

**Corporate Queer Allyship: Legitimacy, storytelling and commodification**

*A Critical Discourse Analysis of 2021 Pride Month Statements*

Student Name: Justin van der Weijde

Student Number: 458561

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Marco Scalvini & Dr. Sven-Ove Horst

Master Media Studies – Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture & Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

April 2022

## ABSTRACT

A major emerging field in marketing and communication studies focuses on the activist nature of brands positioning themselves in public debate by addressing socially controversial issues. Coined as “brand activism,” this trend has the potential to instigate social change, thereby improving corporate reputation and stakeholder perceptions. Vital to authentic brand activism is achieving a cognizance of sound public relations practices that communicate their socio-political position and engage with the targeted audience in an ethical and meaningful fashion. Conversely, theoretical assumptions in the aforementioned fields have pointed towards a dichotomy of altruistic social advocacy and ulterior advancements of organizational interests. Considering the theoretical debate, the current study attempts to investigate how brands strategically communicate social issues through their activist discourse and how that has implications for the broader socio-political arena. The study follows an analytical inquiry into the Pride Month 2021 statements from Forbes’ 200 list of most companies. Since the 1960s, The LGBTQIA+ movement has garnered waves of new activists championing equal rights, visibility, and equity. Coincidentally, this community also represents a consumer segment with increasing numbers of purchasing power and consumer demands. Conversely, companies are aware of this trend and realize that reaching this segment entails embodying core values that the community embraces. As a consequence, this study aims to answer the following research question: *How do companies strategically manage the social issues permeating the LGBTQIA+ community during Pride Month 2021?* The study opts for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the preferred method for analysis. CDA will be used to analyze Pride Month statements that were published on company websites between June 1st and June 30th, 2021. The focal point of the analysis is juxtaposing the company discourse with its broader underlying socio-political implications. Therefore, the dialectical-relational approach of CDA will be utilized, which allows to connect the presentation of social issues with elements of an existing social reality detectable in discourse. In the process, the study aims to unveil the nature of power relations between companies and historically marginalized groups. The results have shown that there is a paradox between company ideology and communicative practice. As a result, although brands exhibit support and allyship, the means to achieve LGBTQIA+ equity is often opportunistic and possesses the general aim to reduce alienating the majority of the LGBTQIA+ community. The analysis identified the main strategy of the humanization of corporate identity, aiming to show allyship with the community while simultaneously improving brand reputation and sales. The findings of the study add to the existing literature by stressing that authentic communication with marginalized publics should be

conducted through a thorough understanding of the diverse needs of the community. The study concludes by providing recommendations on future corresponding research beneficial for PR practitioners, marketers, and communication scholars.

**Keywords:** Brand activism, LGBTQIA+, Public relations, social issues, corporate communication

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for my thesis supervisors Dr. Marco Scalvini and Dr. Sven-Ove Horst. Their unwavering support, patience, and guidance have been instrumental to the completion of this thesis. Furthermore, I would like to thank my mother for her kind words of encouragement and comfort throughout my academic career. Lastly, I would like to thank Wrister Meiresonne and Michiel Mutsaerts for providing a safe and productive workplace amidst a global pandemic.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Contextual background – Origins of the LGBTQIA+ movement.....	7
1.2 Brand activism and LGBTQIA+ community – The Company as a corporate activist. ....	8
1.3 Aim of the research and Research Questions.....	9
1.4 Social relevance.....	10
1.5 Theoretical relevance .....	11
1.6 Thesis overview.....	11
<b>2. Theoretical Literature and Conceptual Framework.....</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Consumer research.....	13
2.2 Brand Activism .....	15
2.3 LGBTQIA+ & PR .....	18
2.4 Conceptual Framework.....	22
The Social Issues Management Model.....	23
<b>3. Methodology.....</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 Research Method .....	25
3.2 Sampling and Data Collection.....	26
3.3 Operationalization .....	28
<b>4. Analysis and Results.....</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1 Definition of issues surrounding LGBTQIA+ community.....	37
4.2 Legitimacy with LGBTQIA+ issues.....	40
4.3 Company as social issue manager.....	47
<b>5. Discussion.....</b>	<b>53</b>
5.1 Addressing the Research Questions .....	53
5.2 Synopsis of Results & Analysis.....	54
5.3 Theoretical Implications.....	54

5.4 Theoretical context .....	56
5.4 Social Implications .....	57
5.5 Limitations and recommendations for further research. ....	58
<i>References</i> .....	60
<i>Appendix A: List of Pride Month 2021 statements</i> .....	68

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Contextual background – Origins of the LGBTQIA+ movement*

The LGBTQIA+ movement was born out of and as a reaction to challenging social conditions and repression (Belmonte, 2020). As of 2019, 123 of the 193 United Nations member states recognize same-sex acts, while the remaining 68 countries penalize the same behavior. Sentences vary between ten years to life imprisonment with 6 countries imposing the death penalty for same-sex acts (Belmonte, 2020). This stark contrast between acceptance and disapproval exemplify LGBTQIA+ advocacy efforts dating from the mid-nineteenth century to present time. Although gradual emancipatory improvement were achieved during this period, the following watershed point in history marked the origins in which the LGBTQIA+ movement grabbed global headlines.

Prior to June 27, 1969, it was quite usual for policemen to raid homosexual bars in New York City and other large cities in the US during the 1960s. Motivations ranged from sanitation and licensing issues to police corruption and anti-gay political incentives (Stein, 2019). But on that same day in the evening, owners and patrons of queer bar “Stonewall Inn” in Greenwich Village were fed up with enduring the demoralizing treatment of law enforcers. Instead, they fought back. Riots ensued throughout the night and marked the start of a turning point in the history of gay liberation movements (Armstrong & Crage, 2006). Although the Stonewall Inn suffered irreparable damages to both the interior and the exterior of the premises, it has sparked a revolution. By 1969, the riots were the precedent for the Gay Liberation Front and the Queens Liberation front in New York. It had mobilized thousands of new activists campaigning for equal rights and gay emancipation. Thus, the LGBT movement was born (Armstrong & Crage, 2006; Stein, 2019).

Almost half a century later, The Stonewall Riots is commemorated annually as the watershed moment of gay activism (Armstrong & Crage, 2006). It has currently materialized in Pride Parade festivities in which the LGBTQIA+ community advocate for visibility, legal rights and social/self acceptability (Tandon & Rao, 2021). Although festivities usually last a few days, the celebration of the LGBTQIA+ community has been extended to the whole month of June in many places worldwide, which is dubbed Pride Month (Tandon & Rao, 2021). This month had first been officially recognized by president Clinton in 1999 and firmly established by

president Obama from 2009 onwards. Pride Month is now a worldwide event, celebrated simultaneously at numerous places (Tandon & Rao, 2021).

Through years of gay activism, perceptions on which orientations and gender identities have broadened. Currently, the gay community is no longer restricted to homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders. When addressing the community, the term that often emerges is *LGBTQIA+*. The acronym functions as an umbrella term for individuals that do not identify with the heteronormative identities and orientation. These include Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual. The “+” symbol encompasses all remainders of diverse sexualities and gender identities (Lewis & Reynolds, 2021). According to a study conducted by the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), LGBTQIA+ inclusion in media and advertising has shown positive results. In general, the non-LGBTQIA+ community is favorable towards increasing representations of LGBTQIA+ in movies, films and advertisements they consume. Moreover, companies who explicitly include the LGBTQIA+ community as a pivotal part in their marketing strategy have contributed to elevated levels of acceptance and opportunities for the community and are generally perceived as approving messages by consumers (GLAAD, 2021).

### *1.2 Brand activism and LGBTQIA+ community – The Company as a corporate activist.*

The concept of brand activism implies that organizations increasingly voice their stance on socio-political and controversial issues in order to meet the expectations of various stakeholders (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Brand activism has become a trend for organizations to distinguish themselves in the marketplace, owing to the belief that consumers view their purchases as an extension of their worldviews (Eyada, 2020). This in turn has created a somewhat perpetual state of constraint for brands to participate in the public debate due to risking estrangement and therefore adhere to expected responses whenever a pressing matter arises (Bhagwat et al, 2020). As Sarkar & Kotler (2018) mentioned, it is not sufficient for brands to internally establish sound and ethical conduct. Instead, it is vital for an organization to communicate how it will ensure that the issues of its consumers are going to be addressed in the present and the future.

Over the course of recent years, brands transformed from being the target of LGBTQIA+ activism to the origin of advocacy (Ball, 2019). For example, multiple corporations voiced their stance on the use of public restrooms by the LGBTQIA+ community, stating that transgenders should be allowed to choose such public places in accordance with their identity and not their assigned birth sex (Zhou, 2021). Between 2015 and 2020, the number of



companies supporting the LGBTQIA+ Equality act has risen from 3 to 260 sponsors. (Human Rights Campaign, 2020). Thus, organizations are subjected to a major emerging trend: the tendency of brands to become zealous corporate activists for the LGBTQIA+ community (Place et al., 2021; Zhou, 2021). The current study contends that core tenets of brand activism, how altruistic its social advocacy might appear, actually achieves the adverse effect when engaging with historically marginalized publics. Scholarship in brand activism within LGBTQIA+ engagement reveals that advocating for social issues is driven by the underlying motivation to increase brand reputation.

### *1.3 Aim of the research and Research Questions*

Considering whether social action of brand activism during Pride Month 2021 can be achieved with discursive strategies, the current study thus aims to provide an assessment of strategic communication of social issues permeating the LGBTQIA+ community. Vital to this evaluation is to discern whether the chosen discursive strategies ethically address said issues while avoiding effects that might compromise its initial intention. The research case focuses on statements published on company websites during Pride Month 2021. The excerpts of these statements will be scrutinized to determine how social advocacy is discursively constructed in organizational communications and its resulting implications.

In congruence with the aforementioned conundrum and contextual background within the LGBTQIA+ community and strategic communication, the following research question is:

*How do companies strategically manage the social issues permeating the LGBTQIA+ community during Pride Month 2021?*

Managing or communicating social issues incorporates multiple approaches. In order to avoid lengthy descriptions of the main research question, three sub-questions have been constructed. These ensure the manageability of the study and guides the research into relevant directions for subsequent observations:

*Sub-question 1: How are LGBTQIA+ issues depicted in strategic communication?*

*Sub-question 2: How do companies legitimize their involvement with LGBTQIA+ rights and issues?*

*Sub-question 3: How do companies communicate their proposed solutions and commitment?*

To analyze the strategic communication of organizations, the focus is on their textual statements/press releases published during Pride Month. These statements exhibit their views on LGBTQIA+ issues such as acceptance and equity and furthermore express how they will manage inequality and visibility through initiatives and proposals. Considering that textual analysis will be the central object of study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the preferred methodology as it can be used to describe and critically reflect upon broader socio-political ramifications in a linguistic context. To make sense of the current phenomenon this way, I will build a theoretical framework that traces our understanding of this topic based on consumer research and brand activism, and connect it to The Social Issues Management model (SIM) proposed by authors Coombs & Holladay (2018). First and foremost, the model clarifies three defining phases of organizations that pertain to the management of social issues: defining the issue, legitimizing their status as a credible entity, and showcasing their prowess to resolve issues. Secondly, these steps suitably align with the established sub-questions. Together, this frame allows gaining a better understanding of how social issues regarding the LGBTQIA+ community are discursively constructed and managed in communication.

#### *1.4 Social relevance*

Brands have become huge cultural icons capable of transforming perspectives and opinions of consumers in society (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Holt, 2003). These have the ability to apply structural change to social issues. Therefore, it is essential for brands to communicate advocacy and activism in a mindful and successive way in order to reach marginalized publics such as the LGBTQIA+ community. Thus, marketers and PR practitioners are required to be cognizant of the evolving nature of consumer demands within the LGBTQIA+ community. The increased levels of skepticism of consumers, the propensity for brands to showcase inconsistency between statements and actions, and insincere understanding of social issues are indicators of a poor relationship between brands and the LGBTQIA+ community (Champlin & Li, 2020). This is especially salient when considering that the LGBTQIA+ community, especially its youth segment, experiences heightened degrees of stressful livelihoods, substance abuse and suicide rates (Woods, Hardman, 2021). Therefore, this study attempts to recommend improvements within the realm of strategic communication with LGBTQIA+ publics, a community that has been maltreated and silenced throughout history.

### *1.5 Theoretical relevance*

Although an observable trend that has garnered a surge in academic interest due to organizational practice (Kotler & Sarkar, 2018) corporate activism remains an emerging field that, up to the present time, has been lacking substantial scholarly contributions. Firstly, this is due to its character of being a novel phenomenon within marketing literature. Secondly, new contributions to the field have tended to rely on specific recent events (Vredenburg et al., 2020). In particular the case of Nike and NFL athlete Colin Kaepernick (Eyada, 2020). Broadening the inquiry from a singular event to a global month of corporate activism will presumably add theoretical substance to the field. Furthermore, the methodology of critical discourse analysis on brand activism has been thinly distributed. The few seminal works focused on discursive strategies include feminist advertising (Sobande, 2019) or the dissection of social media responses to corporate activism (Hoffmann et al., 2020).

A seminal scholarly contribution in LGBTQIA+ communication has been in the field of thematic visual representations of the gay community in product collections (Champlin, Li 2020). Discourse analyses on the community have mostly been computational, neglecting the qualitative contents of corporate discourse and focusing instead on the presence of quantitative content (Zhou, 2021). Furthermore, critical research on specific types of communication approaches has been neglected. Literature highlighting the role of distinct discursive strategies with the LGBTQIA+ community is sparse, with most scholarly attention put on theoretical assumptions on PR strategies that might bear relevancy to LGBTQIA+ engagement. (Spivak, 1990; Cabosky, 2014; Cizek & Pounders; 2020). Few studies have employed those theories in singular contemporary case studies. Therefore, the current study attempts to apply these theories within a practical setting

### *1.6 Thesis overview*

The preceding chapter has illustrated a contextual background surrounding the LGBTQIA+ community, Pride Month, and the theoretical concepts relevant to brand activism. The subsequent chapter will review the theoretical literature, its key contributions to the field of consumer research, brand activism and strategic communications with LGBTQIA+ publics. It will be concluded with a conceptual framework that guides the process of organizations managing social issues of the community. Thereafter, the third chapter will concern itself with the methodological approach. Included in this chapter is the review of the philosophy behind critical discourse analysis, its tools, and analytical framework that are essential for interpreting the findings. The fourth section will provide the analyzed results and will be collocated with relevant

theoretical discussion. Results and theory are linked through examples found in the statements. Excerpts and analysis are freely interchanged in this section. Lastly, the discussion section will put an emphasis on discerning the connection between findings and the research questions, simultaneously revealing social and theoretical implications. Limitations and suggestions for subsequent research will bring the current study to a close.

## 2. Theoretical Literature and Conceptual Framework

The following section starts with providing a theoretical background of consumer research. Specifically, the relationship between brands and consumers is outlined. Subsequently, brand activism as a concept and its theoretical principles are introduced. Following these two sections comes the discussion of the dynamics between strategic communication and the LGBTQIA+ community. The gathered literature in this section presents philosophical motivations for engagement and distinct PR strategies often observed in LGBTQIA+ communications. Lastly, the SIM model is introduced as the conceptual framework. This section explains how the model can serve as a guiding principle for subsequent analysis. The chapter is then briefly summarized.

### *2.1 Consumer research*

This study is broadly embedded in the general tradition of analyzing culture through focusing on practices (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). The ACP is a qualitative approach that sensitizes researchers to understand how marketing communication connects with cultural issues of consumption, brand communities and culture (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). This perspective includes and emphasizes ethnomethodologically informed analysis of everyday discursive practices. Considering that the current study will delve deeper into strategic communication, ACP is an accommodating framework as it underscores how consumers make sense of their life, achieve social order through marketing messaging, and describes ways in which individual experience and social reality are represented (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Furthermore, ACP focuses on material practices; appropriate ways of behaving in particular social settings and situations. The theory assumes that the conduct and meaning attached to social reality are primarily culturally constructed (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

However, viewing consumer research through the lens of a culturally constructed social reality may raise questions on the degree of determinism and autonomy of consumers. For instance, some scholars have viewed it as a zero-sum equation. Either consumers enjoy freedom in their choices or are completely subjected to social circumstances that direct their consumption behavior. Such circumstances may be directed by organizations that desire to influence the arena of consumption (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). This is valid to an extent. However, this notion can be nuanced. According to Moisander & Valtonen (2006), social reality is produced by people through social interaction, but simultaneously that social reality influences and sets the condition for the interaction. In other words, consumers create social circumstances through their agency but social circumstances also inadvertently provide the principles of agency. They are mutually

constitutive and complementary. Thus, consumer research can be considered an interplay and is highly reflexive (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Gubrium & Holstein, 2003).

According to Moisander & Valtonen (2006), every marketplace study is inherently political and applies to both brands and consumers. The former can be viewed as a type of government, acting on behalf of consumers and modifying or steering their behavior. It strives to narrow down the possible field of action of consumers and subsequently discovers the wishes and needs of consumers. It is important to note that perceiving brands as a form of government should not be analyzed as forcing people to purchase a particular product. Instead, it focuses on aligning the often complex subjective tastes of the consumer's lifestyle with products that marketers deem suitable in that framework (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). In terms of consumers, consumption is similarly political and works twofold. First, consumption may act as a form of conscious resistance or demonstration against brands. This occurs when the identity of consumers and brands does not match with each other. As a result, consumers are inclined to take a political and moral stance before purchasing. A common example is boycotting brands that are not sustainable or buycotting, which implies associating solely with brands that completely align with the norms and values held by the consumer. (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Copeland, 2014). Secondly, brands can act as a political authority that assists consumers with their, often unconscious, resistance against the frictions in life. Holt (2003) argued that if the social reality of a consumer does not match with the dominant ideology set by the majority of society (e.g. an LGBTQIA+ individual), consumers tend to turn to brands that provide a refuge for that conundrum. Harley-Davidson for instance gives the consumer the idea that it's not bound to societal demands and requires only the road and a motorcycle to truly express itself (Holt, 2003; Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

In sum, ACP is a theory that underscores socially constructed aspects of consumption and strives to unveil the feelings, thoughts, and views behind consumers and their social reality (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). This theory provides a blueprint for brand activism and how companies give social meaning to the lives of consumers they wish to engage with. First and foremost, the theory introduces the notion that consumption is a complex and increasing political problem rather than an absolute individual choice. Second, it gives insight into how marketers and brands have become a symbol for catering and reshaping the needs of the consumer. This is relevant concerning the current study as recent developments within brand activism have attempted to address the social tension that many minority groups such as LGBTQIA+ communities feel. Lastly, the theory can prove to be a starting point to research the perception and value brands attach to corporate advocacy when engaging with minorities. The

subsequent chapters will discuss relevant theoretical concepts and the conceptual framework for the current study.

## *2.2 Brand Activism*

Brand activism is a marketing tactic for brands that aim to differentiate themselves in a fragmented marketplace. The method relies on taking public stances on social and political issues (Vredenburg et al, 2020). Brand activism is perceived by Sarkar and Kotler (2018) as an evolution beyond the values-driven Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Where CSR relies mainly on integrating responsible business conduct into their core values, brand activism has a core tenet of being driven by a fundamental concern for the most urgent and important issues that contemporary society faces (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018; Eyada, 2020). The incentives for companies embracing brand activism are twofold. On the one hand, brands are cognizant of consumers becoming more belief-driven. Purchasing a product enables consumers to have a voice, make a statement, or exercise power. It is thus an extension of their views, values, and beliefs (Eyada, 2020). On the other hand, companies that abstain from brand activism fail to acknowledge that they exist in a social context in which it has responsibilities towards their environment (Schmidt et al, 2021). Lastly, brands that remain neutral in their stance are often disregarded by the new generation of consumers, who prefer to be identified with socially responsible brands, showcase ethical standards, and are morally superior (Shetty et al, 2019).

However, a substantial part that constitutes the success of brand activism depends on the degree of authenticity of the specific socio-political stance. Vredenburg et al. (2020) stated that a growing body of young consumers believe that brands engage with activism solely as a marketing ploy, thereby treating organizational objectives as the main incentive. As a result, inauthenticity can lead to a negative brand image and boycotting by consumers (Vredenburg et al, 2020; Moorman, 2020; Shetty et al, 2019). There are four defining characteristics for brand activism authenticity. First and foremost, the brand is purpose and values-driven. This entails that, at the core of business conduct, brands want to shift consumer behavior in a direction that is sustainable and advantageous to society (Moorman, 2020; Vredenburg et al, 2020). Second, the brand addresses a controversial and polarizing sociopolitical issue. This is likely to be perceived as authentic because the brand is comfortable with the possibility that it may alienate customers who are not aligned with the stance taken. Third, the issue in question is either progressive or conservative. Thus, brand activism is not limited to certain political ideologies. Lastly, authenticity relies on concrete and consistent messaging and practice. Therefore, it needs to take measurable actions that follow prior statements (Vredenburg et al, 2020). In line with the final

characteristic, the degree of marketing messaging matched with the organizational practice can be further categorized into four spheres of brand activism. It is worthy of mention that the spheres are not mutually exclusive and that in practice brands may occupy more than one sphere simultaneously. The figure below provides an overview of brand activism spheres.



**Figure 2.1**

*The Four Spheres of Brand Activism (Vredenburg et al, 2020).*

The first sphere describes brands in which brand activism is absent. They have yet to take on activist social practices and lack a socio-political purpose and value. Most brands in this category are business-to-business enterprises that are not consumer-oriented (Vredenburg et al, 2020). The second sphere, “Silent brand activism,” involves brands that do indeed incorporate pro-social practice within their core values. However, this group refrains from explicit marketing messaging, thus operating behind the scenes. For this segment, publicizing their activism is highly recommended as it may enhance their brand image (Vredenburg et al, 2020). “Authentic brand activism” is the third category in which brands have a just alignment between purpose and values, activist marketing messaging, and pro-social behavior. (Vredenburg et al, 2020). In addition to being capable of social change, brands that possess this alignment are more likely to achieve high brand equity. This includes favorable consumer perception and lowered perceived risk by consumers when opting for the particular brand (Vredenburg et al, 2020; Shetty et al, 2019). Lastly, “Inauthentic brand activism” represents a segment of brands that have outspoken marketing messaging but are neither purpose nor value-driven or fail to display appropriate



practice. (Vredenburg, et al 2020). With increased transparency on brands, inauthentic brand activism may result in negative consumer perception, boycotting, and loss to brand equity in general (Eyada, 2020; Schmidt et al, 2021; Vredenburg et al, 2020).

Naturally, there does not exist a single, clear conviction on why brands choose to engage with brand activism, nor is there a single pattern to why brands believe they should. However, there are theoretical approaches that attempt to categorize how brands evaluate their position within the spheres of activism. The subsequent section will outline several of these.

### ***Theoretical lenses of brand activism***

The strategies surrounding brand activism have been extensively covered by Moorman (2020). Brands assess their activist role according to seven theoretical lenses which will be outlined hereafter. First, the majority of brands currently choose to refrain from taking a political stance because they fear that it would result in insincere perceptions from their consumers. Therefore, brands believe that they should only be political if they are certain that they can deliver this attitude consistently and genuinely. This is referred to as the “Brand authenticity view” (Moorman, 2020). Authenticity is extremely important as insincerity can result in severe boycotting by consumers (Vredenburg et al, 2020; Eyada, 2020). Another lens revolves around the ‘Corporate Citizen view.’ In this view, brands perceive themselves as if they were political actors, possessing a responsibility towards the world in which they operate. However, this view frequently fails to provide a detailed picture of how to operationalize concretely, resulting in lackluster actions (Moorman, 2020). Therefore, this view often collides with the desire of a growing body of consumers that brands need to implement the strategies they truly can adopt (Kim, 2019; Swaminathan et al., 2020). The “Cultural authority view” has its core tenets in the assumption that companies shape social awareness due to their substantial cultural power (Moorman, 2020). Brands such as Nike and Harley-Davidson have become cultural icons in the everyday lives of consumers and their success is chiefly explained because they touch upon subjects and issues that people deem important and help resolve the tension revolving around these socio-political issues (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Holt, 2003). More opportunistic is the “Calculative view.” This lens strives to attain a positive outcome for brands because their involvement in socio-political issues is reliant on whether it will help them gain a competitive edge in the market (Moorman, 2020). This lens views brand activism as a business strategy and although calculation may yield an enhanced brand image, it is likely to be perceived as inauthentic and inconsistent (Moorman, 2020). The “Brands as educators view” sees brands as teachers that use their marketing expertise to shift consumer preferences for the betterment of

society. This can be done with small adjustments to their products, as well as large-scale marketing campaigns geared towards social change (Moorman, 2020). When a brand has the education role embedded in their core foundation, they have simultaneously embraced the “Political mission view” (Moorman, 2020). For these brands, brand activism is not a marketing tool, nor is it driven by societal demands. Instead, it is their reason for existence (Sarkar and Kotler, 2018; Moorman, 2020). This is the case for Patagonia for example. This clothing brand is political and is, therefore, more often perceived as operating genuinely in social debates (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Moorman, 2020). Lastly, the “Employee Engagement view” operates more internally. It underscores how brand activism can make an organization attractive for prospective employees (Moorman, 2020). This is especially helpful in engaging with a prospective younger workforce as this group attaches importance to occupations that are meaningful and add value to society. (Moorman, 2020). When this view succeeds, the activism exhibited by employees may spill over to consumers, who in turn become brand ambassadors themselves. (Shetty et al., 2019).

The next subsections attempt to provide insights on how activist brands communicate with the LGBTQIA+ segment and how the latter can perceive and engage with activist messaging from brands. It will introduce concepts that will give substance to the discursive practices towards LGBTQIA+ communities.

### 2.3 LGBTQIA+ & PR

#### ***Moral Philosophy & LGBTQIA+ Public Relations***

To better understand the moral implications of this phenomenon, we can enlarge our view and include current understandings of moral philosophy. This is relevant because, according to Place et al. (2021), communication and public relations professionals have an obligation to safeguard equal opportunities for the public to be heard, approved, and ethically engaged. Their study, in combination with other relevant scholarly attention, has reviewed the issues that have long made engagement between companies and communities a disruptive process. Issues such as corporate exploitation (Ciszek & Pounders, 2020), the extensive use of spokespersons (Mundy, 2013), and stereotyping (Ciszek & Pounders, 2020). However, if LGBTQIA+ engagement through messaging is carried out through a normative and philosophical lens, authentic communication can be achieved. When applied to the LGBTQIA+ public, Place et al. (2021) suggest that there are two main approaches. First is the consequentialist approach. This view is defined by the belief that communication should be

centered around achieving the best outcome for the majority of an audience. When applied to LGBTQIA+ engagement, it entails discursive strategies aimed to treat the community as a singular entity and therefore attempting to address the most issues that the group is trying to face without causing any unnecessary harm. (Place et al., 2021). In practice, this view suffers from the neglect of acknowledging the LGBTQIA+ community as a minority, thereby not appropriately serving its variety of needs. Additionally, by serving the interests of the majority, values such as personal autonomy and individual rights that are central to the struggle for recognition are not being focused on (Place et al., 2021).

In contrast, the deontological approach is characterized by underscoring the need to view ethical engagement from the individual, autonomous perspective. It relies on eliminating bias in ethical decision-making by avoiding serving the self-interest of the entity engaging with the minority (Place et al., 2021). When applied to LGBTQIA+ engagement, methods are geared towards radical equality, entailing that engagement is obligated to operate from within the needs and wants of the community. In other words, communication professionals envision themselves in the position of the minority public.

However, it should be noted that the two normative approaches are not mutually exclusive. Communication professionals often are bound to factors that influence their ethical decision-making. For instance, economic incentives may render communication to still follow a utilitarian approach, thereby resorting to stereotyping the queer community to achieve beneficial organizational outcomes (Eagle et al., 2020; Place et al., 2021).

### ***Strategic Corporate Communication & LGBTQIA+ community***

Ciszek & Pounders (2020) have researched core components that constitute authentic and thus successful communication with the LGBTQIA+ community. First, the most proficient brands are those who display social proficiency. This is explained as the organizational cognizance of developing content that truly resonates with the minority community that it attempts to address by communicating effectively and stating genuine commitment. Core strategies in this concept revolve around acknowledging societal and political pressures that are inherent to the realities of LGBTQIA+ members such as the history of suppression, institutional violence, and systemic erasure of the community. (Ciszek & Pounders, 2020). Furthermore, companies communicate their historical prologue which concerns itself with explaining why the companies feel comfortable advocating for the community and how their competencies and resources have made an impact in the past and will continue to do so in the future. (Ciszek & Pounders; 2020). Lastly, the study has revealed that organizations who display a consonance in

their messaging, a proven track record of internal and external communication on equity, messaging is better aligned with an organization's behavior. (Ciszek & Pounders, 2020).

Although brands have realized the importance of authentic engagement with the LGBTQIA+ community, the former has relied on commodification and standardization of the latter that directs their communication strategies. The most salient of these actions are further elaborated in the sections below.

### ***Queer PR Strategies***

A salient feature of LGBTQIA+ public relations is the numerous strategies communication professionals make use of. For instance, large companies have the aptitude to select pieces of information they deem essential and subsequently emphasize that importance through the volume in their communicating texts (Cabosky, 2014). It thus creates a central organizing idea on how society should perceive an issue which is also referred to as framing or agenda building (Cabosky, 2014). Furthermore, queer PR strategies have traditionally relied on the formulation of strong binaries that exemplify power imbalances (Cabosky, 2014; Stein & Plummer, 1994). Communication professionals have often conceptualized the LGBTQIA+ community as the 'other' community, resulting in the view that they are different and should be treated in that manner accordingly (Stein & Plummer, 1994). The construction of binaries has similar implications for the semiotic aspect of queer PR. In essence, it produces a discursive practice that is often reliant on employing equality-themed language (Cabosky, 2014; Champlin & Li, 2020). The strategy employs universal words of acceptance and empowerment in PR, emphasizing the importance of the LGBTQIA+ community possessing an equal power position as the dominant one in society. Cabosky (2014) argues that this yields two beneficial outcomes. At first, majority audiences will understand equality-themed language as a means to provide insight into the difficulties that minorities experience, coincidentally increasing sympathy and solidarity for advocacy. Secondly, minority audiences will feel that their needs are recognized (Cabosky, 2014; Champlin & Li, 2020). Nevertheless, it produces a negative repercussion. It allows for corporate activist discourse to become the victim of strategic essentialism. Initially introduced by Spivak (1990), the concept's core tenets rest on the assumption that a minority group will be stereotyped and 'essentialized' to better achieve goals of accelerated acceptance and equality. LGBTQIA+ communication also includes practices that suggest corporate exploitation of the LGBTQIA+ community Champlin & Li (2020) define rainbow washing as "a brand's use of LGBTQ symbols to only signal their support through advertising, without engaging in further support of this community or their rights." These are often displayed in specific sets of products

that feature colorful arrangements attempting to symbolize the diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community (Pounders & Mabry-Flynn, 2016).

### ***Intersectionality***

In queer PR, intersectionality refers to “the recognition of multiple interlocking identities that are defined in terms of relative socio-cultural power and privilege and shape people’s individual and collective identity and experiences” (Parent et al., 2013). Scholarship on the field has noted the difficulties about the neglect of intersectionality within campaign messaging and strategy, (Vardeman et al., 2013; Vardeman & Sebesta, 2020). Communication professionals have relied on ‘sociological othering.’ The concept indicates that, when dominant groups opt to research or help a subdominant group with fewer resources and power, the latter is formulated as an entity according to the held norms of the dominant group (Vardeman et al., 2013). What ensues is the maintenance of power relationships and a minority community prioritized according to the organization’s strategic value, with the needs of the minority frequently unaccommodated. (Vardeman et al., 2013). Studies have suggested that PR practitioners may benefit from more localized messaging and explicit reflection on their intersectionality within their organizational composition and messaging (Vardeman & Sebesta, 2020). Issues with intersectionality also occur with the term itself. According to Parent et al. (2013), using an acronym to describe the LGBTQIA+ community is inherently problematic. Such terms may indeed still exclude certain minorities and make no difference between sexual orientation (L for lesbian G for Gay) and gender identity (T for Transsexual and multiple gender identities within Bisexual people). As a result, the conceptualization of the community in communication research has had the intrinsic trait of curtailing the diversity of the group in favor of elementary collective labeling (Parent et al., 2013).

### ***Corporate storytelling***

Corporate storytelling is the act of employing a narrative device from within the company that relates to its workforce, practices policies, and mission to convincingly engage with staff (Gill, 2015). According to Gill (2011), Storytelling as a PR device is a significant resource to instigate social change and can be viewed as a substantial contributor to building belief in the brand internally and enhancing reputation externally. Furthermore, public relations practitioners have viewed storytelling as serving the role of building better civil societies and influencing how society considers the world around them (Kent, 2015). When applied to the LGBTQIA+ community, corporate storytelling might achieve resonance through the identification narrative.

As proposed by Kent (2015), identification occurs when an account bears resemblance with another individual or excludes any similarities, thereby emphasizing difference. One of the main rhetorical strategies within identification is “antithesis” in which there are clear mentions of elements that are commonly shared (Kent, 2015). Taking into account there currently exists a trend in public relations utilizing LGBTQIA+ members as spokespersons for social advocacy and increased representation in media (Mundy, 2013; Eagle et al., 2020), its application during Pride Month is a field of study that is worthy of further exploration.

### ***Empathy in PR***

Empathy in the context of PR is based on the notion of providing an “atmosphere of support and trust that must exist if the dialogue is to succeed” and is vital in engaging with the designated public. (Yeomans, 2016). The use of empathy in PR has been in a contested realm. In terms of ethical soundness, staunch opponents have viewed the utilization of empathy as problematic, suggesting that empathy can be used as “surface acting” in which the practitioner shows the appropriate demeanor towards the other individual as desirable in a designated situation. Because of the distinct situation, empathy might not be perceived as sincere but rather as opportunistic. (Yeomans, 2016). Other scholars have pointed out that, even in situations where genuine empathy has been exhibited, a form of egocentric bias might be present, which is fueled by communicating what the audience would have liked to hear in a given situation (Coplan, 2011; Yeomans, 2016). It is also viewed as morally questionable if “intentional” empathy occurs. The problem exists when a PR practitioner, by shifting the perspective with another individual, is comfortable with giving opinions and showing empathy. This undermines the agency of the individual by replacing it with the agency of one of the communicators. To put succinctly, intentions for empathy may be benevolent but do not immediately entail that the communicator is at liberty to fully decide what is in the best interest is for the intended audience. (Goldie, 2011; Yeomans, 2016).

### ***2.4 Conceptual Framework***

The conceptual framework that will be utilized to guide and direct the analysis of data is the social issues management model (SIM). Constructed by Coombs & Holladay (2018), the model delineates how organizations involve themselves in social issues. A company’s eligibility for SIM is based primarily on two factors. First is the participation in social issues by publicly expressing their perspective. Secondly, a company makes an effort in influencing stakeholders and consumers to adopt or embrace that worldview (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). The act of

issuing Pride Month statements is matching with the two requirements. Furthermore, taking into account that brand activism equally concerns itself with fundamental socio-political issues (Sarkar & Kotler, 2018), SIM is thus deemed analogous with the previously stated theory. However, the model further elaborates by producing a framework on how companies communicate such worldviews to the public sphere.

### *The Social Issues Management Model*

Three concepts constitute SIM. Initially, companies seek to identify a social issue and subsequently find ways to voice and define the issue. This strategy of definition reflects a company's overall attitude towards and its answer to the specific issue. Furthermore, defining an issue helps an organization to remain resolute in what they deem the central problem, thereby striving to achieve lucid and consistent communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Secondly, and most importantly, establishing legitimacy is a fundamental driver for the actions and involvement in social issues. It helps justify the company's attachment to the issue, present the issue as worthy of concern, and legitimize their actions to be consistent with their responsibility and functionality towards society (Coombs & Holladay, 2018; Boyd, 2000). However, it should be noted that communicating legitimacy should coincide with pre-established norms or experiences with the issue being discussed. For example, an issue such as inclusivity is predominantly a welcoming value for society. But if not compatible with current or past policies that are associated with inclusivity, the company may be at risk of suffering legitimacy and authenticity. (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). That principle similarly complies with the theoretical lenses of brand activism of Vredenburg et al. (2020) and Moorman (2020).

In the event of companies succeeding in demonstrating their responsibility and identification of the given cause, the final phase of raising public awareness of the firm's actions is initiated. This phase sees the company as a social issue manager and is characterized by strategically communicating the adopted policies and information to stakeholders. It provides the opportunity to remind the public of their long-standing support with the issue and their continuous forthcoming commitments (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Furthermore, brands seek to bring in to play their plea for support and generate pressure for social change. Consumers and relevant communities in turn attempt to confront the stance of a company, pointing out possible discrepancies between words and actions. In the interest of the company, such organizational threats to legitimacy have to be managed and minimized.

In sum, the SIM model stipulates that defining the social issue, establishing legitimacy, and transmitting efforts are the elements that amount to the strategic communication process of an

organization. Therefore, a corporate statement on a social issue is, to a greater extent, a procedure that has multiple ulterior properties that makes it an intricate form of communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2018).

### ***Chapter Summary***

This chapter commenced with a review of consumer research and brand activism. Subsequently, the literature in which, the moral philosophy of PR, its relationship with the LGBTQIA+ community, and the distinct discursive strategies employed to safeguard authentic strategic communication were reviewed. The theory reveals that communication practitioners have a wide array of strategies at their disposal. However, applying that to strategic communication with minority communities is a difficult task due to the importance of remaining politically and morally correct. The chapter culminated with the introduction of the conceptual SIM framework which, in conjunction with prior established corporate activist literature, serves as the foundation for subsequent analysis.



### 3. Methodology

#### *Chapter Overview*

The following chapter will introduce Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the most suitable method of the current research. First, the core tenets of the method will be explained. Second, the motivation behind the sampling choices and data will be provided. Subsequently, the third section will outline the operationalization and the analytical course of action. The final section will briefly summarize the chapter.

#### *3.1 Research Method*

The current research will employ CDA to study public statements from brands engaging with the LGBTQIA+ community during Pride Month 2021. CDA emphasizes researching discourse as a product of existing social and power structures (Fairclough, 2013). On the one hand, CDA describes and assesses social realities in discourse and whether they match up with the dominant ideology and fundamental beliefs held by society (Fairclough, 2013). On the other hand, the method further attempts to elaborate on these social realities, deciphering how they are the effect of broader institutional processes. (Fairclough, 2013). This study addresses brands their communication of pertinent social issues through zooming in on semiotics and language, I will connect this frame by using CDA and its inherent qualitative features that are congruous with the central objective. In addition, CDA expands on other modes of qualitative inquiry, such as the similar-appearing textual analysis. Although the latter equally concerns itself with social meanings reproduced through language, the former underscores possible issues of power relations, exploitations, and structural inequalities visible in discourse. Said concepts are salient in regards to communication and engagement with historically marginalized groups such as the LGBTQIA+ community (Ciszek & Pounders, 2020; Place et al., 2021).

Therefore, the current study needs to be cognizant of how elements of social reality are related to corporate discourse. Therefore, the study will operate according to the dialectical reasoning form of CDA, proposed by Fairclough (2018). In essence, the premise to this approach to CDA consists of analyzing practical argumentation in a given discourse. It stipulates four steps that connect presentation, explanation, and solutions. First, it describes a social wrong and its current state of affairs. Secondly, discourse explains the wrong as a result of elements within an existing social reality. Afterward, it proposes that discourse provides an alternative reality as an end goal and concludes with advocating action on how to resolve the issue for the greater interest of society (Fairclough, 2018; Fairclough, 2008). Crucial to the understanding of this method is to understand that social reality and discourse are in constant interaction with

each other. Language defines the options that discourse has at its disposal, resulting in a practical selection of what is deemed appropriate and unsuitable in expression (Fairclough, 2018).

Understanding the constructed meaning of the reciprocation between social reality and Pride Month discourse is the analytical aim of the current research. To research in what manner corporate discourse expresses their involvement with the LGBTQIA+ community through a selection of terms has implications for strategic communication. Possible outcomes may hint at a dichotomy between genuine advocacy or, albeit unconsciously, “The effective self-identification of subordinate groups with goals and values of the dominant group” (Mumby, 1989 pp. 302).

### *3.2 Sampling and Data Collection*

Eleven corporate textual statements were consulted in this current research. The first criterion consisted of publishing dates. Data was taken into account if they were published between June 1st and July 1st on their online channels. The period covers the period in which Pride Month occurs globally, and is, therefore, the most auspicious and expected moment to issue corporate statements on LGBTQIA+ equity. Furthermore, it was required that statements were publicly available for the public to refer to. Thus, statements had to be present on company websites and it had to be made explicit that it concerned a form of communication with Pride Month as the primary subject matter. Extensive reading was sometimes required as a few statements refrained from explicitly including “Pride Month” in the title. Moreover, in line with Moisander & Valtonen (2006) and Holt (2003) who argued that brands are cultural icons who can aid consumers with making sense of social realities, the brands consulted hailed from the Forbes 200 most valuable brands list. Published yearly, it features the top 100 organizations based on revenue during the fiscal year of 2019 (Forbes, 2021). Selecting from this register would most likely have ensured that brands with the most substantive socio-cultural capital will be featured. In addition, these global organizations have a higher probability of possessing accessible content platforms that are regularly updated. Lastly, the procedure for sampling was based on purposive and required criteria. In terms of the latter, texts were required to contain the issue of LGBTQIA+ empowerment, the organization’s legitimacy regarding the issue, and the organization its authorization to resolve that issue

With regards to the textual contents of the statements, attention was given to entries that contained rich descriptions of the social issues pervading the LGBTQIA+ community and also demonstrated a diverse set of discursive strategies. This entails that the contents of the consulted texts had to be consistent with the theory in the literature review. However, this study is furthermore cognizant that the amount of selected texts has implications for the methodological

soundness. Practical constraints, such as time, made achieving quantitative sufficiency, which enabled a more detailed analysis, unattainable. Notwithstanding the limitation, the approach agrees with the notion that qualitative research aims to contribute to a development of an understanding and therefore, find the relevant materials that are deemed necessary to make the observational ability of the researcher come into fruition (Brennen, 2017).

To avoid homogeneity in the data analysis and results, the current study selected statements from a wide array of industries. In the final sample, 11 statements were selected, ranging from companies in the field of apparel and tech to consumer packaged goods and transportation. The diversity in industries might yield insights on how organizations, that are not traditionally associated with LGBTQIA+ engagement, approach strategic communication. Therefore, it can reaffirm the tradition of advocacy in powerhouses such as Nike (Moorman, 2020) or challenge that belief. Lastly, the study searched for diversity in genres. These were predominantly press releases from newsrooms, blogs from employees, and Pride Month product releases. The table below provides an overview of the 11 exemplary texts.

**Table 3.1**

*Overview of selected Pride Month 2021 statements for Research Sample*

Title	Company	Industry	Date Published
<i>"Introducing Inclusive Health: Meeting the Health Care Needs of our LGBTQ+ Associates."</i>	Walmart	Retail	June 28, 2021
<i>"The 2021 Be True Collection Brings the Energy, One Story (and Patch) at a Time."</i>	Nike	Apparel	June 4, 2021
<i>"Verizon partners with Encircle to build tech spaces for LGBTQ+ youth."</i>	Verizon	Telecommunications	June 9, 2021
<i>"Pride In the Name of Love: Finding Strength to Come Out at Work and Inspire Others."</i>	General Electric	Diversified	June 29, 2021
<i>"H&amp;M Goes Beyond The Rainbow With Emotional, Tech-Driven Pride Campaign."</i>	H&M	Apparel	June 1, 2021
<i>"Microsoft celebrates Pride by centering on intersectionality, donating to LGBTQ+ non-profits and releasing the largest and most inclusive product lineup."</i>	Microsoft	Tech	June 1, 2021
<i>"Forward With Pride: Celebrating and Elevating LGBTQ+ Voices."</i>	Facebook	Tech	June 1, 2021
<i>"Viktor&amp;Rolf Partners With GLAAD To Amplify The Voices of the LGBTQIA+ Community."</i>	L'Oreal	Consumer Packaged Goods	June 15, 2021
<i>"Gap Inc. Celebrates Pride 2021."</i>	Gap	Apparel	June 4, 2021
<i>"Professional and personal intersections."</i>	UPS	Transportation	June 18, 2021

<i>"Finding new ways to show pride."</i>	Chase Bank	Financial	June, 2021
<i>"The 'Love Unites' 2021 Pride Collection: A Celebration of the Love That Connects Us All."</i>	Adidas	Apparel	May 14, 2021

### 3.3 Operationalization

The operationalization of the current study draws upon the SIM model provided by authors Coombs & Holladay (2018). The core tenets of SIM functions as a framework in which the strategic communication practices from brands can be scrutinized and analyzed. The following table shows the three phases relating to managing social issues. Brief examples are given from the Pride Month statement of Chase Bank (2021).

**Table 3.2**

#### *Social Issues Management Operationalization*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Illustration</b>
Social issue	A conundrum that grapples society and contains social and political implications	Companies highlight the social issue, and in the process gather support through their chosen definition. Furthermore, identifying issues enhances its corporate allyship.	<i>"And, around the world, the pandemic also threatened LGBT+ freedoms. In many communities and homes, bullying and harassment increased, and many countries that persecute LGBT+ people stepped up their attacks."</i>
Company as issue manager	An organization seeks to engage with the issue by advocating certain perspectives on the subject	Companies legitimize their position for authentic advocacy	<i>"The bank has been a strong supporter of NYC's Pride for over 15 years."</i>
Proposal for action	The mode of operation that expresses the solution to the issue and illustrates what means are necessary to achieve a desired end goal.	Companies communicate their suggested actions and how it benefits the target group and the larger society.	<i>"In honor of 2021's Pride, the branch launched "Sounds of Pride," an interactive art installation that highlights the voices and stories of LGBT people from around the world."</i>

### ***Research questions***

In order to ensure further in depth-analysis, the current study will attempt to give substance to three sub-research questions. This creates structure during the analysis and addresses the multiple aspects embodied within the main research question. The three questions will correspond to the three phases in the SIM model:

Sub-question 1: How is LGBTQIA+ equality depicted in strategic communication?

Organizations engage with social issues that they deem beneficial for their reputation towards stakeholders. The definition of the issue occurs in multiple ways: through semiotic analysis of language but also how the organization positions themselves vis-à-vis the issue.

Sub-question 2: How do companies legitimize their involvement with LGBTQIA+ rights?

As soon as the reason for communicative engagement is stated (sub-question 1), the SIM model proposes that companies legitimize themselves in order to show proficiency and capability as issue managers. The question concerns itself with the expression of corporate character and whether that aligns with taking a public stance on the issue.

Sub-question 3: How do companies communicate their proposed solutions and commitment?

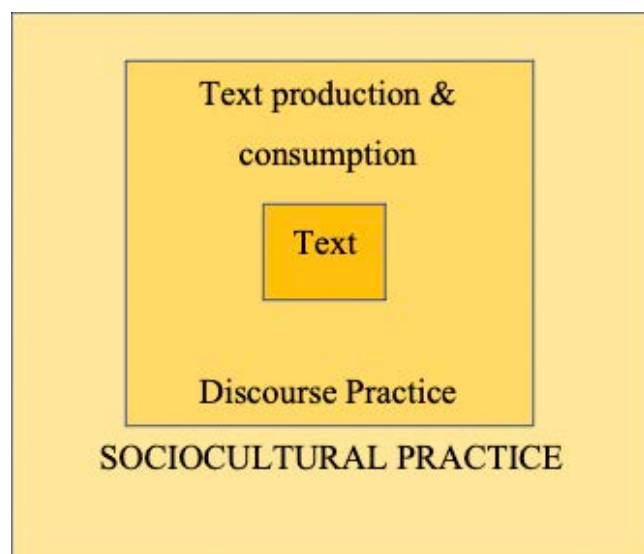
The last sub-question deals with the suggested actions in alleviating the LGBTQIA+ community. This question attempts to unveil the discursive strategies that materialize in concrete measures. It aims to dissect the relationship between discourse and substantial elements of social life. To put succinctly, discourse analysis reveals how companies set the solutions in motion and how that could impact society.

### ***Analytical framework***

The preferred structure for systematic analysis is the framework proposed by Fairclough (1993). The framework consists of three dimensions relating to legitimacy, identification, and representation. The first dimension concerns itself with how text is used in a linguistic context and how it motivates certain communicative strategies. Second is the discourse practice which revolves around how a text may be consumed by its target audience and what level of interpretation by this group occurs. It furthermore seeks to analyze what the relationship is between communicative events and the discourses that help structure these events. Last, is the sociocultural dimension. It is the culmination of the first two dimensions and seeks to determine the text its position in the “wider frame of society and culture” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 62).

**Figure 3.1**

*Three-dimensional CDA framework*



Adapted from *Media Discourse* (p. 59), N. Fairclough, 1995.

A principal reason for the choice of three dimensional framework rests on its synthesis with the SIM model (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Where the SIM model provides structure for analyzing what companies strategic processes are in discourse, Fairclough's model adds tangible steps that define exactly how text and larger socio-cultural processes make social issues management achievable. The following section will discuss these dimensions extensively.

### ***Text***

Paramount to the first dimension is the close inspection of linguistics. These include the analysis of vocabulary, grammar, and the forms of sentences. It further elaborates on the connection between sentences. According to Fairclough (1995), solely dissecting an isolated piece of text based on perceivable forms is impractical due to the notion that deeper meanings are inherent to every piece of text. Therefore a sound textual analysis should be based on three premises. Texts should be viewed as ideational in the sense that certain representations are marked with ideological undertones. The textual analysis is also required to focus upon multiple identities within a text. The construction of identities of writers and readers, their status, and roles in the given context are crucial parts of the investigation. Lastly, the relationship between writer and reader and the tone to express that reveals the formality. It articulates particular interpersonal agreements between the two audiences (Fairclough, 1995). With this in mind, the

textual dimension thus seeks to determine both observable, as well as subdued forms of representations and legitimacy.

### ***Discourse practice***

Production and interpretations (consumptions) of a text are essential concepts during discourse practice. Its main function is to identify the motivation behind text production and how it could be perceived. (Fairclough, 1995). The discourse practice is guided by two main considerations: interdiscursivity and intertextuality. The former relates to the diversity of styles and genres within a given text and seeks to question how they relate with each other.

Furthermore, interdiscursivity concerns itself with the distinctive identity of a text. According to Fairclough (2003), discourses contain different linguistic tendencies that assign it a special character which in turn constitute a newly constructed meaning. Therefore, the current study aims to unveil how different narrative styles within a single text can contribute to a system of ideas and beliefs.

Intertextuality refers to the incorporation of other external discourses into the original text. It seeks to determine the volume of other sources of information that are used as an integral part of the original discourse (Fairclough, 2003). References, quotes, and other exterior narratives are significant indicators of intertextuality. Considering that PR often employs spokespersons to amplify legitimacy (Mundy, 2013), it is worth exploring if intertextuality applies to Pride Month 2021 statements.

### ***Sociocultural practice***

The previous two dimensions constitute the analysis of sociocultural practice. Distinctive to this part is that analysis is now concerned with whether the text is embedded in a wider ideological perspective. The levels of perspective may vary from a situational event to fitting in a broader frame of culture and society (Fairclough, 1995). Understanding the level of perspective that is provided in a given text is crucial as it sheds light on how particular events related to the structure of habits, attitudes, and beliefs. When applied to the current study, it aims to abstract the discourses from corporate activism from its original situational context to see if it matches up with larger sentiments such as ideology, power, culture, and identity in regards to the LGBTQIA+ community.

### ***Analysis step-by-step***

With the aforementioned methodological elements considered, the procedure for analyzing the data consisted of combining the components into a coherent framework for analysis. However, during the analytical process, certain obstructions transpired. For instance, texts that were deemed sufficiently analyzed proved to be worthy of further consideration when subsequent texts yielded equally relevant results and therefore added more meaning. Thus, analysis followed the notion of researcher reflexivity as proposed by Wodak & Meyer (2001). Essential to reflexivity is the dynamic re-evaluation of the statements, gathering new perspectives and applying them again in subsequent interpretations. The initial gathering of suitable data occurred during the end of June. Several companies issued statements after the Pride Month timeline which showed relevance to the analysis. However, considering time constraints and the focus on how companies engage with LGBTQIA+ publics exclusively during Pride Month, these were excluded from the preliminary examination.

After determining the final selection of texts, the texts were read in an open-ended manner, first annotating keywords and sentences that were deemed relevant to theory. Afterward, more detailed observations of the text were succinctly provided. These served as concise abstracts that were used to compare several texts and thereby discern overarching themes and repeated patterns of meaning. The following phase consisted of a deep analysis of all the content within a given text. Particular attention was given to the subtleties of words, discovering possible ulterior implications and objectives of phrases and expressions. Another comparison between the texts ensued after the in-depth analysis and resulted in newfound common occurrences that constituted to general themes of Pride Month 2021 discourse. It also helped identify several types of discourses that were prevalent in the intended communicative strategy, such as storytelling and historical commitment. This in turn revealed ideological narratives that pointed towards societal implications regarding corporate activist discourse during Pride Month. Structures of unequal power dynamics, opportunism, and an overall discrepancy between authentic communication and social reality.

### ***Reflecting on Quality Criteria in Cultural Research***

It is important to note that qualitative research methods are not free from criticism. To better understand the quality of this research, I will reflect upon the meaning of quality criteria based on Moisander & Valtonen (2006) and other writings on qualitative research. In general, qualitative studies rely on the interpretation competencies of the researcher, its familiarity with the research field, and data handling (Brennen, 2017). Furthermore, results in qualitative research



are subject to a continuous review of the consulted data. This process can result in a convenient preference of which data aligns with the scope of the study (Brennen, 2017). Notwithstanding, it does raise questions of subjectivity. However, this study finds that qualitative research should aim for a constructivist understanding of realities. According to Golafshani (2003), the constructivist approach sees the accumulation of knowledge as socially constructed which is contingent on the circumstances. Its ultimate aim is to “engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features” (Johnson, 1995, p. 4). Moreover, the current study is cognizant of some problematic features of CDA. For example, the practice of CDA has been scrutinized as being inherently complex due to its dependence on expressing adequate justification of observations, which reduces objectivity (Breeze, 2011). Furthermore, CDA falls prey to researchers presenting results that they expected to find beforehand (Stubbs, 1997) and that analysis is merely suggestive, never explicit, and is frequently bound to be politically correct in its expression. (Stubbs, 1997; Fowler, 1996). Conversely, staunch proponents of CDA, particularly Fairclough (2003), have stressed that CDA is principally a means to discover a given understanding of a given social reality. Fairclough (2003), acknowledges that perceptions of reality are not infallible, thereby emphasizing that seeking a general truth is never the objective of the research. The experience of reality differs per individual and therefore, analysis of discourse is by nature subjective (Fairclough, 2003). In sum, the methodological soundness of CDA and qualitative research, in general, is based on the researchers' understanding of its inherent limitations. Therefore, this study attempts to establish a systematic and transparent approach prior to analysis. Simultaneously, the chosen method offers opportunities for the study of social realities. It produces a unique insight into the livelihoods of distinct groups of society.

In terms of quality, Moisander & Valtonen (2006) and Silverman (1998) propose that analytic depth stands at the base of sound qualitative research. Academic research in cultural marketing and consumer disciplines are inherently based on the co-creation of meaning behind social phenomena. It challenges conventional epistemological views of observation and empirical testing. Therefore, it becomes difficult task to establish trustworthiness of qualitative studies (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Nevertheless, this research will attempt to address the questions pertaining to validity, reliability, and generalization and how it applies to the current study.

At face value, validity and cultural research appear to be incompatible with each other, with the former determined by accurately depicting the truth of social phenomena and the latter bound to assertions that are constructed culturally and are therefore always subject to interpretation (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006; Hammersley, 1987). Although the practice of CDA

requires a thorough analysis of discourse and helps obtain a degree of intellectual rigor, it is by no means a certainty that it coincides with an increase in validity. However, attaining a universal truth in cultural research is equally problematic as it ignores the intricacies and importance of a given social reality and context. Specifically, it would suggest that the LGBTQIA+ community and Pride Month are phenomena that are part of a wider fragmented and truthless social reality, which contributes to a scientific and cultural apathy.

The main strategy therefore is to add heightened degrees of broadness, scientific rigor, and complexity to the inquiry. By ensuring the variety of Pride Month statements, originating from diverse industries and narrative devices, the study aims to achieve the proposed strategy and simultaneously enhance the degree of validity. In sum, the main methodological goal in terms of validity is to add to the public debate by offering new perspectives on LGBTQIA+ marketing communication, pursuing a contribution to current cultural dialogues within marginalized communities. Validity, in this sense, requires to initiate further implications and recommendations for society and not strive for an objective truth (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

Reliability revolves around the degree of independence of findings within a research and how unforeseen circumstances can affect its production (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). The present study is cognizant that future research in a similar field can yield different results, thereby undermining the degree of replicability which is required for drawing sound conclusions. However, the inherent trait of cultural research builds on the notion that it is contextual and bound to specific factors applicable to the study in question (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Applying this to qualitative cultural research necessitates a transparency in methodological processes preceding the findings section. The current study strives to achieve this by disclosing the particular methodological approach from author Norman Fairclough. The procedure is not presented as the exclusive approach required for unveiling socio-cultural implications in discourse. Rather, it provides a methodological option for future research and subsequently serves as a quality measurement of the study. In a similar vein, the study aims for theoretical transparency, to ensure that findings follow logically from pre-established theoretical frameworks, omitting possible conjecture from the researcher that compromises the reliability and quality of the study. According to Moisander & Valtonen (2006), reliability increases if research occurs systematically and attentively. Therefore, the current study consistently juxtaposes analyses with data excerpts to avoid that evaluators fail to grasp a logical deduction from phenomenon (the text) to conclusion (social reality).

Lastly, generalization has an effect on quality assessment in cultural marketing research. In general, results are valid when they can be applied to other contextual phenomena (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). However, the present qualitative inquiry, as opposed to the majority of quantitative studies, focuses on a sample too marginal for an accurate representation of larger demographics. According to Alasutaari (1996), generalizability in qualitative studies are not concerned with interpreting and understanding a specific historical context and extracting meaning that is relevant for the members in the specific culture. Therefore, in terms of strategic communication with the LGBTQIA+ community, it would not be deemed necessary to establish that the LGBTQIA+ community has increasingly become a pivotal consumer segment for brands as that belief has been generally confirmed (GLAAD, 2021). Instead, this cultural qualitative inquiry sets out to focus on how communication with LGBTQIA+ community is represented, transformed and contested in daily life, rather than researching the degree of widespread occurrence.

### ***Chapter Summary***

This section has provided a description of CDA, the chosen methodology for the current study. It has furthermore, motivated the choice behind sampling, data collection, and provided analytical frameworks and models that serve as the foundation for analysis, concluded by offering on the ethical implications of CDA. The subsequent section delineates the results.

## 4. Analysis and Results

### *Chapter overview*

The following section consists of the principal results that the CDA method has revealed from the corporate Pride Month statements. The subsections are divided into 3 main parts with respective subsections corresponding to the research questions. In general, distinctive themes were observed in the corporate statements, with relevant subsections corresponding to the three discursive constructs of the SIM model proposed by Coombs & Holladay (2018).

**Table 4.1**

*Results incorporated with SIM model (Coombs & Holladay, 2018).*

<u>Discursive Construct</u>	<u>Types of Meaning</u>	<u>Primary macro-strategies</u>	<u>Discursive strategies</u>	<u>Legitimation function</u>
Defining the social issue	Representation	Demonstrating Support Humanization of corporate identity	Acknowledgement Education Ideological narrative empathy	Urgency of instigating social change Agenda setting
Legitimacy	Authorization	Self-Justification	Historical commitment Tokenism Corporate storytelling Anti commodification	Authority to involve itself in the issue
Company as issue manager	Justification	Commodification Humanization of corporate identity	Rainbow washing Commodification Donations Initiatives Partnerships	Justification of company being a competent driver for social issues

#### *4.1 Definition of issues surrounding LGBTQIA+ community*

Findings in the following section exhibit the overall tendency of brands to define the social issues that permeate the LGBTQIA+ community. Organizations demonstrate solidarity and understanding in their discourse. Issues experienced by the LGBTQIA+ community are defined mostly by purpose and value-driven semantics that acknowledge the issues provide urgency to the problem and educate the reader.

#### ***Offering Acknowledgement***

The corporate statements frequently display a recognition of pressing matters pertaining to the everyday lives of the LGBTQIA+ community as a discursive strategy. By utilizing this device, brands attempt to solidify their consciousness and involvement with the community. Thus, it secures the connection with a historically marginalized group whose desires and needs have been routinely muted and ignored. To illustrate with an excerpt of Microsoft:

Excerpt 1:

“LGBTQI+ communities represent a large group of people whose experiences vary and intersect across different cultures, regions, races, ethnicities, faiths and more.”

Excerpt 2:

“As we strive for a more equitable future for all, we cannot offer one-size-fits-all solutions.”

This sentiment recognizes the intricacies of the LGBTQIA+ community. Here, equity is a goal that requires the treatment of LGBTQIA+ not as a single market segment with one universal dilemma that can easily be resolved, but as a community that is both diverse in group composition as how it experiences individual problems. Microsoft expands on this:

Excerpt 3:

“LGBTQI+ communities represent a large group of people whose experiences vary and intersect across different cultures, regions, races, ethnicities, faiths and more.”

Microsoft presents a cultivated statement that appears to be sensitive to a wide array of relevant issues. Thus, such sentiment evokes empathy and aids corporate activism engage in a meaningful and legitimate way due to the circumvention of perceiving the LGBTQIA+ public as a collective

with a single desire. On the other hand, such statements often seem to distance the company from the group it seeks to address as the exhaustive and all-encompassing list tries to reach as many profiles as possible. Therefore, such universal statements have the propensity to diminish and downplay particular issues inherent to the LGBTQIA+ community.

### *Creating Urgency*

The significance of given issues are communicated by defining it as a grave problem and subsequently creating a sense of urgency to resolve that issue. Consider the following statement by L'Oréal:

Excerpt 4:

“in at least 76 countries, discriminatory laws criminalize same-sex relationships with penalties including arrest, imprisonment, and in some cases, the death penalty.”

And Walmart:

Excerpt 5:

“This service is especially important, because, sadly, 35% of the LGTBQ+ community does not engage with the health care system. Often, it’s because they don’t feel comfortable speaking candidly with their health care providers — they don’t feel seen or heard.”

In these excerpts, a heightened sense of urgency is created by showing the dire consequences of belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. The usage of “at least” from the excerpt of L'Oréal implies that cases of LGBTQIA+ criminalization are a global and detrimental occurrence, thereby raising awareness that such a common practice should not be normalized. It results in the victimization of the community that coincides with the strengthening of a company’s activist stance. Walmart’s excerpt gives additional meaning to victimization. It portrays the LGBTQIA+ community as an agonized entity that suffers and is powerless. Words such as “sadly” denote a bleak awareness of facts and “don’t feel seen or heard” suggest the negative trend of viewing LGBTQIA+ hardships as insignificant. Although the framing of these issues is necessary for full clarification of problems, especially during a critical period such as Pride Month, it is equally propelling the companies in a position of hypervigilance and wokeness. A position that renders organizations as educators, but often at the expense of their pitiful and deprived target group. In the end, it contributes to a disproportionate power relationship in which the company appears as a charitable organization vis-à-vis a pitiful marginalized group. However, some organizations have countered this with empathy devices.

### *Showing Allyship and Empathy for equal power balance*

In terms of curbing the asymmetrical power balance, brands exhibit discursive strategies that point towards solidarity and empathy. In an effort to identify with the community and share feelings of trustworthiness, companies utilize semiotics that are intended to unify and show support. An example of GAP:

Excerpt 6:

“we see your power and stand with you”

GAP aligns itself with the LGBTQIA+ community through a cognitive form of empathy. As the study by Yeomans (2016) argued, empathy in organizational communication often materializes in the form of an “egocentric bias.” In the statement by GAP, “We” and “With you” signals a shift in perspective from company to humanized actor that is supportive and in close proximity. Salient is that it illustrates that the company in its entirety is cognizant of the resilience of the LGBTQIA+ community. It evokes feelings of friendliness, yet is difficult to assume that a statement can reflect every attitude within a company. Furthermore, these words carry little weight as they are uncontroversial and are undoubtedly welcoming for the majority of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Excerpt 7:

H&M continues to stand by the LGBTQIA+ community, telling individual stories from the other side of the rainbow and encouraging people to share their own personal stories through our newly developed web app.

After reviewing the previous two excerpts, it becomes increasingly apparent that there is a substantial risk of using empathy improperly. In a sense, highlighting the supportive position of the brand contributes to elevated degrees of empathy. However, the likeliness of false empathy is an imminent danger as both brands state the difficulties of the community but lack the true projection of themselves in the other’s situation (Yeomans, 2016; Goldie, 2011). The two excerpts demonstrate the fact that organizations still portray themselves as an entity and not as an individual actor. It implies that true empathy is harder to attain. Therefore, what we observe is the “standing by” merely exhibits the company projecting themselves in the situation and not truly imagining the other person in their situation, leading to an egocentric bias that results in further distancing between companies and LGBTQI+ individuals (Yeomans, 2016; Coplan, 2011).

This mismatch is relevant to the asymmetrical communication proposed by Cabosky (2014) in which power dynamics between organizations and the public it attempts to address is strengthened through fervently making it known that the former is “right there with them” to aid the latter with their struggles. The result is that companies adopt communication that first of all,

tells audiences what they “want” to hear and second, profile themselves as an organization that is capable of showing emotional capital in an attempt to belong to a common citizenry that values universal notions of altruism (Coplan, 2011; Cabosky, 2014; Yeomans, 2016).

#### *4.2 Legitimacy with LGBTQIA+ issues*

##### ***Underlining historical efforts to avoid opportunism***

Multiple statements have attempted to gain the trust and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community by portraying their brand relation with Pride Month engagements as a legitimate endeavor. In order to be authentic and therefore consistent with corporate practice, brands often commence with stating their tradition of LGBTQ+ advocacy. This communicative strategy is exemplified through the statement of GAP:

Excerpt 8:

“we have a long history of Championing Inclusion and supporting the LGTBQ+ community, our employees, and our customers. From being the first retailer to offer same-sex domestic partner benefits to scoring 100 in Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Corporate Equality Index for 15 years straight.”

With expressions such as “long,” “history,” and “first,” the excerpt is centered around clarifying their long-term commitment to social issues. These semantics further evoke the sense that the company wants to justify itself to avoid being perceived as opportunistic within the given timeframe of Pride Month. Therefore, possible presumptions of using the statement merely as a marketing ploy are being avoided, serving as a stamp of approval. To strengthen this notion, in numerous instances, activist discourse utilizes measurable monetary outputs to add substance to their efforts made in the past. For example Verizon:

Excerpt 9:

“Verizon has pledged \$250,000 to PFLAG National, the nation’s first and largest organization for the parents, families, and allies of the LGBTQ+ community. This brings Verizon’s total support of the organization to \$1 million, over the last four years.”

This excerpt emphasizes the inclusion of financial resources as a significant driver for empowering the LGBTQIA+ community and therefore acts as a driver for social change. Monetary support for allied organizations has received criticisms that mainly point towards the possibility of wrongly allocated resources, lacking transparency in clarifying the route of the finances (Champlin & Li, 2020). The effect is that a donation promise might give the impression of an action that lacks tangible results in the end. To avoid this critique, Verizon expressed the following:

Excerpt 10:



“PFLAG National’s long-term partnership with Verizon has helped thousands of LGBTQ+ people and their families connect to share love,” said Brian K. Bond, Executive Director of PFLAG National. “The pandemic proved to all of us how important connections on the phone and online can be, and Verizon’s continued commitment will help strengthen those connections through PFLAG Connects.”

By including a statement from the executive director of PFLAG National organization that is associated with LGBTQIA+ empowerment, which publicly announces the value of the partnership and contribution of Verizon, the company receives an endorsement and justification of its action. Furthermore, emphasizing the void that the pandemic had left on communications as an important issue and Verizon’s ability to subsequently fill that gap due to its core business practice contributes to Verizon’s activist identity as a credible and apt driver for LGBTQIA+ emancipation. Hence, Verizon’s excerpts operate in tandem to enhance the organization its legitimacy and authenticity. It is seemingly aware of what scrutiny it might be subjected to and counters criticism accordingly.

### ***Core values: LGBTQIA+ advocacy as raison d’être***

In terms of brand activism, its degree of legitimacy is often tied with the presence of activism incorporated in a company’s core values. Therefore, the companies perceived as most authentic have activism as their reason of existence. (Moorman, 2020). In line with this concept, several Pride Month statements have expressed brand activism through different forms of devices to substantiate their engagement with the LGBTQIA+ public. First and foremost, brands have articulated this sentiment through viewing diversity and inclusion as concepts that are inherently tied to their business conduct. As Nike puts it:

Excerpt 11:

“A belief in the value of diverse representation has long been a cornerstone of Nike.”

“Cornerstone” implies that Nike its opinion of diverse representation is a fundamental principle that can not be excluded from the company its values. Secondly, “belief in the value” further emphasizes how engagement can be fueled by ideology-driven semantics that resonates within the LGBTQIA+ community that, in their turn, requires the company to step up. A few narratives stress the importance of why LGBTQIA+ activism should be considered in the first place and how it ultimately fits into more desirable sociocultural practices. According to L’Oréal:

Excerpt 12:

“we believe that when LGBTQIA+ people’s stories are shared openly and honestly, it creates a positive dialogue in society around acceptance, freedom, and the LGBTQIA+ experience”

L'Oréal similarly demonstrates their core values, and the positive consequences if these ideological beliefs eventually will come to fruition. Although social norms such as “acceptance” and “freedom” are hardly up for discussion, whether it contributes to a positive dialogue around the “LGBTQIA+ experience is problematic. Owing to the fact that framing the LGBTQIA+ community as an “experience” might demote the intricacies of a diverse community to a marketable idiom that neglects intersectionality (Vardeman et al., 2013; Vardeman & Sebesta, 2020). Furthermore, both Nike and L'Oréal write from the perspective of the whole company, and therefore, statements appear to be written as a form of dichotomy. It sides the capable and authoritative corporate entity against the marginalized others in need of aid. Conversely, it suggests that both companies have embraced a consensus about the positive effects of LGBTQI+ empowerment. The following statement of a global sustainability manager from H&M echoes this sentiment:

Excerpt 13:

“I am very proud of the way this campaign brings together the LGBTQIA+ community and tells all these different but so important stories of pride. It connects directly to our core values and encapsulates our social vision to enable everyone at H&M and beyond to live the life they want, express who they are and to be the best of themselves.”

By framing the beneficial effects of their campaign as a logical consequence of their core values, H&M purports to be a capable emancipator. Their core beliefs are synonymous with competence.

In sum, exhibiting core values is an effective means to engage with the LGBTQIA+ community. It achieves twofold outcomes. First, advocating values is subject to little to no criticism if the values are uncontroversial and already widely accepted beforehand. Practitioners engage with this tactic because it is intrinsically harmless (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Secondly, values act as a bedrock of which subsequent actions can be taken (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). Considering the case of H&M, Nike & L'Oréal, the praised values are used as premises to support their Pride Month policy. However, all three organizations exhibit a homogeneity in semantics and its application to sociocultural dimensions. This, in turn, might denote an accepted jargon that is free of reproval due to its unoffensive nature. It is yet to be ascertained whether LGBTQIA+ publics consume these texts in a meaningful way or if it merely increases the engagement gap between corporate entities and marginalized groups, resulting in an indifference through identical PR tactics.

### *Telling a story*

Across the consulted data, brands often incorporate the device of storytelling within their statements. Storytelling often functions as a means to enhance corporate reputation and provides the opportunity to differentiate themselves as companies that exhibit sound practices within their workplace and translate that to its consumers (Gill, 2015). Applied to the current study, several companies have called attention to either internal employees belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community or an affiliated spokesperson. Below are several major themes related to how corporate storytelling is constructed during Pride Month.

### *Tokenism: usage of LGBTQIA+ spokespersons*

Salient to the usage of this type of communicative strategy revolves around a conflict. Namely, between the conundrums that accompany the membership to the LGBTQIA+ community and how to ensure identity can be freely expressed in social and professional life without negative repercussions such as exclusion, and discrimination. In general observation of the corporate discourse, such dichotomies are presented and resolved by the company through utilizing an employee or external stakeholder as a token. Tokenism, as defined by Cloud (1996), is the “cultural construction of a successful person who metonymically represents a larger cultural grouping.” These individuals are used as mediums that exchange group identity and politics for cultural and economical capital (Cloud, 1996). Statements have revealed that the token employee expresses explicitly how being comfortable with their identity did not occur without difficulties but subsequently was fully accepted by the employees. This, in turn, creates an effect of an inclusive company that has had real-life experience with LGBTQIA+ acceptance and empowerment, thus enhancing the brand image of LGBTQIA+ allyship. Consider the following Pride Month statement from General Electric:

Excerpt:

“In 2005, Ilécio started as a telemarketer in São Paulo and worked his way up to a senior staff technical global product manager. “From what I had seen in other parts of my life, when people come out, there are problems,” he says. “I didn't want that translating to my career.”

This excerpt shows the personal account of a General Electric employee Ilécio. He informs the reader about the first-hand experience of LGBTQIA+ identification within a large company. Closer inspection of the sentence: “From what I had seen in other parts of my life” indicates an authoritative piece of communication through empirical evidence. It illustrates that social implications would almost certainly apply to his professional life, meaning that having a minority identity is synonymous with living a life full of uncertainty. Furthermore, the account attempts to provide an emotional resonance by including one of the major turning points in the life of an

LGBTQIA+ individual: coming out. “There are problems” amplifies the fears that are associated with expressing one’s true identity that is at risk of rejection by the majority of his professional work sphere and thus, may have implications for future career developments. Therefore, a realistic depiction of a dire situation evokes empathy and shows to the reader the graveness of leading a double life. Although most likely to strike a chord with the majority of the LGBTQIA+ community, it is also prone to be in the commercial interest of the organization. Inequitable treatment of minorities within a company can have severe malignant effects such as reduced work satisfaction and enhanced levels of stress (King et al., 2008). Therefore, well-intended personal accounts that are publicly communicated may serve a secondary purpose as a calculative strategic tactic that enhances reputation and competitive edge (Moorman, 2020). This, in conjunction with the next two excerpts, highlight an emotional narrative that is potent in outlining the inherent conundrums of the LGBTQI+ community in private and public spheres. In the Pride Month statement of Chase Bank, the financial institution opted for the incorporation of several quotes from their LGBTQI+ client community:

Excerpt 14:

“I came out as a trans person four years ago, and it's been harsh on me in a lot of ways because the world is not a kind place for us.”

The first words signify a personification of the issue. It puts forward the notion that the issue experienced stems from an individual, and is not narrated through a generalized declaration. As a result, by using the first person narrative expressed by the word “I,” it attempts to achieve the effect of universal appeal. To describe succinctly: using the perspective can be applied to everyone who feels addressed by the circumstance (Gill, 2015). Furthermore, the statement speaks of a conflicting reality in which the person is still in the process of full acceptance of identity, only to be hampered by the majority of society. This is mainly expressed by including the phrase “four years ago” which indicates that confirming one’s LGBTQIA+ identity is not a simple endeavour, nor is it an event that swiftly reaches a conclusion. Instead, it implies that it is a decision that will have lasting effects on an individual’s position in society and how in turn society perceives the individual. Therefore, The narrative victimizes the person in the sense that it evokes a feeling that the individual is ostracized and estranged in a world that rejects minority identities. Another statement from Chase further emphasizes this victimization:

Excerpt 15:

“Nobody hands you a book saying, 'Here's how to be gay.' I'm still figuring out how I, Amy, am gay and I think that's fine.”

This quote similarly addresses the hardships behind the polarization of society between the LGBTQIA+ community and the dominant heteronormative group. To illustrate, “Nobody”

generates sentiments of alienation and personal struggle. Combined with still figuring out what identity and behavior are acceptable to the exterior world. In addition, this excerpt counters the idea that coming to terms with an individual's LGBTQIA+ identity is a ceaseless and defeatist process of personal development. The use of "I think that's fine" is representative of empowerment and normalization of homosexuality. Therefore, Chase Bank strives to give solace to the community by sharing Amy's story. Thereby instilling the notion that no individual is truly alone with accepting one's identity.

Excerpt 16:

"Being gay in the Middle East is not accepted in our households or communities. Personally, my family did not accept me right away, and it took some time— about four to five years—for them to come around."

In addition to the hardships illustrated by the previous two excerpts, this statement emphasizes that perseverance is essential. For the reader seeking stimulus and similarity, this excerpt provides a motivating force for proud identity expression. It signifies that the situation will eventually ameliorate.

In sum, the stories provided by Chase are hardly exclusive to the individuals from whom these quotes stem from. This exactly contributes to the reason for using these storytelling tropes from a PR perspective. Feelings of non-acceptance, inequity, and solitude are not isolated problems but shared universally, resulting in an identification tactic (Kent, 2015).

However, findings suggest that companies are not only pointing out commonly shared issues, but also view personal storytelling as an opportunity to present the prowess of a company to be tolerant and inclusive towards the LGBTQIA+ community. This is mostly achieved by using the token's insecurities and subsequently stating that the organization celebrates the individuals' courage and honesty and is in fact capable of addressing the needs of its LGBTQIA+ employees. To illustrate with the following statements from UPS in which Latasha Griffin, a bisexual Black/Puerto Rican woman who is the supplier diversity manager and chair of the LGBT & Allies Business Resource Group at UPS:

Excerpt 17:

"Joining the BRG gave me the safe space I needed to feel better connected to the community. It helped me be more comfortable with embracing all parts of my identity and live more authentically."

Griffin points out that she possessed the desire for a safe space and an overall stronger association with the LGBTQIA+ community and her identity. In turn, the BRG division of UPS is being presented as a platform that was competent in fulfilling those needs mentioned by Griffin. As a result, UPS is being portrayed as an entity that is inclusive and is capable of

accommodating. Furthermore, an essential element that enhances this discourse is the endorsement made by the spokespersons and tokens in question. For example:

Excerpt 18:

“There’s always more we can do,” she said. “That fundamental UPS way of being constructively dissatisfied.”

Here, Griffin suggests that it is inherent to UPS business conduct to continually search for improvements regarding inclusivity. Words such as “fundamental” and “dissatisfied” denote an organization that is conscious and critical of its attitude towards diversity, therefore simultaneously implying that its activist stance is of evolving nature. Griffin’s statement supports the efforts of UPS, enhancing the authenticity of the brand activist image by disposing of notions of ad hoc inclusivity strategies. In addition to the previous statement, Nike has similarly utilized a spokesperson. However, that individual is not part of their workforce but an associated spokesperson. The following excerpts outline two main functions: to inspire and to legitimize:

Excerpt 19:

“The way I advocate doesn’t really vary from group to group,” says Parr. “For me, it doesn’t really matter whether or not they have a rich history or if it’s a fairly new program. Even in sports, I view it through the lens of community, not competition. I want to bring my energy through my story and hope that I can educate and inspire people. Everyone can add to that bigger energy by telling their story.”

Instead of using a personal account that is associated with NIKE, the company connected with athlete Gia Parr that is known to function as an LGBTQIA+ advocate for several other companies. It inspires in the sense that the ambassador does not seem to change her story at the expense of her true identity, signaling authentic storytelling. It furthermore legitimizes Nike as an ally. It would give the impression that including an external spokesperson would not directly enhance the reputation of the company, as apparently as UPS or General Electric. However, considering that Parr does not make concessions while telling her story alludes to the idea that the spokesperson does not differentiate Nike either. Therefore, it insinuates that Parr’s account has not been altered to fit into Nike’s strategy. In sum, storytelling through tokenism as an ideological narrative in LGBTQIA+ activism is a popular mode of seeking engagement and raising awareness. Especially during a global period of consciousness of the community. It evokes empathy, authenticity by personal experience, and above all, emotional journeys with hardships and triumphs. Conversely, incorporating bite-size pieces of personal accounts may not be representative of the company’s attitude towards the LGBTQIA+ community as a whole. It further suggests that issues surrounding LGBTQIA+ identities can be easily resolved by staying authentic, realizing that LGBTQIA+ equity is a process, and persevering throughout that

journey. Once again, although that results in inspiring and universal communication, it does not automatically entail that it has universal applicability to the complete spectrum of the LGBTQIA+ community. The dichotomy of issue and solution will be further elaborated in the discussions section.

### *4.3 Company as social issue manager*

As expressed in the literature review section. Several forms of strategic corporate discourse have been utilized in PR to enhance the authenticity of brand activism towards LGBTQIA+ equity. Findings have revealed that the strategic communication modes of companies during Pride Month had the propensity to include queer vernacular, products, and initiatives in their discourse. This in turn creates a paradox in which the LGBTQIA+ community has been commodified as a marketing segment with companies tailoring to that group, defeating the purpose of treating the historically marginalized group as an equal segment of society that desires equity and empowerment. Following the third phase from the SIM model, brands during Pride Month have issued solutions and future commitments to increase equity for the LGBTQIA+ community.

### *Corporate pride through Rainbow washing*

Nearly half of the corporate statements exhibit a form of rainbow washing. Whether it is through certain products or semiotics, brands are inclined to show their support through distinct marketing phrases that strive to show support on the one hand but also resort to stereotypical imagery of the LGBTQIA+ community. Consider the following statement from Facebook:

Excerpt 20:

“We’ve also partnered with GLAAD again this year to update our list of popular hashtags — such as #genderfluid, #pridefamily and #gayvisibility — used throughout the LGBTQ+ community. When you use one of these hashtags in a Story, your Story ring will turn rainbow while the photo or video is live for 24 hours.”

On the one hand, putting certain hashtags in the spotlights through a rainbow filter may contribute to an amplification of content from LGBTQIA+ individuals. The specific hashtags are likely to succeed in enhancing media representation of the community while simultaneously putting forth inspiring stories that emancipate individuals. However, the tactic inadvertently diminishes this strong feature through generalization of those stories with rainbow washing. As Eagle et al. (2020) stressed, the diversity within content is often diminished for the sake of universality. Therefore, the use of endearing rainbows surrounding the content might actually defeat the strong and delicate points made towards visibility and equity. Chase Bank continues

this sentiment in a more materialized form with an incongruity that displays the difficulties between defining the issue and managing that issue accordingly. To illustrate:

Excerpt 21:

“The bank has been a strong supporter of NYC's Pride for over 15 years. But this year, instead of launching a float in the parade, the bank decided to do something a little more personal: Provide a forum for people around the world to tell their stories about coming out, living their truth, and finding their LGBT family.”

Initially, the excerpt above signifies an authentic discursive strategy with regards to the LGBTQIA+ community. Chase legitimizes itself through past efforts with Pride, matched with a suggestive hint of critique on commercialization of Pride. Thereby framing traditional participation in Pride festivities as an endeavor that lacks in direct substance. The sentence “providing a forum for people” can be viewed as associated with collectivizing the community in order to accelerate social change (Mundy, 2013). By contrast, the financial institution proposes an interactive art installation that is:

Excerpt 22:

“Proudly bedecked in a rainbow of flowers, the branch honored the blossoming of the LGBT+ community. Some of the flowers played audio recordings of LGBT+ people sharing their stories—and their support—with other people in their community.”

This excerpt is seemingly incompatible with the previous entry and results in two implications. First, although Chase attempts to amplify the stories of the LGBTQIA+ community, the method to achieve that is by offering a solution that is rainbow-themed, thereby managing the social issue through a conventional image of the, inherently diverse community it wishes to serve. Secondly, similarly to the rainbow-themed excerpts of Facebook, Chase its implementation of colorful ornamentation is at risk of reducing the importance of the subject matter from LGBTQIA+ members. The signs of dissimilarity of the Pride month statement seems analogous with the moral conundrum that Place et al. (2021) have described. While Chase executes LGBTQIA+ engagement based on the emphasis on individual autonomy with regards to identity and equality, the actual outcome implies that the organization favored an all encompassing tactic that caters to the majority of audiences in and outside of the LGBTQIA+ community. Thus, this emerges as a debate between consequentialist and deontological attitudes in PR, which the discussion section (chapter 5) will further elaborate on.



### ***Commodification of the LGBTQIA+ community's identity and traits***

In numerous instances, brands have the tendency to materialize the identity and issues of LGBTQIA+ with Pride Month initiatives. Nike for example proposed that the concept of intersectionality may be represented through their new Pride Month apparel:

Excerpt 23:

“A wide spectrum of nine LGBTQIA+ flags, highlighting the personal stories deep inside each stripe color, is broadly explored in this year's footwear, featuring a diverse set of flag patches that can be applied to the Blazer '77 Low, the Air Max Pre Day, the All Out Utility Slide and the Infinity React Run 2.”

Here, Nike equates the adaptability of the nine flag patches with its footwear as a symbol for diverse intersectionality. In terms of semiotics, “wide” and “spectrum” is indicative of the brand its mission to include the majority of queer identities into a single holistic message, thereby avoiding communication that excludes from the broader society. However, arguing that there are deep personal stories embedded in each flag signifies a form of commercial symbolism. Its categorical imperative and intentions relying on the ideology behind the stripes but its appliance dependent on a universal applicability denotes of a discursive strategy aimed at reaching the most substantial consumer segment, including consumer segments who solely find the patches visually appealing. Therefore, in tandem with Chase Bank its flower installation, the predetermined motivation behind the issue management is downplayed through objectifying the community it designates.

### ***False equivalence of intersectionality***

Three excerpts have illustrated that Pride Month initiatives are analogous with some defining characteristics of the LGBTQIA+ community. The communicative strategy aims to attain an understanding that the concept behind Pride-themed products are reflecting their intricate intersectional nature. This is expressed by Facebook partnering up with influential artists:

Excerpt 24:

“Their perspective and dedication to depicting non-binary and diverse communities is shown through vibrant colors, block shapes, and distinct textures that are meant to highlight the authenticity and confidence of each character.”

Here, intersectionality of non-binary individuals of the LGBTQIA+ community is equated with “vibrant colors, block shapes and distinct textures.” Although the motivation seems to be backed by altruistic intentions, it raises the question whether a particular design choice can be equated with and reflect certain aspects of non-binary individuals. Non-binary communities are

in essence not defined by social constructions or biological essentialist notions (Vijlbrief et al., 2020). Instead, non-binary communities challenge the very idea that a sex, sexuality and gender are interchangeable and can be defined through discourse, institutionalization, and media representation (Vijlbrief et al., 2020). The following statement by Adidas seems to abide to the essentialist definition of by equating visual elements with the LGBTQIA+ community:

Excerpt 25:

“the expansive collection looks to hero a ‘Do It Yourself’ (DIY) visual aesthetic born from the LGBTQ+ communities who had sought to create their own spaces for self-expression. This ‘DIY’ aesthetic is what inspires the fluid geometries as well as the expressive and layered graphics seen throughout.”

Here, Adidas inappropriately capitalizes on the struggles of the community. At first, the excerpt has the appearance of creating a product collection that respects and acknowledges that the community needed to be self-sufficient in safely articulating their identity throughout their lives. Conversely, it can also be registered as a culturally insensitive remark. As empowering as the “DIY” inspired graphics are, it can coincidentally assume that self-sustenance is normalized and an expected practice within this minority community. It thereby can misinterpret the numerous LGBTQIA+ narratives in which doing it yourself, or not being able to depend on a supportive environment, came with many hardships. In short, it harbors two implications. It downplays and appropriates institutionalized identity politics of those facing systemic appropriation. Secondly it falsely equates marketable graphics with the struggle for identity expression of the LGBTQIA+ community. The following excerpt of Microsoft however, embraces a different approach on this false equivalence take a stance and aptly emphasizes this:

Excerpt 26:

“Created with and by employees from the LGBTQI+ communities, these Pride products center on the intersectionality of the LGBTQI+ movement across race and ethnicity. Embracing 19 flags representing various gender identities and sexual orientations, they give visibility to groups that are still often overlooked and neglected today.”

In contrast with Adidas and Facebook, Microsoft heeds the marginal position of the community, acknowledging the important distinction between sexual preference and identity. Salient to this excerpt that Microsoft does create Pride Month centered packages, however, it does this not by paying an homage to the distress of the community and at the expense of the community. Instead, it merely is cognizant of intersectionality, which singles this company as it is the only entry which uses this significant concept in their Pride Month statement.

Excerpt 27:

“Free to move, free to love. Athleta's Pride capsule collection brings bright styles and colorful hues for bold steps forward.”

The Gap statement above is congruent with false equivalence between LGBTQIA+ identity and commodification. It can be assumed illusory that the creation of vivid color schemes makes a significant contribution to emancipation and equity. Visual aesthetics is suggested to instigate social change for the community to take pride in their identity. Visibility of LGBTQIA+ social issues through prominent outward appearance can elevate said issues to the public discussion. However, the implicit messaging of Gap lacks the explicit motivation of how the product or its brand takes tangible steps to actually improves equity.

### *Financial resources for the LGBTQIA+ community*

In addition to financial contributions made by companies in the past as a legitimizing function, several statements sustain these efforts by stating their forthcoming monetary donations. In general. Financial resources by organizations are found to be more effective in achieving social change and positive consumer perceptions if the donation is based on every item sold (Vlachos et al., 2016). Donations that either vaguely or explicitly disclose the proposed amount are often perceived as a publicized event with the objective of raising profits and sales, thereby reducing its authenticity (Vlachos et al., 2016). The statement of H&M below is an example of the latter:

Excerpt 28:

In connection to the campaign a donation of 100,000 USD will be made to United Nations Free & Equal Campaign, which champions equal rights and fair treatment of the worldwide LGBTQIA+ community.

First and foremost, semantics of the excerpt showcase that H&M is adamant to over-elaborate that their initiative is not a singular effort. It is effective in the sense that matching a campaign with altruistic words of empathy and inclusion with a concrete donation should naturally increase authentic solution solving. However, it lacks clear details in how the non-profit organization transforms those resources into measurable outputs, solely stating its generalized mission statement as its mark of legitimacy for the donated money. The excerpt is furthermore an exhibition of the power relations between a major corporate of financial magnitude with the marginalized LGBTQIA+ community. Such amounts Where H&M shows an objective amount to an international non-profit, Facebook centres its financial resource to curated Pride Collections from LGBTQIA+ founded and supported businesses. Which then reach LGBTQIA+ related initiatives.

Excerpt 29:

“For example, you can discover limited-edition face decals by Euphoria makeup artist Donni Davy in collaboration with Face Lace, with a portion of proceeds going to Trans Lifeline”

By not disclosing the exact amount and instead relying on the consumer’s own responsibility for the percentage of the funds, Facebook rules out possible perceptions of exploiting power relations, using its economic weight for self-centred motives. It conversely enhances its philanthropic appearance by adhering to a grassroots approach in which its Pride Month initiative invites consumers and small businesses to be part of a social change.

Lastly, expressions of financial resources also materialized in an implicit announcement in which the donation is not met with a specific amount.

Excerpt 30:

As part of this initiative, the brand has also shown its support to the LGBTQIA+ community with a special edition “Pride Up” bracelet, along with a financial contribution to support GLAAD’s mission.

This excerpt of of L’Oréal exhibits an indistinct amount to a non-profit organization. It combines opportunistic strategies with the Pride Up bracelet in combination with a tangible but unspecified resource. According to Vlachos et al. (2016), this type of donation achieves a twofold outcome. It is likely to be perceived more sincere than a quantifiable amount due to a mention of a financial contribution. On the other hand, sales-driven tactics preceding in the form of a Pride product that mention are prone to diminish altruistic donations. Unlike the statement of Facebook in which contribution is based on a multi-participatory model, L’Oréal inadvertently creates a situation that is ambiguous. According to Vlachos et al. (2016), the result is that consumers often devote their attention to the sales-driven gesture and not the financial contribution.

In sum, allocating financial resources to the LGBTQIA+ community is a safe and measurable objective for brands to express solidarity and achieve empowerment. The issue is that companies refrain from clearly demarcating in which distinct channels the resources appear. Financial donations are often met with higher degrees of scepticism by consumers if the amount is subjectively or concretely presented. Donations are subjective in the sense that the provided number is a merely a substantial number funnelling towards a philanthropic cause. It is objective if the amount can be tracked and its destination clarified. Furthermore, there consumers occupy a positive stance towards donations that are calculated based on sales and are often doubtful about sales-drive products that are independent of contributions (Hensley, 2019; Vlachos et al., 2016).

## 5. Discussion

### *Chapter Overview*

The current research has attempted to reveal how corporate activist discourse defined and managed issues surrounding the LGBTQIA+ community during Pride Month 2021. In the process, communicative strategies towards historically marginalized publics have been analyzed to discern its broader socio-cultural implications. As a result, findings have revealed a paradox between company intentions and the communicative output in practice. While organizations are aware of their activist stance, their cultural/economic competence to increase equity and resolve issues permeating the LGBTQIA+ community, they coincidentally resort to holistic messaging that caters to the majority of the LGBTQIA+ public. Organizations often manage social issues in a politically correct manner with benevolent intentions but in the process, still view and treat their audience as the sociological other.

Notwithstanding, this research strived to make an introductory supplement to the field of PR queer relationships. It is vital that subsequent studies research perceptions of brand activism, strategic communication, and consumer perceptions through other methods to substantiate this emerging field within communication science.

### *5.1 Addressing the Research Questions*

In terms of the research question: *How do companies strategically manage the social issues permeating the LGBTQIA+ community during Pride Month 2021?* Findings have revealed both ostensible and concealed discursive strategies. The study concludes that Pride Month discourse has been predominately centered on an ambivalence between the ideological-driven semantics aimed at establishing trust and credibility and the adverse, contradicting issue management materialized through commodification. Organizations create this ambivalence by including a form of communication that preserves their activist role and benevolent brand identity. The principal strategy to manage LGBTQIA+ issues is by reducing the distance between corporate identity and the community it serves. Multiple micro-strategies come into play to achieve this however findings suggest that the overarching macro-strategy is based on *humanizing corporate identity*. Discursive strategies are generally aimed at positing corporate identity as an actor that communicates on the same power-relationship level as the LGBTQIA+ community. The inclusion of allyship, storytelling, and LGBTQIA+ friendly initiatives constitute the notion of compassion. However, other strategies, such as commodification, tokenism, and legitimacy,

diminish that same humanization. The result is that dominant corporate structures are reinforced at the expense of a marginalized other, thereby maintaining existing power imbalances. Therefore, results are primarily congruent with the moral dilemma idea as proposed by Place et al. (2021). The current study concurs that the consequentialist and deontological views of LGBTQIA+ engagement are not mutually exclusive. Pride Month statements show an awareness of ethical engagement, offering support and underscoring the diverse composition of the community with equally diverse desires and needs. Simultaneously, organizations offer initiatives that pander to the majority, thereby reducing the risk of alienation and harmful side-effects to both company and the public. Further analysis that was guided by sub-research questions revealed that each discursive construct in the SIM model was accompanied by distinct strategies. Discourse, whether to identify, legitimize or propose action, is shaped by strategies that aid in the fulfillment of activism and LGBTQIA+ engagement. As a consequence, the desired method of Pride Month communication was predominantly based on organizational interest, minimizing perceptions of malignant corporate practice, and maximizing engagement.

## *5.2 Synopsis of Results & Analysis*

Organizations have generally operationalized in the following manner. First, statements generally commenced by expressing universally accepted norms that gave urgency to a myriad of LGBTQIA+ related problems. Brands acknowledged the experienced issues and voiced their solidarity with the community. In sum, organizations defined the issue mainly through establishing an equal power relationship, representing themselves not as a corporate entity, but as a social, empathetic entity capable of leveling with the community it serves. Discursive constructs revolved around the communication of universally held norms of identity articulation. After establishing a connection, organizations attempted to legitimize their involvement with the LGBTQIA+ public. Self-justification was mainly achieved through a demonstration of advocacy efforts in the past, and the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ spokesperson to enhance their corporate humanization.

## *5.3 Theoretical Implications*

The current study has yielded results that point toward a necessary reflection on how brand activism, with its benevolent intentions, actually reinforces hierarchal power dynamics between corporate behemoths and marginalized communities. In this regard, the general theoretical implication for LGBTQIA+ engagement is that Pride Month statements are presented as meaningful entries to add to the progress of emancipation and equity. In the

process, however, organizational goals such as marketability, brand image, and allyship are being expressed through the humanization of corporate identity. Therefore, there seems to exist an opportunistic means to achieve an altruistic end goal. First and foremost, that notion seems to be analogous with the ACP theory by Moisander & Valtonen (2006). The initiatives proposed by brands are indicative of their economic weight and use that to cater to the wishes of the LGBTQIA+ community who, as a minority, often make sense of their lives through appropriate cultural and social practices shaped by brands. (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). However, the statements exhibit that brands are quickly inclined to resort to this powerful cultural authority and strength through partnerships and donations. These two resources are representative of the competence to provide a refuge for the frictions within a consumers' social reality. Considering that these two are the main forms of initiatives simultaneously indicates an imbalance in power relations. It suggests a form of hubris by brands that find their agency powerful enough to shape the social reality of the LGBTQIA+ community. Furthermore, the theory has stipulated that brands ascribe to different mentalities concerning the modus operandi of brand activism. Findings reveal that brands predominantly act through several lenses of brand activism. For instance, two statements have made extensive use of corporate storytelling as their main literary device. Using LGBTQIA+ spokespersons from the company suggests traces of empathy and identification but it coincidentally contributes to the "Employee Engagement View" as advanced by Moorman (2020). Sharing empowering stories from LGBTQIA+ employees positions the company as an attractive work environment for minority groups and enhance their tolerant brand image. The statements from Chase Bank and L'Oréal for example serve as an instructive principle. By communicating the current state of LGBTQIA+ acceptance and underscoring the need to improve that continuously, statements like these seem to ascribe to the "Brands as Educators view." The educational role appears to drive social awareness of the LGBTQIA+ audience which in turn increases authenticity. Notwithstanding these benevolent brand activism approaches, Pride Month statements ultimately culminate in the "Calculative view." This is materialized in the commodification of the LGBTQIA+ community through Pride Month products and stereotypical initiatives. It has to be noted that identifying the degree of sincerity of these forms of issue management is impractical and beyond the scope of this study. However, explicitly stating these initiatives is most likely to yield a competitive advantage during Pride Month.

The theoretical discussion on the PR & LGBTQIA+ community revealed that strategic communication employs distinctive strategies to ensure successful engagement. However, that mentality often proves to be disruptive. The LGBTQIA+ community remains to be essentialized

as the 'other' community for practical and cost-effectiveness motivations, confirming the sociological othering theory of Vardeman et al. (2013). Most statements were found to acknowledge systemic oppressions and erasure of the LGBTQIA+ community but failed to elaborate precisely how forthcoming solutions will mitigate the malignant effects of the social issues.

Thus, an approach worth exploring is researching how companies can continue their advocacy during Pride Month without facing the risk of resorting to generalized, all-encompassing semiotics. Out of all the excerpts, the grassroots approach as exemplified by Facebook (last excerpt) seems to have found a satisfactory balance. The excerpt shows that participation initiated and occurring across multiple levels and actors contribute to authentic initiatives, transparency, and empowerment. Therefore, the relationship between corporate activism and consumers is inherently ambivalent. Companies are required to involve in social issues due to an increase in societal demands. Conversely, the wishes and needs of a specific consumer segment such as the LGBTQIA+ community render it impractical for companies to address the entire community with tactful sensitivity.

#### *5.4 Theoretical context*

Critical discourse analysis of the LGBTQIA+ community has extended to other relatable institutions. Fields of inquiry include the inclusion of the community as a political interest (Mongie, 2016), higher educations promoting diversity by advertising their LGBTQIA+ resource centers (Self, 2015). And even other marginalized communities, such as the discursive practice of halal-oriented beauty cosmetics for Muslim women (Kaur & Mutty, 2016). While these studies provide insights into the discourse on different facets of social and political life, much of the extant literature does not address the opportunism that accompanies marketing messages during a specific time in a year. Although driven by a desired gain, discourse by political and educational institutions do not share the same flexibility in their communications like private companies. The latter, to some extent, enjoys more freedom in the tone of voice, product initiatives due to the inherent characteristic of brands possessing a unique corporate identity. Another facet in which this study deviates from the existing scholarship is that it deals with an inherent ambiguity in discourse. As stated earlier, brands have occupied a new status of activists that have the cultural gravitas to initiate sociopolitical change. (Bhagwat et al., 2020). Combining that newfound role with the traditional business creed of maximizing profits, a discrepancy likely occurs between authenticity and self-interest in communication. Studies of LGBTQIA+ discourse stemming from governmental and educational institutions on the other



hand, are by default established with the core belief of serving the public interest, which in turn influence their admissible linguistic practices. For these institutions, the LGBTQIA+ community represents a social segment that can not be excluded from greater society. Thus, they are obliged to show inclusiveness. The significance of this study to the theoretical context therefore rests on the unique perspective on the attitude of companies towards the LGBTQIA+ community in a specific moment in the year, what they want to achieve and how their semantics propel towards to or deviate from their goal.

#### *5.4 Social Implications*

The study of corporate activist discourse, and its embedded social meanings and practices, have produced implications on identity politics towards historically marginalized groups. Taking a stance on LGBTQIA+ issues was inherently harmless, with companies engaging Pride Month through an ideological narrative that is analogous with the most pressing social issues pervading the community: equity and emancipation. However, the method to achieve this was problematic in the sense that it reinforced the stereotypical imagery of the LGBTQIA+ community, exploited members for the benefit of organizational credibility, and showcased insufficient knowledge on the diversity of the community it attempted to address. Therefore, social change was illustrated as a pressing matter that had to be normalized. But in reality, Pride Month discourse seemed to distance organizations from the LGBTQIA+ community.

The fundamental issue of Pride Month statements can be traced back to the question of the authenticity of corporate activism with the LGBTQIA+ public. As described by Ciszek & Pounders (2020), authentic engagement is often met with strategically standardizing and commodifying the community. Social change is predominantly embraced by organizations. However, discursive strategies exhibit an opportunistic approach, which results in a conflict between altruistic intentions and an effort that can be deemed harmful to its audiences

Therefore, the current study concludes that Pride Month statements originating from companies have the tendency to posit themselves as an approachable actor for the community that perceives LGBTQIA+ equity as a favorable form of brand activism. Therefore, LGBTQIA+ advocacy tends to approach communication securely, ensuring that semantics and initiatives are free from scrutiny. It should be noted that the social issues pertaining to the community are far from universally accepted. Shepherd et al. (2021), have proposed that brands representing the LGBTQIA+ community in their communication are more likely to be perceived negatively by people with conservative ideologies or heterosexual consumers. In

conjunction with Vredenburg et al. (2020) who hypothesized that sincere brand activism is not reluctant to alienate audiences by addressing controversial issues, it can be argued that brands that issue Pride Month statements offer a substantial degree of sincerity. On the other hand, the effect of good faith seems to be mitigated through the arrangements of queer pr. Therefore, the current study concurs with the suggestion of Place et al. (2021) and Eagle et al. (2020) that PR practitioners who navigate through LGBTQIA+ issues are confronted with economic incentives and utilitarian strategies to achieve a maximum outcome.

In sum, social change is a corporate undertaking. Pride Month statements are meticulously crafted, from the initial phases of framing social issues as urgent to the culminating stages in which social issues are implied to be adequately resolved organizations.

### *5.5 Limitations and recommendations for further research.*

The current research aimed at developing an understanding of corporate communication with minority publics. By using CDA as a methodology, results have yielded insights into paradoxical discourse strategies, in which corporate intentions and social reality become an incongruent practice. However, this study is cognizant of several methodological and practical pitfalls that occurred during the research.

First and foremost, including the LGBTQIA+ community as the subject of the study comes with complications. It is an arduous task to interpret corporate discourse on behalf of a community that is vastly diverse, with each individual possessing different wants and needs. In that sense, perceptions and critiques on organizational communication do not automatically entail that the same worldview is held by each individual within the community. (Lewis & Reynolds, 2021). Therefore, a considerable limitation is that the inherent heterogeneous nature of the community renders it culturally insensitive to critique or state Pride Month incentives as either positive or negative, considering that the unique lived experiences vary widely and all contribute to a different consumption of brand activism. (Lewis & Reynolds, 2021).

Furthermore, the limited sample size causes the study to be deficient in generalizability. Only with difficulty can 11 corporate statements serve as an accurate description of LGBTQIA+ engagement by organizations. Future inquiries may benefit from broadening the consulted data. Another limitation is the opted timespan requirement for data. Excluding the sample to a single organization's Pride Month statements might shed light on how communication has developed. Conversely, including multiple statements stemming from multiple organizations offers a comparative insight on how discursive strategies, semiotics, and queer PR measure up throughout the years.

In addition to sampling and practical constraints, the current study is aware of the impact of the researcher's subjectivity. As stated in the validity and reliability section (chapter 3), studies of qualitative nature are contingent on the reflexivity of the researcher. This entails that ethical soundness could have been undermined. Although analysis has been informed by theory and established conceptual frameworks, interpretations have been discussed and presented as a self-evident procedure. However, assertions on corporate statements differ per researcher. Thus, it must be emphasized that the conclusions are but one interpretation and that similar studies produce other claims based on other subjective perceptions.

As a consequence, a serious recommendation for future research should include other research methodologies that inquire about LGBTQIA+ and corporate activist discourse. Such examples may include but are not limited to: ethnographical research, focus groups, or quantitative-driven studies. For instance, the in-depth interview might add to a better understanding of what the LGBTQIA+ community perceives as authentic engagement by brands. Similarly, interviewing PR practitioners and marketing professionals on the subject matter can equally yield descriptions of what incentives come into play when advocating for marginalized communities. On the other hand, quantitative methods may contribute to this field by including a more substantial body of corporate statements. This in turn would allow for other phenomena that can be studied, such as the frequency of keywords, themes, and networks. In sum, there exists a profusion of methodological approaches that can offer broader understandings and nuances in a sensitive and pressing topic.

## References

- Alasuutari, P. (1996). Theorizing in Qualitative Research: A Cultural Studies Perspective, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2(4), 371-384. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049600200401>
- Armstrong, E.A., Crage, S.M. (2006). Movements and Memory: The making of the Stonewall Myth, *American Sociological Association*, 71(5), 724-751. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240607100502>
- Arnould E., Price, L., & Zinkhan, G. (2002). *Consumers*. New York: McGraw–Hill.
- Ball, C. A. (2019). *The queering of corporate America: How big business went from LGBTQ adversary to ally*. Beacon Press.
- Belmonte, L. (2020). *The International LGBT Rights Movement: A History*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Bhagwat, Y., Warren, N. L., Beck, J., Watson, G. F. Corporate Sociopolitical Activism and Firm Value. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(5), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242920937000>
- Boyd, J. (2000). Actional legitimation: no crisis necessary. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 12(4), 341-353. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1204\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1204_3).
- Breeze, R. (2011). Critical discourse analysis and its critics. *Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association*, 21(4), 493-525. <https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.21.4.01bre>
- Brennen, B. S. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for media studies*. ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.eur.idm.oclc.org>
- Burkart, R. (2007). On Jürgen Habermas and Public Relations. *Public Relations Review*, 33(3). 249-254. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2007.05.002>.
- Cabosky, J. M. (2014). Framing an LGBT organization and a movement: A critical qualitative analysis of GLAAD’S media releases. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 3(1), 69-89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x13519638>.

- Carrington, M. J., Zwick, D., & Neville, B. (2016). The ideology of the ethical consumption gap. *Marketing Theory*, 16(1), 21–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593115595674>.
- Champlin, S., & Li, M. (2020). Communicating Support in Pride Collection Advertising: The Impact of Gender Expression and Contribution Amount. *Journal of Strategic Communication*, 14(3), 160-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2020.1750017>.
- Chase Bank. (2021). Finding new ways to show pride. Retrieved from <https://www.chase.com/personal/chase-stories/community-leaders/chase-pride>
- Ciszek, E. (2018). Queering PR: Directions in theory and research for public relations scholarship. *Journal of Public Relations Inquiry*, 30(4), 134-145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2018.1440354>
- Ciszek, E. (2020). “We are people, not transactions”: Trust as a precursor to dialogue with LGBTQ publics. *Public Relations Review*, 46(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.02.003>.
- Ciszek, E. L., & Pounders, K. (2020). The bones are the same: an exploratory analysis of authentic communication with LGBTQ publics. *Journal of Communication Management*, 24(2), 103–117. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jcom-10-2019-0131>.
- Cloud, D.L. (1996). Hegemony or Concordance? The Rethoric of Tokenism in “Oprah” Winfrey’s Rags to Riches Biography. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 13(2), 115-137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295039609366967>
- Coombs, W.T., & Holladay, S. J. (2018). Social issue qua wicked problems: The role of strategic communication in social issues management. *Journal of Communication Management*, 22(1), 79-95. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-11-2016-0093>.
- Copeland, L. (2014). Conceptualizing Political Consumerism: How Citizenship Norms Differentiate Boycotting from Buycotting. *Political Studies*, 62(1), 172-186. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12067>
- Copeland, L., & Boulianne, S. (2020). Political Consumerism: A meta-analysis. *International*

- Political Science Review*, 00(0). 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120905048>.
- Coplan, A. (2011). Will the Real Empathy Please Stand Up? A Case for a Narrow Conceptualization. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 41(1), 40-65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.2011.00056.x>
- De Souza, E.M. (2017). Where is Queer theory in Organizational Studies? *Sociology International Journal*, 1(4), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.15406/sij.2017.01.00021>
- Eagle, L., Dahl, S., De Pelsmacker, P., & Taylor, R. C. (2020). *The Sage Handbook of Marketing Ethics*
- Fairclough, N. (1992). Intertextuality in Critical Discourse Analysis, *Linguistics and Education*, 4(3-4), 269-293. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0898-5898\(92\)90004-G](https://doi.org/10.1016/0898-5898(92)90004-G)
- Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical Discourse Analysis and the Marketization of Public Discourse: The Universities. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 133-168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002002>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. London: Arnold.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (2008). A Dialectical-Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis in Social Research. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer. (Eds.), *Methods in Critical Discourse Analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 162-185). Sage.
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis : The Critical Study of Language*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368>.
- Fairclough, N. (2018). CDA as Dialectical Reasoning: Critique, Explanation and Action. In J. Flowerdew & J. E. Richardson. (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 13-31). Routledge.
- Fowler, R. (1996). On Critical Linguistics. In C.R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard. (Eds.), *Texts and Practices: Reading in Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 3-14). Routledge.
- Gill, R. (2011). Corporate Storytelling as an Effective Internal Public Relations Strategy.

*International Business and Management*, 3(1), 17-25.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.ibm.1923842820110301.107>.

Gill, R. (2015). Why the PR strategy of storytelling improves employee engagement and adds value to CSR: An integrated literature review. *Public Relations Review*, 41(5), 662-674. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.02.012>

GLAAD. (2021). LGBTQ Inclusion in Advertising & Media. Retrieved from <https://www.glaad.org/inclusion>

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 597-606. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2003.1870>

Goldie, P. (2011). Anti-Empathy. In A. Coplan & P. Goldie. (Eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 302-319). *Oxford University Press*.

Hammersley, M. (1987). Some Notes on the Terms 'Validity and 'Reliability.' *British Educational Research Journal*, 13(1), 73-82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192870130107>

Hensley, C., Diddi, S., & Hyllegard, K. (2019). Millennial Consumers' Responses to Cause-related Marketing in Support of LGBTQ Homeless Youth. *Social Sciences*, 8(240), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8080240>

Hoffmann, J., Nyborg, K., Averhoff, C., & Olesen, S. (2020). The contingency of corporate political advocacy: Nike's 'dream crazy' campaign with Colin Kaepernick. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 9(2), 155–175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X20920802>

Holt, B. D. (2002). Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(1). 70-90. <https://doi.org/10.1086/339922>.

Holt, B. D. (2003). What Becomes an Icon Most?, *Harvard Business Review*, 81(3). 43-49.

Huckin, T. N. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. IN T. Miller. (Ed.). *Functional Approaches to Written Text: Classroom Applications* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 87-101). *Unites States Information Agency*.

Human Rights Campaign. (2020). Corporate Equality Index (CEI) 2020. Retrieved from

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/corporate-equality-index>

- Johnson, S. D. (1995). Will our research hold up under scrutiny? *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*, 32(3), 3-6.
- Jungblut, M., & Johnen, M. (2021). When Brands Don't Take My Stance: The Ambiguous Effectiveness of Political Brand Communication, *Communication Research*, 00(0). 1-26  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F00936502211001622>.
- Kaur, M., & Mutty, B. (2016). The Commodification of Islam? A Critical Discourse Analysis of Halal Cosmetic Brands. *The Asian Journal of Humanities*, 23(2), 63-80.  
<https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2016.23.s2.4>
- Kent, M. L. (2015). The power of storytelling in public relations: introducing the 20 master plots. *Public Relations Review*, 41(4), 480-489.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.05.011>
- King, E.B., Reilly, C., & Hebl, M. (2008). The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: Exploring Dual Perspectives of "Coming Out" in the Workplace. *Group & Organization Management*, 33(5), 566-601. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1059601108321834>
- Kotler, P., & Sarkar, C. (2018). *Brand Activism: From Purpose to Action* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). IDEA BITE PRESS.
- Lewis, C., & Reynolds, N. (2021). Considerations for conducting sensitive research with the LGBTQIA+ communities. *International Journal of Market Research*, 63(5), 544-551.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/14707853211030488>
- Moisander, J., & Valtonen, A. (2006). *Qualitative Marketing Research: A Cultural Approach* (Introducing Qualitative Methods series) (1st ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.  
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209632>.
- Mongie, L. D. (2016). Critical Discourse Analysis as Queer Linguistics: Religious pro and anti-LGBT equality framing and counterframing in two letters to the editor in the City Press, *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus*, 49, 26-43. <https://doi.org/10.5842/49-0-664>



- Moorman, C. (2020). Commentary: Brand Activism in a Political World. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 39(4), 388–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915620945260>.
- Mumby, D. K. (1989). Ideology & the Social Construction of Meaning: A Communication Perspective. *Communication Quarterly*, 37(4), 291-304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463378909385551>
- Mundy, E. D. (2013). The Spiral of Advocacy: How state-based LGBT advocacy organizations use ground-up public communication strategies in their campaigns for the “Equality Agenda.” *Public Relations Review*, 39(4), 387-390. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.07.021>
- Parent, M. C., DeBlare, C., & Moradi, B. (2013). Approaches to Research on Intersectionality: Perspectives on Gender, LGBT, and Racial/Ethnic Identities. *Sex Roles*, 68, 639-645. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-013-0283-2>.
- Place, R. K., Edwards, L., & Bowen, A. S. (2021). Dignity and respect or homocommodification? Applying moral philosophy to LGBTQ public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 47(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102085>
- Porter, J. E. (1986). Intertextuality and the Discourse Community. *Rhetoric Review*, 5(1), 34-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198609359131>.
- Pounders, K., & Mabry-Flynn, A. (2016). Consumer Response To Gay and Lesbian Imagery: How Product Type and Stereotypes Affect Consumers' Perceptions. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 56(4), 426-440. <https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-2016-047>
- Robinson, G.C., & Toliver-Smith, A.L. (2021). Sociopolitical Implications to consider When Working With the LGBTQIA+ Community. In R. Horton. (Ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Social Justice in Speech-Language Pathology* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 18-39). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-7134-7.ch002>
- Self, J. M. (2015). Queering Center: A Critical Discourse Analysis of University LGBT Center

- Theoretical Foundations. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, 4(2),  
<https://doi.org/10.31274/jctp-180810-48>
- Shepherd, S., Chartrand, T. L., & Fitzsimons, G. J. (2021). Sincere, Not Sinful: Political Ideology and the Unique Role of Brand Sincerity in Shaping Heterosexual and LGBTQ Consumers' Views of LGBTQ Ads. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 6(2), 1-50. <https://doi.org/10.1086/712608>
- Sobande, F. Woke-washing: “intersectional” femvertising and branding “woke” bravery. *European Journal of Marketing*, 54(11), 2723-2745. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ejm-02-2019-0134>
- Stein, A., & Plummer, K. (1994). “I Can’t Even Think Straight” “Queer Theory and the Missing Sexual Revolution in Sociology. *Sociological Theory*, 12(2). 178-187.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/201863>.
- Stein, M. (2019). *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History*. NYU Press.
- Stubbs M, (1997). Whorf’s children: critical comments on CDA. In A. Ryan & A. Wray. (Eds.), *Evolving Models of Language* (1st ed., pp. 100–16). *Milton Keynes, UK: Multilingual Matters*
- Swaminathan, V., Sorescu, A., Steenkamp, J-B. E. M., O’Guinn, T. C. G., & Schmitt, B. (2020). Branding in a Hyperconnected World: Refocusing Theories and Rethinking Boundaries. *Journal of Marketing*, 84(2), 24-46.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022242919899905>.
- Tandon, A., & Rao, T. S. S. (2021). Pride Parades. *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, 3(3), 209–211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26318318211038118>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical Discourse Analysis. In D. Tannen., H. E. Hamilton., & D. Schiffrin. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 466-486). *Wiley Blackwell*.
- Vardeman-Winter, J., Tindall, N., & Jiang, H. (2013). Intersectionality and publics: How

- exploring publics' multiple identities questions basic public relations concepts. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 2(3), 279-304.
- Vardeman, J., & Sebesta, A. (2020). The problem of intersectionality as an approach to digital activism: the Women's March on Washington's attempt to unite all women. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 32(1), 7-29. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/1062726X.2020.1716769>
- Vijlbrief, A., Saharso, S., & Horashi, H. (2020). Transcending the gender binary: Gender non-binary young adults in Amsterdam. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 17(1), 89-106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2019.1660295>
- Vlachos, P.A., Koritos, C.D., Krepapa, A., Tasoulis, K., & Theodorakis, I. G. (2016). Containing Cause-Related Marketing Skepticism: A comparison across Donation Frame Types. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 19(1), 4-21. <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1057/crr.2015.23>
- Vredenburg, J., Kapitan, S., Spry, A., & Kemper, J. A. (2020). Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing? *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 39(4). 444-460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915620947359>
- Yeomans, L. (2016). Imagining the Lives of Others: Empathy in Public Relations. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 5(1). 71-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X16632033>
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2001). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. SAGE.
- Woods, N., & Hardman, D. (2021). 'It's just absolutely everywhere': understanding LGBTQ experiences of queerbaiting, *Psychology & Sexuality*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2021.1892808>
- Zhou, A. (2021). Communicating Corporate LGBTQ advocacy: a computational comparison of the global CSR discourse. *Public Relations Review*, 47(4), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102061>

## Appendix A: List of Pride Month 2021 statements

Table A1

Title	Company	Industry	Date Published	URL
<i>"Introducing Included Health: Meeting the Health Care Needs of our LGBTQ+ Associates."</i>	Walmart	Retail	June 28, 2021	<a href="https://corporate.walmart.com/newsroom/2021/06/28/introducing-included-health-meeting-the-health-care-needs-of-our-lgbtq-associates">https://corporate.walmart.com/newsroom/2021/06/28/introducing-included-health-meeting-the-health-care-needs-of-our-lgbtq-associates</a>
<i>"The 2021 Be True Collection Brings the Energy, One Story (and Patch) at a Time."</i>	Nike	Apparel	June 4, 2021	<a href="https://news.nike.com/news/nike-be-true-collection-2021-official-images-release-date">https://news.nike.com/news/nike-be-true-collection-2021-official-images-release-date</a>
<i>"Verizon partners with Encircle to build tech spaces for LGBTQ+ youth."</i>	Verizon	Telecommunications	June 9, 2021	<a href="https://www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-partners-encircle-build-tech-spaces-lgbtq-youth">https://www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-partners-encircle-build-tech-spaces-lgbtq-youth</a>
<i>"Pride In the Name of Love: Finding Strength to Come Out at Work and Inspire Others."</i>	General Electric	Diversified	June 29, 2021	<a href="https://www.ge.com/news/reports/pride-in-the-name-of-love-finding-strength-to-come-out-at-work-and-inspire-others">https://www.ge.com/news/reports/pride-in-the-name-of-love-finding-strength-to-come-out-at-work-and-inspire-others</a>
<i>"H&amp;M Goes Beyond The Rainbow With Emotional, Tech-Driven Pride Campaign."</i>	H&M	Apparel	June 1, 2021	<a href="https://about.hm.com/news/general-news-2021/h-m-goes-beyond-the-rainbow-with-emotional-tech-driven-pride-ca.html">https://about.hm.com/news/general-news-2021/h-m-goes-beyond-the-rainbow-with-emotional-tech-driven-pride-ca.html</a>
<i>"Microsoft celebrates Pride by centering on intersectionality, donating to LGBTQI+ non-profits and releasing the largest and most inclusive product lineup."</i>	Microsoft	Tech	June 1, 2021	<a href="https://blogs.microsoft.com/blog/2021/06/01/microsoft-celebrates-pride-by-centering-on-intersectionality-donating-to-lgbtqi-non-profits-and-releasing-the-largest-and-most-inclusive-product-lineup/">https://blogs.microsoft.com/blog/2021/06/01/microsoft-celebrates-pride-by-centering-on-intersectionality-donating-to-lgbtqi-non-profits-and-releasing-the-largest-and-most-inclusive-product-lineup/</a>
<i>"Forward With Pride: Celebrating and Elevating LGBTQ+ Voices."</i>	Facebook	Tech	June 1, 2021	<a href="https://about.fb.com/news/2021/06/forward-with-pride-celebrating-elevating-lgbtq-voices/">https://about.fb.com/news/2021/06/forward-with-pride-celebrating-elevating-lgbtq-voices/</a>
<i>"Viktor&amp;Rolf Partners With GLAAD To Amplify The Voices of the LGBTQIA+ Community."</i>	L'Oreal	Consumer Packaged Goods	June 15, 2021	<a href="https://www.loreal.com/en/news/brands/viktorrolf-partnership-with-glaad/">https://www.loreal.com/en/news/brands/viktorrolf-partnership-with-glaad/</a>
<i>"Gap Inc. Celebrates Pride 2021."</i>	Gap	Apparel	June 4, 2021	<a href="https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/articles/2021/06/gap-inc-celebrates-pride-2021">https://www.gapinc.com/en-us/articles/2021/06/gap-inc-celebrates-pride-2021</a>
<i>"Professional and personal intersections."</i>	UPS	Transportation	June 18, 2021	<a href="https://about.ups.com/us/en/social-impact/our-people/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/professional-and-personal-intersections.html">https://about.ups.com/us/en/social-impact/our-people/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/professional-and-personal-intersections.html</a>
<i>"Finding new ways to show pride."</i>	Chase Bank	Financial	June, 2021	<a href="https://www.chase.com/personal/chase-stories/community-leaders/chase-pride">https://www.chase.com/personal/chase-stories/community-leaders/chase-pride</a>
<i>"The 'Love Unites' 2021 Pride Collection: A Celebration of the Love That Connects Us All."</i>	Adidas	Apparel	May 14, 2021	<a href="https://news.adidas.com/originals/the--love-unites--2021-pride-collection--a-celebration-of-the-love-that-connects-us-all/s/7fb45da3-eb44-41b8-adcd-3191d2dc8081">https://news.adidas.com/originals/the--love-unites--2021-pride-collection--a-celebration-of-the-love-that-connects-us-all/s/7fb45da3-eb44-41b8-adcd-3191d2dc8081</a>



