (news headlines or a news reporter), the brand emphasizes the importance of the social issue they are addressing or the newsworthiness of their undertaken action.

The news reporters' personal status connotes that they are part of an objective third-party that has nothing to do with 'selling' or 'persuading,' but reporting news and issues in our society. Moreover, the multiplying strategy gives the viewer the idea that countless news outlets are talking about the action, which has a legitimating effect. If all the news outlets are talking about it, the brand's action must be essential and legitimate—however, the viewer an overload of information, which can not be processed all at once.

Furthermore, the strategy of expert authorization was utilized for communicating either professional expertise or experiential expertise. Professional expertise makes the brand message more credible since it includes a third-party. The experts that are visualized are experts on a particular social issue, which emphasized the need for attention the addressed the social problem. However, experiential experts communicate that the brand involves the people who have experienced a particular social issue themselves. This

demonstrates that the brand cares about those people's problems and, again, emphasizes that this is worth solving. Another way in which brands utilize expert authorization is by visualizing their own expertise and competence.

Besides, brands portray specific role models to claim a discourse of social activism. The data showed that these role models were, in some way, famous, for example, successful athletes or media personalities, but at the same time, also represented a discourse of social activism. They were either social activists themselves, known for their actions concerning a social cause or presenting a minority group. By involving activist role models in their advertisements, brands do necessarily have to undertake social action themselves. By visualizing these role models, the brand communicates that it shares the same social values as the portrayed role model.

Actually Undertaking action with Specific Outcomes

Studied commercial brands claim discourses of social activism by visualizing actual undertaken social action by the brand. A notable fact that the findings of this research present is that 19 of 25 studied advertisements were portraying an original brand 'action.' In these advertisements, the brand does only take a stance in a particular political or social debate; it also undertook a specific effort to legitimize a social or political statement. For example, Ikea designed furniture for disabled people, and Huawei created an app for deaf children.

Additionally, brands claim discourses of social activism through rationalization legitimation. Since all the advertisements in this dataset include a particular social cause, 20 of the 25 units focused on the positive effect of pursuing a social purpose. This emphasizes that the goal of the brand goes beyond just making a profit. A strategy that is recognized in the studied data is including competitors in their advertising. This constructs the idea that the brand is more concerned with social activism than with competitive, economic advantage. However, this study recognized that ten brands of the dataset were more focused on the undertaken action taken by the brand rather than on the social impact. This communicates that the brand is more concerned with portraying itself as an activist than with the social effects.

Another rationalization legitimization strategy that is recognized in the data is communicating the brand's relevance on social media. 14 of the 25 studied units employed this strategy. By referring to the attention of the brand's action or statement gets on social media, it constructs the idea that the crowd values their action or statement, by ordinary people. Brands legitimize their claim over social activist discourses by referring to the number of likes, comments, shares, or user posts of people that relate to their brand action, which connotes that the brand is relevant: many people are talking about them on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

'We' are Good, the 'Other' is Bad

Furthermore, this study recognized that the analyzed brands claim discourses of activism discourse through moral evaluation. 14 of the 25 studied units created an 'us' versus 'them' construction. With this, I mean abstractions or evaluative adjectives that refer to bigger value systems that either connect 'us', a group that refers the brand and possibly also the viewer or other actors, or to 'the other', a group who is not us and therefore different or even 'bad'. It emphasizes the 'we'-group and how the brand is part of society and the 'friend' of the viewer. The opposite to 'us' is evaluated as negative. The other is vaguely referred to. Nike refers to the other as 'People' who are disapproves of who 'you' are. Aqui refers to 'dirty politicians' and P&G refers to 'they'. Evaluative adjectives and reference to abstract value systems (for example: a shot of white children represent a broader discourse of white privilege) are not made explicit and are the tip of a submerged iceberg of moral values (van Leeuwen, 2007). However, they unconsciously trigger a 'us' vs. 'them' discourse in which the viewer is drawn to 'good' side of the brand and disapproves the 'bad' other.

This has an effect that the viewer sees 'us,' himself, and the brand, as connected and 'them' as another, separate group . For example, by visualizing the ones that 'suffer' from a particular social cause opposed to those that do not. Or visualizing the 'other' as bad, to which 'we,' the brand and the viewer, have to stand up. Language is essential in this strategy since evaluative adjectives like 'good,' 'bad,' 'fair' or 'unfair' are appointed to the 'us' or 'them' group.

Four Brand Narratives

Lastly, this study recognized that brand social activism is approached through narratives whose outcomes reward legal actions and punish non-legitimate acts. The studied data can be divided into four categorical narratives:

1. The Brand as Frontline Activist
2. The Brand as Collaborator
3. The Brand as Whistleblower
4. The Brand as Hidden Activist

These four narratives identify the four main ways in which brand advertisements approach discourses of social activism. Ten of the 25 studied units portray social activism as a heroic action claimed by the brand. Eight of the 25 units claim social activism as an action that is pursued together, but in which the brand can play a central role in making a change. Four units approach social activism as a social issue that is not recognized by others but is recognized by the brand and is, therefore, rightfully visualized to aims for the attention it needs. Three brands define social activism by approaching social issues playfully and humorously. By not defining themselves as an activist, they approach social activism as addressing a social issue, but without the seriousness or with focus on the problem. Instead, with a focus on straightforward outcomes and discussing these with consequences with sarcasm and humor, they emphasize the fact that social issues can be solved.

5.2 Theoretical and Social Implications

In the theoretical section of this research, previous concepts and studies were discussed to contextualize this study's aim. Firstly, the theoretical section of this study identified cause marketing as a phenomenon that came before the concept of brand activism. Brei & Böhm (2014) research was identified as one of the few previous studies that come close to critical analysis of brand activism as an advertising strategy. However, their study was more related to cause marketing than on the concept of brand activism defined in this study.

In Brei & Böhm's research (2014), they assess the '1L = 10L for Africa' campaign of bottled water brand Volvic critically. Firstly, the study identified that Volvic transformed the bottled water, the product, into a tool for supporting a social cause. The findings of this study show that the advertisements are focused on the commercial brand, especially in the 'Brand as Frontline Activist' narrative, but not on the actual products a brand is offering. None of the studied units connected their message to the actual purchasing activity. This emphasizes the fact that brand activism is a different phenomenon than previous cause marketing strategies. It focused more on establishing a particular brand image, than on the actual purchasing activity.

The second finding of Brei and Böhm (2014) is that their studied campaign sees transforming passive shoppers into active, engaged consumers who participate in affirmative social action by buying. The findings of this study demonstrate that the advertisements engage consumers by involving them in specific social issues that they make a statement about. However, as stated above, the action of buying is not included in the message. Therefore, this study argues that the findings show that the studied brand activist advertisements are more concerned with building a positive brand image than with directly addressing the selling-goal of advertising. This refers back to the identification of Dahlen & Rosengren (2016), who state that advertisements are transforming into aiming for 'impact' and 'effect' rather than just 'selling.' However, this study also identified that ten out of the 25 units are brand-central narratives that are concerned with their own actions and image, rather than with the outcome.

Lastly, Brei & Böhm (2014) identified that Volvic strengthens their relationship with their consumers by capturing their imaginations and attention, binding them to their brand. This study identified the need for political consumers for brands and products that express their ethical and moral beliefs. However, Volvic actively stimulates consumers to buy to do good. Oppositely, in the studied data of the research, brands are undertaking actions themselves and are making statements about what is right and what issues should be supported. It is not necessarily inviting consumers to buy, but it is asking them to think about a particular social issue and bind consumers based on their shared values on a social problem. This refers back to the brand equity model of Keller (2001) in which the consumer is central. By creating meaning that includes political and social statements, brand activist advertisements are attempting to bind political consumers to their brand. By creating a

positive brand image in the minds of their consumers, consumers will think of the brand as a personality that shares the same social and ethical values as them. As a result, they will buy products of the brand to express these social and moral values.

The Brand Activist Discourse

The theoretical section of this study established brand activism as a marketing activity of brands that recontextualizes political values traditionally linked to social activism in their brand communication. By doing this, brands voluntarily take a stance on what they think is “good” for society and then make corresponding public statements (Cian et al., 2018). Manfredi-Sanchez (2019) recognized four different themes of brand activism in advertisements: politics and regulatory affairs, economy & business (protecting the free market, wages, business ethics, etc.), societal (demands of social movements including feminist positions, the fight for equality, LGBTQ rights and other sub-policies) and the environment.

Furthermore, In the theoretical literature review of this study was established that there is an extensive amount of critical academic studies that focus on the practice of advertising (Hamilton, Bodle, & Korin, 2016). Numerous critical studies have examined on micro-level how advertising mass communication “persuade” and “manipulate” consumers (Harms & Kellner, 1991). On the other side, however, critical studies have argued how advertising has contributed to the development of social order by giving cultural power to corporations and individuals (Harms & Kellner, 1991). These two streams of the literature of critical media studies have gained insights into the social functions and ideological effects of mass communication, which was not exposed before (Harms & Kellner, 1991).

By conducting critical discourse analysis, this study aimed to uncover the ways brands are claiming social activist discourses and values. It identified multiple discursive strategies that legitimize the claim over social activist discourses, which are outlined above. This research’s findings demonstrate the functioning of the strategy and uncover strategies of persuasion. This adds to the existing knowledge about the brand activism discourse but also informs people about advertising strategies that are, on the one hand claiming to make an impact and be social activists, but on the other hand, still are persuasive with profit-raising goals.

Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser (2012) argue that brand-intended 'doing social good' can either be interpreted as hypocrisy or as a self-fulfilling prophecy with positive outcomes. Since 19 of 25 studied advertisements were portraying and undertaking a brand 'action' supports the second assumption. However, this study argues that it is essential to emphasize that brands, while claiming social discourses by multiple strategies outlined above, are still commercial with profit-raising goals. Strategies as multiplying and the brand-central narratives make the social goal of brand activism questionable.

Moreover, this study's findings demonstrate that none of the researched advertisements mention the actual purchasing action. This is in line with the argument of Dahlen & Rosengren (2016), who argue that the term 'persuading' is already outdated to describe the act of advertising. They define advertising as 'brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people' (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016, p. 343). Studied brands seem more concerned about their brand image. This study defines brand image as a concept that deals with the extrinsic properties of product or service and meets consumer's psychological or social needs. It is rather about how a person abstractly thinks about a brand, than about what the brand actually does (Keller, 2001).

The recognized brand narratives in this study could be interpreted as four different brand activist images brands are communicating. 'The Brand as Frontline Activist' narrative presents the brand as daring and imaginative. The brand is the main character in the story and takes the personality of a frontline activist who is not afraid to stand up. Furthermore, 'The Brand, as Collaborator' narrative communicates a brand image that is more focused on authenticity. Including role models or members of a particular minority group dealing with a social issue emphasizes that the brand collaborated with third parties.

Moreover, the 'Brand as Whistleblower' narrative communicates a brand image of sophistication. By communicating this through visualization rather than through taking action, the advertisements communicate a more passive, reserved image. Because the sequences are cinematic and esthetic, they communicate a higher status, which connects to art and sophistication. Lastly, the 'Brand as Hidden Activist' narrative presents a brand personality that is based on the dimensions of excitement and ruggedness. By distancing themselves from the discourse of social activism and using humor and sarcasm as tools to bring across their message, the brands show that they are playful and not concerned with a 'higher' political or social debate.

The data of this study was selected beforehand on their brand activist characteristics. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that brands present four different brand activist images. The images communicate in which way the brand is active in pursuing social causes. However, the brands are not explicitly mentioning their products or the act of buying. They are just presenting themselves as social activists, which can be interpreted as misleading. Social movements are usually connected to social change, activism, and corresponding values. Their main goal is to pursue a social cause without profit-raising goals. Commercial brands, however, always have a profit-raising goal. However, in brand activist advertising, this is no way visible, and advertising purposes are covered up by mentioning or pursuing a social cause.

Dahlen & Rosengren (2016) argue that the term 'persuading' is already outdated to describe the act of advertising. They define advertising as 'brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people' (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016, p. 343). However, the results of this study demonstrate that brand activist advertisements may not persuade the viewer directly to buy, but they do communicate brand activist images that cover up profit-raising goals of commercial brands. Therefore, it is essential to emphasize while brands are bonding with consumers through presenting moral values and creating and political and social active image, the fact that their advertising is still inherently persuasive and aiming for profit should not be overlooked. By uncovering discursive strategies of brands to claim social activist discourses, this study add to existing knowledge on the functioning of the brand activist strategy. Furthermore, it hopes to inform political consumers to assess brand activist advertisements critically.

5.2 Limitations & Future Research

Since brand activism is an emerging research field, this study encounters several limitations concerning the theoretical framework, the data collection, and the data analysis itself. Although qualitative research establishes the researcher as a primary instrument for data collection, it is vital to approach this position of the researcher regarding the results of this research. The data collection of this study contains a dataset that was selected by pre-established criteria in regard to the research purpose. Therefore, I relied on previous research on the definition of brand activism and my judgment regarding the collection of the dataset. Thus, the existing definition of brand activism that includes 'taking a stance' can

be interpreted in several ways. Moreover, only the relevant commercials for the goal of this study have been taken into account. The methodology section of this paper provides a transparent description of the data collection and research steps taken during this study. This increases the reliability of this research.

Moreover, this research only included videos that were in the winner list of the Cannes International Festival of Creativity 2018 and 2019. Results might have differed when the dataset was selected from another award festival. Besides, by choosing a dataset from an award-winning commercial list, the dataset does only include commercials that are defined as 'successful' (since they won a prestigious award). Therefore, the results of this study might have differed if it would have also taken 'unsuccessful' brand activist advertisement into account. By choosing a dataset from the Cannes International Festival of Creativity winners list, this study is oriented on the western advertising industry.

In addition, the analysis of this study is accompanied by limitations as existing frameworks on assessing the construction of brand activism in advertising lack academic research. Even though a few studies focus on the definition of brand activism, methods for analyzing how images and language construct a brand activist message do not exist yet. However, this study did recognize methods that have approached advertising critically in previous research. Therefore, this paper combined the approaches from social semiotics and discourse theory to increase the reliability of the findings.

These identified limitations also offer new perspectives for future research on brand activism. The following paragraph will discuss future research recommendations that can extend the presented research findings or anticipate the limitations this study has encountered.

The first recommendation is aimed at the focus of brand activism literature regarding the method of data analysis. The current academic literature is at the stage of recognizing and defining the trend. More critical approaches to brand activism could lead to the creation of theoretical frameworks to assess brand activism in advertising messages, especially. Thus, since this research only focused on video advertisements, future research could perform the methodological steps this study took and conduct a critical analysis of brand activism in written data or on still visuals. Instead of only looking at 'successful' cases of brand activism execution, future critical studies could focus on cases outside of an award-winning dataset.

Additionally, this study has not extensively focused on different sectors within the advertising industry during the analysis. Future research could focus on case studies of brand activism in different sectors and possibly comparing them. Is brand activism, for example, differently constructed in controversial industries (like alcohol or fast food) than in the fashion industry? And just as interesting: how do consumers react to this kind of communication? This brings us to the next recommendation.

This research has not focused on how consumers perceive brand activism. Here lies a huge opportunity for quantitative as well as qualitative research. Research on how consumers perceive brand activist advertising would offer new insights into the advertising industry itself. Besides, from an academic perspective, it would be relevant to observe how the political consumer is evolving along with the emerging trend of brand activism. Besides, this research has named the evolved power of consumers. They can express their feelings easily on the internet, something that can hurt or help a brand. Future research could focus on cases of brand activism that received online backlash from consumers or possibly other institutions. This could offer more insights into the working of online advertising in combination with the strategy of brand activism.

6. Conclusion

This study recognized the changing advertising environment and the aim of advertisements to 'impact' and 'effect' people, rather than just 'selling' or 'persuading.' Within the advertising industry, a new trend was identified: brand activism: an increasingly popular corporate strategy through which companies voluntarily take a stance on what they think is “good” for society and then make corresponding public statements (Cian et. al., 2018). Through brand activism, values that are traditionally connected to social movements and are initially discussed in political or private conversations, enter the now advertising sphere as well (Manfredi-Sáchnez, 2019). The strategy goes hand in hand with what has been called 'political consumerism,' which entails the fact that consumer behavior is, to a certain extent, shaped by a desire to express and support political and ethical perspectives (Shah *et al.*, 2007).

In the presented thesis, a critical discourse analysis of 25 brand activist video advertisements was conducted. This research approach was the most sufficient since this study aimed to uncover *how* brands are constructing a discourse on brand social activism and corresponding moral values in their advertising messages. The data was collected according to pre-existing criteria in regard to the research question of this study. The units were chosen from the winner list of the Cannes International Festival of Creativity 2018 and 2019. Since we are living in an increasingly dominant visual culture, video commercials were chosen to offer a unique insight into contemporary cultural values. In this paper, the approaches from social semiotics and rhetorical theories were combined to assess the data.

In chapter 1, this study aimed to assess brand activism as a strategy with a problematic ethical dimension and argues that even though it claims to ‘impact’ or ‘effect’ people and society, it is also inherently persuasive of nature. The research field around brand activism is emerging, but there is no extensive academic literature available yet. This offered the opportunity for this study to critically assess the construction of brand activism in brand advertising. Therefore, it asked the research question:

RQ: How do brands claim discourses of social activism and sets of moral values embedded in their visual video communication?

Previous research established that through brand activism, values that are traditionally linked to social movements and are initially discussed in political or private conversations, enter the advertising sphere (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). Therefore, this study assumed that brands are claiming the discourse of social activism and corresponding sets of moral values. It aims to focus on *how* brands are doing this.

In Chapter 2, four overarching theoretical concepts that are relevant to this study were discussed. Firstly, it shed light on previous research on cause marketing. It identified the study of Brei & Böhm as one of the few critical studies that connect to the emerging field of brand activist research. It was established that cause marketing goes hand in hand with the fact that consumer behaviors are shaped by a desire to express and support political and ethical perspectives (Shah, McLeod, Kim, Lee, Gotlieb, Ho & Breivik, 2007).

Subsequently, previous studies on defining brand activism were discussed. Firstly, the concept of 'brand' was defined by the brand equity model of Keller (2001), who identifies four layers of a brand: identity, meaning, response, and relationship. Brand meaning is defined by brand image. This concept deals with extrinsic properties of product or service and meets consumer's psychological or social needs (Keller, 2001). These brand associations that exist in a consumer's mind can be, to a certain extent, formed indirectly by the depiction of the brand in advertising (Keller, 2001). Secondly, the researches Manfredi-Sánchez (2019), Cian et al. (2018), Kotler and Sarkar (2017), Hopkins (2015), and Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser (2012) were assessed to define (the different forms of) brand activism.

Furthermore, previous research on discourse theory was presented. This paragraph explained what discourse is and why advertising can be viewed as discourse. The value of studying advertising messages was established. Moreover, semiotics was established as theoretical research to assess these advertising messages in order to "trace" the underlying message of advertisements. In addition, two streams of critical academic studies that focus on the practice of advertising were identified. On the one hand, numerous critical studies have examined on micro-level how advertising mass communication "persuade" and "manipulate" consumers (Harms & Kellner, 1991). On the other side, critical studies have argued how advertising has contributed to the development of social order by giving cultural power to corporations and individuals (Harms & Kellner, 1991).

Besides, the term 'discourses of social activism' was explained more in-depth. Manfredi-Sánchez (2019) states that brand activism borrows from the campaigns of social

movements, copying their aesthetics of authenticity. Internal discourses of social activism involve communicative practices, for example, their leaflets, symbols, and language, that express their identity, thus their internal system of knowledge and aim to contribute to existing discourses in society (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016). Manfredi-Sanchez (2019) recognized social activism as the societal demands of social movements, including feminist positions, the fight for equality, LGBTQ rights, and other sub-policies. Social movements aim to shape the individual's relations to itself and thus affect the mobilization for a specific cause (Baumgarten & Ullrich, 2016). However, the goal of brand activism is commercial since advertising aims to create a communicate a positive brand image.

Furthermore, In order to analyse how brands are claiming discourses of social and sets of movements and moral values, it is essential to understand how brands carry out their message. The complexity of creating an advertising message that is both persuasive and truthful at the same time was addressed. The difference between the absolute truth and perceived authenticity was identified. For consumers, an advertising message is not all about the absolute truth, but rather about authenticity. In order to be perceived as authentic, companies must match consumer's social expectations, which can be a complicated task (Colleoni, 2013). Therefore, it is essential for brands to gain legitimacy: they have to claim validity and justification through attachment to norms and values within a particular society (Van Leeuwen, 2007).

Since this study is concerned about how brands are claiming discourses of social activism and sets of moral values and norms, it is interested in how brand activist messages gain and communicate legitimacy. Therefore, it discussed the legitimation framework of Van Leeuwen (2007). This theoretical framework is a relevant research tool to find out how legitimation is expressed through language and visuals (van Leeuwen, 2007).

In chapter 3, the methodology chapter of this study discussed all the specific research steps that were taken during the analysis. This section justified the research method of critical discourse analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis is the appropriate method for this study since CDA typically analyses texts and visuals and exposes strategies that appear neutral initially, but which may actually be ideological and seek to shape representation of events and persons with a particular goal.

Moreover, this section discussed the purposive sampling strategy of this method and the decisions made during the collection of data. Since this study concerns the in-depth

study of brand activism, data selection had to match the predefined profile of brand activism in advertising. Furthermore, this study selected its data from the winner list of the Cannes Lions International Festival Creativity. This decision ensures a certain level of quality and professionalism of the selected data. By choosing the the archive of this award show, this research limits itself to studying western-oriented, global functioning brands. In Addition, this chapter presented a detailed description of how the data was analysed. A multimethod approach to the data is justified and operationalized. The legitimization framework from Van Leeuwen (2007) was approached as an assisting framework during the analysis to uncover discursive strategies of brand activist messages. Finally, it presented measures taken for the level of reliability and validity of this study.

In chapter 4, the results section uncovered multiple ways in which brands construct social activism and corresponding moral values through their video advertisements. Firstly, the results demonstrate that brands construct social activism by visualizing actual undertaken social action by the brand. Secondly, through visually presenting newscasts, news reporters, and quotes from news outlets, studied advertisements construct the idea that the social issue they are addressing is newsworthy and essential in our society. Moreover, the strategy of expert authorization was utilized for communicating either professional expertise or experimental expertise. Additionally, by making certain semiotic choices, such as portraying a high-tech environment, a team working together, or computers with complicated work artifacts displayed on the screens, the brands emphasize their own expertise and competence. Furthermore, brands portray specific role models to construct a discourse on brand social activism.

Moreover, another finding shows that brands construct a discourse of brand activism through rationalization legitimation. This is the act of emphasizing the goal of the brand goes beyond just making a profit. A strategy that is recognized in the studied data is including competitors in the advertising message. This constructs the idea that the brand is more concerned with social activism than with competitive, economic advantage. However, this study recognized some brands were focused on the positive effects of social action but were at the same time more focused on the undertaken action taken by the brand rather than on the social impact of it. This communicates that the brand is more concerned with portraying itself as an activist than with the social effects. Moreover, another rationalization

legitimation strategy that was recognized in the data is communicating the brand's relevance on social media.

Furthermore, this study recognized that the analyzed brands construct a social brand activism discourse through moral evaluation. Ads create an 'us' versus 'them' construction by referring to a bigger value system. This strategy is carried out through reference to abstract value systems and utilizing evaluative adjectives. Lastly, this study recognized that brand social activism is constructed through narratives whose outcomes reward legal actions and punish non-legitimate acts. The studied data can be divided into four categorical narratives: 'The Brand as Frontline Activist,' 'The Brand as Collaborator,' 'The Brand as Whistleblower,' 'The Brand as Hidden Activist.'

Chapter 5 presented the findings in four main categories of discursive strategies: inclusion of third parties (The Media, The Famous and the Experts), by actually undertaking action with focus on specific outcomes, by creating a 'Us' vs. 'Them' framework through moral evaluation and by four different brand activist narratives ('Frontline Activist', 'Collaborator', 'Whistleblower', 'Hidden Activist'). The implications of these findings outline a brand activist discourse in which brands are not mentioning commercial activity. Brand are above all concerned about the activist brand image and undertaking action, which can be interpreted as misleading, since brands are not social movement that act completely selflessly.

7. References

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