Corporate Social Responsibility and its Media and Social Media Representation
The Case of Patagonia

Student name: Luka Petri

Student number: 500584

Supervisor: Dr. Maria Avraamidou

Master Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis

June 2023

Word Count: 18 478

Corporate Social Responsibility and its Media and Social Media Representation

The Case of Patagonia

ABSTRACT

Digitalization and the rise of social media transformed the way people interact with media. Simultaneously, the environmental concerns and societal pressure regarding the activities of corporations increased the popularity of corporate social responsibility. The concept, predominantly rooted within the business perspective, has been increasingly positioned in the socio-political landscape. However, its practical implications have been a subject of controversies. Due to its low legislative categorization, CSR have been used by some companies to mislead the public about their activities, resulting in greenwashing, damaging the image of the concept. In 2022, owner of Patagonia transferred ownership to a designated trust and a non-profit organization to fight climate change. This radical move has been met with a considerable reactions across various news media.

Thus, this study examines corporate social responsibility and how is the meaning around Patagonia's ownership created throughout mainstream news media and social media. Hence, the research is guided by the following research question: "How is meaning created about Patagonia's founder decision to give away the company to a designated trust and a non-profit organization to fight climate change in September 2022 across the mainstream media from the US and the UK, and social media?"

To provide an answer, the study used qualitative thematic analysis upon 25 articles from traditional mainstream media and 216 social media comments. The study sheds a light on the way meaning regarding corporate social responsibility is created throughout interaction with media. The results suggest the active role of media in polarisation of the portrayal of corporate social responsibility, due to its inherent connection to politicised aspect of climate change and liberal rhetorics. Moreover, the findings identified the cautious manner of reporting on climate change across the articles, with the specific emphasis lying on the conflict between believers and deniers of climate change. Skepticism plays a prominent role throughout the findings, interestingly appearing throughout various perspectives, including the supporters of Patagonia. Moreover, the study examined the passive role of government in combatting climate change due to its politicised aspect, simultaneously shifting the responsibility to the "one percent", increasing the dependency on the wealth of the few, whose actions are further evaluated on a social level in terms of politics.

Lastly, the study revealed a prominent critique of capitalist system, and the need for more sustainable solutions regarding consumerism.

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to the proactive actions taken by a company that are beneficial for the society as a whole, beyond a firm's main goal of profit maximization (Chandler, 2020). These may include taking into account the company's impact on the environment, conditions of labor, support of communities, or involvement in charities. Similarly, brand activism describes a company's decision to take a public stance on current social and political issues (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Today, an increased number of companies include some of its forms within their strategy or brand identity (Chandler, 2020). Rodriguez-Vila et al. (2017) write that many brands include a social purpose within the marketing communications, and product innovation, as well as "steer investments toward social cause programs" (para.1).

Patagonia is an American outdoor clothing company founded in 1973 by Yvon Chouinard. The company is known for its commitment to both social and environmental responsibility and brand activism. As such, in 2012, Patagonia received B Corp Certification, highlighting its legal commitment, transparency, and high level of social and environmental performance (B Corp, 2023). Patagonia uses sustainable materials, aims to reduce its carbon footprint, and supports various environmental organizations. In 2022, Chouinard gave $3 billion of assets and $100 million in annual profits to a designated trust and a non-profit organization to fight climate change. He stated that "the Earth is now our sole shareholder" (Heaps, 2022). Now, "rather than extracting value from nature to generate wealth, Patagonia's wealth will now be used to protect nature" (Schembri, 2022, p.4). Profit maximization is still relevant as the company is bound to grow and expand, however, its core financial beneficiary is no longer its business owner. Schembri (2022) states that such business behavior can be seen as the "exemplar of progressive brand activism and a foundational brand purpose" (p.1). Patagonia has a long history of enforcing a sustainable business approach, with its customers encouraged to "reduce, repair, reuse, and recycle" the company's products (Schembri, 2022, p.2).

The thesis bases its scope on the increased popularity of the topic both current and socially relevant as it examines the role of corporations and businesses in society as a response to the climate crisis using Patagonia as a case study. Corporate social responsibility has been gaining popularity among companies, with more businesses deciding to implement some of its forms within their strategy (Scheidler et al., 2018). Another concept relating to CSR is brand activism, which refers to the ways in which companies engage in social and political issues to promote their brand values, often taking a public stance on controversial topics (Vredenburg et al., 2020). However, some firms include CSR as a way to influence its various stakeholders with minimal attempt to

implement effective and purposeful activism. The topic has become increasingly relevant and popular as more consumers expect companies to take a stance on social issues and hold them accountable for their actions (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Here, the case of Patagonia is treated as a phenomenon in the way it provides insight into the relevance of companies in a global attempt to mitigate the climate crisis. Positioned within this discourse, the paper focuses on the company Patagonia, used as an example of a promising incorporation of corporate social responsibility within the brand's identity — "build the best product, do the least harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis" (Patagonia, 2013).

At the same time, debates have been raised with some viewing CSR as purely symbolic and focusing on shifting the perspective of stakeholders towards a more positive image of the company (Bhattacharya et al., 2008). These notions relate to the concept of greenwashing, where companies mislead the public by falsely reporting on the way social responsibility is conducted and implemented (Leonidou, 2015). Schäfer (2015) writes that "climate change is a cross-sectional topic that includes scientific as well as political, economic, cultural, and other facets" (p.854). Patagonia's environmental decision has been globally recognized as a big step in shifting the perception of CSR, with numerous and diverse news articles reporting on this phenomenon. The media attention on climate change-connected issues is said to be fluctuating over time, taking into consideration social complexities (Schäfer, 2015). These complexities of climate change issues force journalists to re-evaluate and construct the news in a particular way (Schäfer, 2015).

1.1. Research question

To examine how corporate social responsibility and, inherently, climate change, is represented in the digital public sphere, the articles from diverse mainstream media and the replies to corresponding social media posts are analyzed in order to comprehend and examine the dynamics of this concept as well as the narrative around it. Such comparison enables research to gain understanding of how people interact with media regarding corporate social responsibility and climate change, pertaining to the prominent skepticism or positive attitude towards both, discussing and exploring the reasons for such polarisation. As such, the paper aims to explore how does the reporting on the chosen event represents these topics, and how individuals respond to it online with the use of the following research question: "How is meaning created about Patagonia's founder decision to give away the company to a designated trust and a non-profit organization to fight climate change in September 2022 across the mainstream media from the US and the UK, and social media?"

1.2. Scientific and social relevance

The following study has several reasons for its scientific and social relevance. Firstly, it is grounded in ever-so relevant discussion regarding climate change and human activity on the planet. Examining the factors that contribute to the way this issue is portrayed and discussed provides an insight into a better understanding of this global phenomenon and the way it is represented and thus, understood. At the same time, the scope of this discussion is positioned within the discourse regarding corporate social responsibility — a concept existing mainly in business, yet which influences and role can be seen as crucial in both cultural as well as socio-political landscapes.

By considering this concept as not only related to the business sector per se, it sheds a light on the current tendencies and philosophies behind businesses, emphasizing the role of education and institutions in shaping future generations. This aspect directly links into the contemporary role of corporations in the society, with the chosen, and recent, case study of Patagonia posing as an alternative to the established and grounded in society capitalistic tendencies, while simultaneously touching upon human dependency on individual wealth on a global scale and the role of the government in these processes. Although rooted in politics, the study provides an objective study on the creation of meaning, curating both sides of the discourse.

Lastly, as the study examines the role and reasons for skepticism towards these concepts through the analysis of social media comments, it contributes to the debate on the creation of meaning and the contemporary role of media and human interaction. The study embodies a seeming

media-discussion positioned within the digital public sphere, clashing mainstream, traditional pieces of news with unedited social media comments made by numerous users online. The synthesis of such media expands on the event, providing new findings ranging from economical, social and cultural issues, simultaneously highliting notions that otherwise would not be identified.

1.3. Thesis outline

To examine the media representation of Patagonia's change in ownership in a structured way, the study is divided into the following sections. After the introduction, the theoretical framework conceptualises concepts of corporate social responsibility to position in within the scope of the paper, emphasizing the role of stakeholders. Next, this section examines the historical perspective of corporations since its inception and traces how corporate social responsibility had been shaped. The following part discusses the contemporary discourse on CSR pertaining to politics and ideology, reflecting on the role that corporations play in the society. Next section discusses and examines greenwashing, a concept closely related to that of corporate social responsibility and simultaneously a cause of its damaged image within the business and socio-political landscape. Lastly, it explores concepts of meaning and representation within the cultural and social studies, basing on the work of Stuart Hall and Jürgen Habermas. The third chapter focuses on the methodology and provides the rationale for choosing the qualitative thematic analysis. Moreover, it describes the process of data collection and the process of conducting the analysis itself. The following section, Results, presents in detail the outcomes and findings in the form of four main themes. The last section consists of the overall conclusions derived from the results and provides an answer to the research question. Moreover, this sections aligns these components with the literature explained in the study's theoretical framework. Lastly, the paper acknowledges its limitations and provides recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

"Profit for a company is like oxygen for a person. If you don't have enough of it, you're out of the game. But if you think your life is about breathing, you're really missing something."

— *Peter Drucker*

Prior to analyzing the complex relation between corporate social responsibility, climate change, politics, and the representation in media, special emphasis is place on positioning its historical and social foundations. This chapter aims to provide a theoretical background of the concepts that will be further explored throughout the thesis.

Corporate social responsibility has been gaining popularity as a business concept, however its relation to a broader, cultural and societal landscape is often overlooked. As such, firstly, the chapter conceptualises corporate social responsibility and positions it both within business, as well as broader, socio-political context. Secondly, it provides an insight into the historical development and formation of the corporations, allowing to examine the power dynamics and the legislation relating to the emergence of corporate social responsibility. Later, with increased digitalisation and media interaction, the chapter discusses the contemporary discourse on corporate social responsibility. Special emphasis is put on the role of politics and ideology.

The subsequent part relates to the concept of greenwashing and the way it damages the overall image of prosocial corporate practices. Finally, the chapter explores the interrelations between representation, media, and politics within the discourse.

2.1. Conceptualising corporate social responsibility

Chandler (2020) writes that corporate social responsibility is both a critical, as well as controversial concept. The first is justified by highlighting the relevance and the crucial role that for-profit organizations play in society. Chandler (2020) emphasizes how, through mutually beneficial ways, companies intertwine with society, providing jobs, creating wealth, and fuelling innovations that allow society to prosper. Moreover, these organizations are vital for the economic benefit of the governments, seen as the "primary delivery system for food, housing, healthcare, and other necessities of life" (Chandler, 2020, p. 51). Simultaneously, businesses and corporations are known to exploit *common goods*, such as air, water, land, and people (Aslaksen, 2021). This dichotomy of business tendencies fuels the controversial aspect of CSR, touching upon questions proposed by Chandler, such as "Why does a business exist?" or "What does profit represent?"

(Chandler, 2020). Such dissonances show how dynamic, multidimensional, and complex CSR is as a social phenomenon, merging the business landscape with a wide array of social issues, potentially representing more than just a business strategy (Skruibyte, 2020). The complexity is further explained by Aslaksen building on van den Broek, who states, in relation to the climate crisis, that: "While accepted as a vital part of the complex modern society, business is depicted both as the reason for the crisis and the solution to it" (2021, p.1). As such, Skruibyte (2020) writes that the assessment of CSR is particularly challenging due to the dynamic aspects of the concept, and the way it fluctuates over time, both exposed to and influenced by socio-political, as well as business-related factors. This is linked directly back to Aslaksen (2021), who describes how social expectations of corporate behavior have and still are changing, playing a vital role in the way corporations approach CSR. At the same time, Skruibyte (2020) highlights the way the evolution of CSR occurred, identifying the need to portray the concept from a social perspective, rather than a business one.

To further conceptualise corporate social responsibility for the thesis, the next section provides an insight into the historical background of corporations, exploring the foundations that directly influence the contemporary discourse regarding CSR and examining the factors that paved the way for these modern debates.

2.2. Corporation: a historical perspective

Business corporations are created and survive only as a special privilege of the state. It is absurd to regard the corporation simply as an enterprise established for the sole purpose of allowing profit-making. One has simply to ask: Why should citizens, through their government, grant special rights, powers, privileges, and protections to any firm except on the understanding that its activities are to fulfill their purposes? Corporations exist because we allow them to do so.

— R.A. Dahl, 1973

Corporate social responsibility is a concept highly dependent on each country's own economical, social, and environmental context (Aslaksen, 2021). Due to the major role American companies play in the global economy and as the thesis focuses on Patagonia, an American company, the historical context will pertain to the US. Furthermore, the thesis concurs with Latapí

Agudelo et al. (2019) that the approach regarding CSR should be interdisciplinary in its business relation to global socio-political, and cultural contexts.

In the 18th Century, upon the creation of the first corporations and as a contrast to the British colonial system of royal corporate charters, the American colonists created systems acting as state charters for corporations, ensuring the control of the state over the organization (Banerjee, 2008). The legislation of the 1800s sustained the corporate law that allowed for the state to revoke the charter of the corporation if the organization acted against the "public good" (Banerjee, 2008, p.53). Effectively, Banerjee (2008) writes how some banks of the 19th century in the US lost the right to conduct their business for committing certain violations — this, however, changed towards the end of the 19th Century, and the restrictions disappeared. Banerjee (2008) invokes Perrow (2002), who states that this was cannot be seen as "a mistake, an inadvertence, a happenstance in history, but a well-designed plan devised by particular interests who needed a ruling that would allow for a particular form of organization" (p.41). This phenomenon shows the power structures that paved the way for modern corporations to become "free" of certain legislative limits, effectively removing the major restrictions around corporate activities. Consequently, without these limitations, and as a propeller of the economic growth of the early 20th century, the corporate focus shifted solely to the ever-lasting, primary incentive — profit maximization. The proactive aspects of the corporation and the question of its role in society have been positioned in two assumptions made by Regan (1998): the corporation is guided solely by self-interest or that the organization has an "enduring capacity to operate on the basis of civic virtue" (p.57).

Before discussing its social implications, it is worth emphasizing an underlying concept behind corporate social responsibility, that of a stakeholder. Chandler (2020) writes that a "*stakeholder* is today widely understood to be a group or individual with a self-defined interest in the activities of the firm" (Chandler, 2020, p.24). Concerning CSR, the main "intellectual argument" (p.24) behind the concept is that meeting the needs and expectations of as many shareholders as possible is in the company's best interest. At the same time, Freeman (2010) argues that this reasoning may lead to a paradox, resulting in the concept of stakeholders becoming a "meaningless designation" (p.208). Ultimately, if everyone is recognized as a stakeholder, then in practice, no one is. Repositioning this dissonance, Chandler (2020) narrows the definition to: "An individual or organization that is affected by the firm (either voluntarily or involuntarily) and possesses the capacity and intent to affect the firm" (p.24). Furthermore, researchers argue that such focus on shareholders in discourse about CSR is simultaneously the reason for the skepticism behind it. Banerjee (2008) writes that despite its emancipatory rhetorics, the focus on the external

shareholders dominates its social cause. An interesting case positioned within this debate is the view of the *environment as a stakeholder*. In his book, Chandler (2020) does not include it explicitly as a stakeholder, due to its "lack of agency" (p.125). Chandler (2020) states that such "non-acting entities" (p.125) are excluded from the definition and that the responsibility fall on the agents acting on the behalf of each entity, such as environmental non-profits and funds combatting climate change.

2.3. Contemporary discourse on corporate social responsibility

In the 1970s, the provocative statement of the economist Milton Friedman, in which he claimed that the sole responsibility of businesses is to seek profit, dominated the business landscape. This view remains a major obstacle in the the adoption of CSR within corporations and companies. One of the reasons why businesses do not adopt CSR is the additional costs required to switch to more sustainable solutions, these costs, along with extended time for the benefits to appear, influence short-term profits which then may be difficult to justify to the shareholders (Chandler, 2020). At the same time, some authors argue that corporations cannot act as governments and contribute to social welfare (Banerjee, 2008). This claim is supported by the political economic assumption that corporate strategies are, and will always be made in the interest of increasing profits.

Writing in 2008, regarding CSR, Banerjee argues that social capital cannot be seen as a universal good, and emphasizes that companies are not the only agents responsible to make change expanding the corporate discourse on a global scale. The author states that CSR may work efficiently "provided it creates genuine change rather than reacting to changes in the political economy" (Banerjee, 2008, p.75). 13 years later, in their article, Aslaksen et al. (2021) discuss the evolution of CSR as a result of changes in social expectations of the corporate behavior. Throughout these years, the climate crisis worsened in parallel to the increased digitalization and the rise of social media, shifting the paradigm of which stakeholders play the role in the evaluation of global companies. The rise of environmental concern, already identified in the 1960s, is still very much present. The aforementioned issues emphasize the further transformation of the relationship between society and business. While necessary, there is still a dissonance on how this relation should evolve. Linking this with Chandler's statement on the company's role in society, some authors argue that these corporations are thus portrayed as "the vehicles for change" (Matten & Moon, 2020). At the same time, there is an evident need to shift CSR's emphasis on sustainability,

pushing companies to adopt more environmentally-friendly solutions, thus becoming a larger "symbol" of the possibility for a change.

Such shift in the paradigm regarding the companies' role in the society, however, links the need for environmental sustainability to the ideological issues associated with progress. Circling back to the corporate foundations of the US economy, Aslaksen et al. (2021) argues how environmental discourse acts in opposition to industrialization and embodies "a dissociation from industrial society in a more or less radical way" (p. 6). Such rhetorics has already been seen in practice, paving the way for more issues regarding the image of CSR, and highlighting the divisive, ideological debates that shape it. The term *sustainable development* had been deemed "'dangerously vague' ,'elusive' ,'an oxymoron' and 'a cliché'" (Brown, 2016, p. 6). Similarly, the concept has been described as being open to radically different interpretations, fuelling the strategy of greenwashing, the main issue associated with corporate social responsibility.

2.4. Greenwashing: environment and ideology

Greenwashing is a concept used to describe the deceptive marketing tactics used by companies to promote their products as environmentally friendly, without them having an actual environmental benefit (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Academic research on greenwashing focuses on the impact of these strategies on the society and investigates the factors, its ethics, and legislation. The topic has become more relevant as consumers are becoming more environmentally conscious and demand more transparent and sustainable business practices from companies (Vredenburg et al., 2020). As a result, the academic study of greenwashing is important for understanding the complexities of corporate sustainability and its possible implications for society as a whole. These issues create space for managers' decisions to not only be influenced by business strategies but by political ideology as well.

In 1988, Erikson conceptualized political ideology as a "set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved" (p.201). Jian et al. write about how the political ideologies of managers influence their responses to CSR. Already in the 70s, some theorists such as Milton Friedman argued how left-leaning managers are more likely to promote CSR, a concept already believed to be promoted by left-wing political ideology, especially socialist one (Friedman, 1970). At the same time, those with a right-wing, *capitalist* ideology tend to focus on shareholder view and promoting economic freedom (Jiang et al., 2018). Schwartz (1996) argued that classical liberalism is more concerned with civil rights, and people of this ideology are more sensitive to social issues, such as diversity, social change, human rights, and the environment. On the opposite side of the

spectrum, more conservative views tend to focus more on individualism, property rights, and free markets — with resources that ought to flow to those who are most effective and efficient (Chin et. al., 2013). Throughout the discourse on CSR, some authors further argued how some over-emphasize the concept as a way to enhance the personal reputation within their communities, as well as their business environments (Chin et al., 2013). Linked to the constantly rising issue of climate change, these observations expand on the business landscape and further position CSR as a concept deemed to be explored and discussed from a socio-political perspective, uncovering the ideological clashes that add layers to this already multidimensional discourse.

Regarding social issues such as climate change, Anderson (2009) argues that media are central to the "relations of the definition" (p.179) between political, scientific, and public spheres. Anderson writes that socio-political factors are a crucial aspect of media reporting on climate change, which has become increasingly apparent, with political and industry interests playing a significant role in this process (Anderson, 2009). The author highlights that covering this complex topic presents multiple challenges for researchers and that there is a need to explore the factors that shape current representations in media. Ghoul et al. (2016) write how "the internet and social media can be powerful tools in penetrating informational barriers, mobilizing citizens, and advocating for reform" (p. 1053). Thus, the evident rise of the "new media" and its role in the active polarisation of society become an inherent part of the global socio-political context. Building on that, the role of political ideology and its rhetorics can be visible not only to the managers of the companies but also to customers. Here, the relation between the two is much more intertwined in comparison to the aforementioned beginnings of corporate America, shifting the focus to social issues in a bottom-up manner. As such, it created an online space where companies can be directly influenced by the opinions of their customers, and not only. Through interaction with the new media, such increased visibility is yet another aspect of CSR, potentially driving or mitigating the adoption of these strategies in companies.

Therefore, different media and their affordances have the potential to affect the reputations of the companies (Ghoul et al., 2016). Such "reputational penalties" (Ghoul et al., 2016, p.1053) pose a threat to companies and, in the polarised context of modern environmental debates, show how much power both sides of the spectrum have to influence the business and political landscape. Already in 1995, Arora et al. argued that "the increasing rapidity of information distribution and enhanced levels of public awareness were heightening the urgency of managing stakeholder perceptions of the firm's CSR profile" (p.290). The further increasing digitalization and the global move from the public to the digital public sphere further emphasize the role of emerging media in

the social expectations of businesses but also in shaping meaning around corporate social responsibility. The next section therefore revises studies about how meaning is constructed in social and traditional media around representations of CSR and in particular climate crisis and greenwashing.

2.5. Meaning: Power of representation

This section conceptualises and provides a base for the analysis of meaning based on the work of Stuart Hall (1997), who describes the complex, and versatile relation between culture, representation and meaning within society. Furthermore, as the scope of the paper focuses on the digital interaction of audiences with media, the role of digital public sphere will be additionally discussed. Hall (1997) provides different definitions of "culture", ranging from traditional: "best that has been thought and said in a society" (p.2) to one positioned within the context of social science, referring to values that are shared or "whatever is distinctive about the way of life of a people, community, nation, or social group" (p.2). Due to such plurality of possible ways to define culture, Hall (1997) puts a special emphasis on the "importance of meaning to the definition of culture" (p.2).

Hall (1997) highlights the interrelation between language and culture throughout the process of meaning creation, pertaining to its dependency on its participants and how it concerns the "production and the exchange of meanings (…) between members of a society or group" (p.2). These participants interpret the world and express their identity in a similar way, understood by others from this particular group. Cultural meanings are shaped through the relations between one's identity, emotions, and attachments, collectively forming, organising and regulating social practices (Hall, 1997). These meanings influence and reinforce particular tendencies resulting in real, practical outcomes in the public sphere (Hall, 1997). Here, the emphasis lies on the influence and the involvement of participants in a culture, and it is ultimately these participants that give meaning to people, objects, and events. Collectively, yet on a personal level as well, the way *we* talk, think and feel about certain *things* directly translates into how we represent them, which in turn is what gives them a certain, assigned meaning (Hall, 1997). This allocation of meaning is done through "frameworks of interpretation" (Hall, 1997, p.2). In any given "culture", the way words, emotional associations, images or conceptualisations are used to describe certain objects is part of representation, directly relating to the way we collectively describe and portray these objects. Hall writes how culture exists throughout these processes — "permeating all of society" (p.3). These symbolical, fluctuating domains reinforced in society directly affect how its participants portray and

exist within social life, distinguishing this humane aspect from universal biologically driven behaviours (Hall, 1997, p.3). Hall (1997) writes that meaning is "what gives us a sense of our own identity, who we are, and with whom we belong" (p.3).

Production and exchange of meaning is a constant, multi-level process throughout every personal and social interaction, happening and existing throughout various media (Hall, 1997). Today especially, with increased digitalisation and constant exposure to new forms of modern mass media through emergence of new technology and dispersed content, it circulates between different cultures on a massive and rapid scale (Hall, 1997). This creation of meaning is also present throughout the consumption, interaction or appropriation of the elements existing in culture — ultimately incorporating them within our daily practices, further giving them value and significance. Thus, these meanings organise and regulate the social norms and behaviours, being an inherent part of setting up rules and conventions. This aspect, relating to the notion of power is "what those who wish to govern and regulate the conduct and ideas of others seek to structure and shape" (Hall, 1997, p.4). Especially nowadays, in the era of digital mass and social media, such regulatory, or influential role of representation and meaning creation emerged throughout social sciences, emphasising how representation enters the "very constitution of things" (Hall, 1997, p.5), and thus referred to by Hall (1997) as equally important as economic or material elements that shape social subjects and history.

Pertaining to the role of mass media and social media in the digital public sphere, Thiel (2022) invokes Habermas, who criticised the development of the Western public sphere in the 1950s, emphasizing how the process reminds "(re)institutionalised feudal structure of one-sided representation through the focus on consumption and entertainment" (Thiel, 2022, p.132). Habermas argues how public sphere is rooted in capitalism and is shaped by mass media and how this process could be tamed with the use of welfare state (Habermas, 1976). Regarding the digitalisation of the public sphere, Habermas identified possible dangers to this shift, with the emphasis on "unequal access to discursive power (agenda-setting, chances of manipulation)" (Thiel, 2022, p.132). Ultimately, Habermas structurally distinguishes *online* public from the *normal* publics. Here, the emphasis lies on the digital public sphere formed by online communities operating on the Internet. Thus, these interrelations and processes of meaning creation are a foundation for this study.

3. Methodology

This thesis explores the construction of meaning in mainstream, international media as well as on social media, focusing on corporate social responsibility using Patagonia's change in its organizational structure in September 2022 as a case study. This chapter justifies the use of qualitative thematic analysis as its method of research. Moreover, this section describes the procedure of data collection and the sample, examining chosen articles from traditional news media and social media comments. Later, the data analysis and the steps of the qualitative thematic analysis are explained. Lastly, this part of the thesis discusses its validity and ethics.

3.1. Research design

The thesis explores how the news on Patagonia's new structure is portrayed across diverse news media in the US and the UK and how is it discussed on social media. The findings of this paper shed a light on how media represent and portray environmental and business-related issues and how this affects the meaning creation within the audiences in the online environment. To answer the research question, the thesis used a qualitative thematic analysis. This qualitative method focuses on capturing and analyzing patterns, themes, and meanings (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This method allows the study to explore how different mainstream news publications from the US and the UK report on the company's unique business approach and its relationship to CSR and climate change as it allows for inclusion and positioning of the study in a particular, socio-political context. The use of such method will help in the identification and the analysis of themes and patterns within mainstream news publications describing the case of Patagonia which will be then synthesised with social media comments and replies to the event. Using this research method allowed the research to generate insights into the way in which the complexities of this phenomenon, such as its revolutionary business approach and the relation to climate change, are portrayed across diverse news media and how it resonates within the digital public sphere.

Qualitative thematic analysis has been chosen as it is beneficial in investigating the way meaning is created through identification, analysis, and reporting on underlying patterns within the sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interpretation of the sources by the researchers is a fundamental aspect of this method, allowing to further take into consideration the context of their creation, aspect especially vital when discussing dynamic and complex themes of media, climate change, and politics. Furthermore, the flexibility make this method a useful research tool, capable of creating a detailed analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Here, the usefulness of this analysis can be seen in a way the social implications of news media and how their messages resonate with the

audiences in the digital sphere can be analyzed, taking into the consideration current issues, tendencies and the global narrative. Moreover, the prominent skepticism relating to corporate social responsibility and modern news can be thus visualised through the qualitative comparison of the meanings, additionally providing new insights into the discourse.

Thematic analysis is based on systematical analysis of large data sets of text set in a specific context through the application of codes and identifying the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) write that: "thematic analysis can be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of „reality" (p.9). Given the rise of digitalization, dispersed content and the human dependency on technology regarding the way news are presented, these complexities fuel the modern dissonance and further complicate how society interacts with the available data, and thus meaning. As the scope of thesis pertains to online media, this method is particularly useful due to the range of various points of view that are present online. Moreover, with Patagonia's corporate social responsibility relying heavily on the company's attitude towards climate change, it provides an opportunity to analyze and evaluate the intricacies and roots of these issues, here seen as socio-political. In order for the research to be detached from the imposed tendencies, as well as the assumptions of the researcher, the entire process has to be well defined and transparent (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.2. Data collection

3.2.1 Units of analysis

In this paper, thematic analysis is applied to articles and social media comments to asses the complexities of CSR, politics and news media, as well as the way their messages resonate with the audiences, constructing meaning. The sample is obtained from diverse mainstream news media of various political affiliations from the UK and the US, reporting on the change in Patagonia's organizational structure: The Times, The Guardian, New York Times, The Independent, FOX News, Washington Post and Bloomberg. Then, to analyse the way that these news resonate with the public and how the meaning is created, the social media comments as well as replies to both Facebook and Twitter posts informing on the event were additionally analyzed. Additionally, one of the selected articles provides a transcript of Fox News broadcast channel, in which news anchors and media contributors discuss and comment on the event, allowing to analyse their input into the discourse.

3.2.2 Sampling strategy

In order to answer the research question, an appropriate sample strategy was applied. Thesis conducted the sampling of international news media articles by selecting a range of mainstream publications from different regions and with varying political affiliations that reported on the event.

The thesis followed a sampling criteria, with a non-probability sampling approach being utilised and purposive sampling used to find the most relevant content. Such sampling allows the author to select and create the data collection based on the criteria relevant to the topic of the study (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Here, the study focused on the most prominent and mainstream media, diversified when it comes to political orientation, referring to the event in the headline and body of the text. The news about Patagonia's organizational change went public on September 14th 2022, with most of the global newspapers presenting their articles on the same day. As such, the chosen articles are covering the period from September 14th and which referred directly to the event. Moreover, both social media Facebook and Twitter posts of have been posted on Patagonia's official profiles that day. Additionally, as the study focuses on international news media from the UK and the US, the sample consist only of articles written in English.

Thesis selected articles from each news media, either directly reporting on it (factual), or commenting on the event. The final amount of the articles totalled 25 articles from seven different news media from both US and UK. The UK newspapers included four articles from The Times, five from The Guardian, and three from The Independent. The US media consisted of four New York Times articles, three from FOX News, three from Washington Post, and three from Bloomberg. Throughout these newspapers, their political stances are considered to be as follow (see Table 3.1):

Table 3.1: Approximated political stances of the selected news media

Left	Centre left	Centre	Centre right	Right
	The Independent			
The Guardian				
			The Times	
		New York Times		
				FOX News
	Washington Post			
		Bloomberg		

The paper analyzed replies and comments on two social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, as comments on these two particular platforms tend to be longer and reflect personal opinions of the users, often resulting in online discussions on particular topic. The chosen social media posts were the official posts made by Patagonia on September 14th reporting on the event and providing a link to the company's official website. Upon the review of the data, the study excluded comments that consisted of only *emojis* or *hashtags*. In order to enrich the data corpus, the research also included the replies to an official post made by New York Times on Twitter, with a direct link to its article about Patagonia. As the chosen posts were directly linked to the event, the time period for the social media posts remained the same as that for traditional media. Social media replies under Patagonia's official post on Facebook resulted in 315 comments; after reviewing the comments in terms of their suitability for research, the final amount totalled 82. Reviewing Twitter replies under Patagonia's official Tweet, resulted in 73 suitable replies. Lastly, the Twitter replies to New York Times's official post with a link to the article had 61 selected replies. The final amount of the analyzed comments totalled 216 comments.

In order to obtain the relevant data, the main keywords used upon researching the sample were as follows: *Patagonia, company, owner, giveaway, climate change, non-profit, fund*. Majority of the news media articles used these exact keywords in their headlines or in the introductory part of the article. Moreover, the keywords that were used align with the scope of the thesis and relate directly to the research question (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Keywords and their alternatives

Keywords	Alternative keywords
Patagonia	
company	brand, corporation
owner	Yvon Choinard, founder, Patagonia founder
giveaway	ownership, control, donates
climate change	environment, climate crisis
non-profit, fund	

3.3. Data analysis

Conducting a qualitative thematic analysis can be divided into four main steps: familiarisation, development of the initial codes and subcategories, categories, and selective coding that allow to create the main themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). By comparing and contrasting different themes from various sources, the study is able to identify similarities, contrasts, and create relationships between them, at the same time highlighting both business and socio-political contexts. The final results of the qualitative thematic analysis is presented with the use of specific codes. By analyzing the data thematically, the thesis identifies common patterns and themes across the articles and generates a comprehensive understanding of how this particular event is portrayed and understood in mainstream and social media, and how the meaning is constructed.

The first step before conducting the analysis is the process of familiarisation with the data. Detailed examination and understanding of the material allows for a thorough analysis, and preliminary identification of the patterns. In doing so, the researcher traces similarities across data, creating preliminary connections that are later reflected in the creation of themes. Furthermore, during the phase of familiarisation, the researcher additionally identifies initial similarities and differences. Upon second reading of the entire data set, the researcher summarises the data set and creates notes, allowing to create a base for further analysis and the later creation of codes.

The second phase of the analysis, as described by Braun and Clark (2006) involves generating initial codes. Upon reading and familiarisation with the data, these codes compose of the preliminary elements from the text that are characteristic and interesting for the researcher, allowing one to make links between them. Referred by Boyatzis (1998) as "the most basic segment of the raw data" (p.63), these subcategories are grouped together to create themes — broader segments entailing the interpretation of the researcher in the particular context. Due to the paper including various news media reporting on the same event, the initial codes tend to be similar due to the informative style of the articles. At the same time, these are contrasted by the informal style of writing seen in the comments under social media posts informing on the event, allowing for fruitful comparison and the analysis of the creation of meaning as well as identifying what could be missing throughout the articles, and why. Differences in tone further allow the study to identify the tendencies and the rhetorics of the users, given the reporting style of the thesis and its context. As such, big aspect of generating preliminary codes already assumes the differences in attitudes and tendencies of the users — such as skeptical, or positive attitude towards combatting climate change, billionaires, or corporate social responsibility. The tone of the articles made by news media does not simultaneously assume the political affiliation of the newspaper, however certain political bias can

be observed. Upon conducting the initial coding, the data set was once again re-read by the researcher. Subcategories with similar meaning, such as "skepticism regarding climate change" and "disbelief in climate change" were grouped together. The final amount of subcategories totalled 239 subcategories. Some examples of the found subcategories are: "generosity of the company", "reluctant billionaire", or "passiveness of society". A full version of the coding frame, including subcategories, categories and themes, is available in Appendix A.

The next step involves identification of patterns between the generated codes, creating categories that will later be used in creation of the main themes. Given the research question of the paper, each category is evaluated within its context, allowing to highlight the relation between newly found themes. Through such contextualized evaluation, this part of the study highlights the relevance of each category, paving the way to gather more insights in the following part of the analysis. The analysis resulted in 23 categories, such as "Skepticism regarding climate change", "The role of the system", or "Critique of capitalism".

The final stage of the analysis involves the comparison of all categories to create multiple main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes are related to the main assumptions behind the research question and allow for a fruitful discussion and further analysis in the Results section of the thesis. After conducting the initial analysis, the findings revealed seven themes. However, upon reviewing the findings at the later stage, some themes and subcategories had to be merged with others due to repeating patterns, resulting in four final themes: *Portrayal of climate change*, *Portrayal of corporate social responsibility*, *Portrayal of Patagonia*, and *Role of capitalism and institutions.*

3.4. Validity

To strengthen the quality of this research, this section provides a brief critical assessment of validity throughout the research process. The selected sample consists of mainstream media articles reporting on Patagonia's change in its ownership and the appropriate social media comments and replies from Facebook and Twitter. The chosen social media posts are directly linked to the articles, allowing to trace the discussion despite newspapers not providing the designated space for commenting online. Thus, analysing these responses enable researcher to examine these debates in the digital public sphere. Moreover, contrasting traditional, mainstream data from popular news media with social media comments made by everyday users allow for an interesting synthesis, in which edited and curated by editors articles are contrasted with informal, and often blunt replies. Throughout the process, a constant re-evaluation of the findings, with special attention aimed at

repetitive codes and themes to make sure an appropriate representation of the content, focused on the scope of the research.

3.4.1 Reflexivity and ethics

As discussed earlier in the Methodology section, qualitative research incorporating thematic analysis is subjective and relies heavily on the role of the researcher throughout the process of the analysis. As such, this section will provides a brief explanation to explain any possible biases that could influence the results. The scope of thesis touches upon topics of climate change, politics, and ideology — themes that are challenging to discuss without possibility of a certain bias, at the same time the researcher remained objective in one's finding, taking into consideration the dichotomies and complexities present in both sides of the political spectrum.

The researcher concurs with the scientific evidence regarding human contribution to climate change, and although the researcher supports the incorporation of corporate social responsibility within companies, the researcher is aware of misleading, inconsistencies and erraticism regarding these actives which are viewed as one of the main reasons for skepticism towards them. This further justifies researcher's position on objectivity of the research, aiming at examination of how is the meaning created on both sides of the dispute.

Moreover, as the study relies heavily on publicly available articles and social media comments, the notion of ethics has been considered. When it comes to mainstream news media, the articles are available online on the newspapers websites and are available for viewing for the public. At the same time, despite the public availability of the social media comments on Facebook and Twitter, the study chose to anonymise the users to protect their identity.

4. Results

The conducted thematic analysis consisted of two pools of data, namely the selection of articles reporting on Patagonia's organizational change made by mainstream news media from the US and the UK, as well as the comments under social media posts on Facebook and Twitter. Following the steps of thematic analysis, both articles and comments were merged, allowing to highlight the interrelations within them. In doing so, the paper analyses the way meaning is created, allowing to expand on the Patagonia's case study, revealing a broader discussion about corporate social responsibility, climate change, capitalism and current socio-political issues. Due to the complexities of media representation and the diversity of the sample, the following part of the paper willl present an overview of the findings, highlighting the key characteristics of the results, prior to discussing the overarching themes.

4.1. Overview

The data set consisting of mainstream media revealed a more homogenised representation of the event, given the informational and reporting rhetorics of the pieces. All articles informed on the event, yet they differed in attention to more in-depth information regarding the practical and legislative process of the change in Patagonia's organizational structure. Articles coming from newspapers with more progressive image, such as The Guardian, additionally provided the backstory of the company, focusing on Patagonia's founder, Yvon Chouinard's personal philosophy as a way to provide an explanation of the decision to transfer ownership to the designated environmental trusts aiming to combat climate change. The news' attention to the personal beliefs of the founder as well as the long history of Patagonia's brand activism seem to justify the decision and fuel the rhetorics of more positive approach. Simultaneously, the rather ambivalent, reporting style of the articles did not reflect any drastic political affiliations or tendencies, nor did they appraise the decision explicitly. However, while describing the event and somewhat justifying such drastic change from a business world, the matter of the climate change as the environmental issue itself was omitted throughout all of the samples, excluding one article from The Guardian, providing explicit recommendations regarding environmental investing.

One key distinction in the reporting style of the newspapers can be seen in the way FOX News presented the announcement. One article of this particular news media, which is considered as more openly conservative newspaper provided a description of the Chouinard's declaration and objectively informed about the news. However, another article presenting the transcript of the FOX's broadcast channel revealed an evidently more critical and direct stance, where news

contributors as well as the news anchors of the channel explicitly downplay the Chouinard's decision by stating that he found a "loophole" that allows him to avoid paying taxes and, as another co-anchor stated: "Nobody ever just gives away all their money for no reason" (FOX News, 2022). Here, the critical stance is clearly visible and although the news anchor's omitted the fact that despite not paying the considerably larger inheritance tax, Patagonia is bound to pay taxes as a result of the transfer of ownership, the aspect of such skepticism keeps resurfacing throughout the research and is predominant across the data after conducting the analysis of social media comments and synthesising the results. The issues regarding taxes is further explained in the latter part of the thesis. When it comes to the digital sphere of the users reacting to this event on Facebook and Twitter, several key aspects emerge. Here, the relatively objective and homogenous representation throughout mainstream media is contrasted with the social media responses. Not bound by the editorial limitations, the social media comments broaden the discussion, shedding a light on current social issues, allowing the research to further analyze the aspect of the meaning creation about corporate social responsibility and the way audiences interact with media. Inclusion of the social media comments, ranging from reaffirming to critical across multiple political perspectives, expand the discourse and politicise the matter at hand.

The iconic, or "cult" status of Patagonia revealed a vast amount of supporters of the company, idolising its owner's environmentalism and corporate social responsibility and historical brand activism, both environmental as well as political. These positive comments reveal the feelings of gratitude and hope towards combating climate change, with many users stating and pledging loyalty to the brand as a result of a positive social outcome of the change. At the same time, while some praise the decision, treating it as a case of a great corporate leadership and setting an example for future generations, other are more reluctant to accept such radical move for variety of reasons, ranging from disbelief in the climate change, "wokeness" of the company, or ulterior political motives, to overall futility of the settlement given the current global economic and socio-political state of the world.

Thus, synthesising social media comments within the representations of Patagonia in mainstream media via a the thematic analysis highlights the key aspects of these predominant conflicts positioned both within the progressive and conservative perspectives. These are visible throughout the analysis and are a foundation of the latter part of thesis, revealing patterns regarding corporate social responsibility, repercussions of greenwashing, and political paradoxes of how news media resonate within the audiences. As such, the application of thematic analysis to the selected articles and comments revealed four main themes, categorised and revolving around the

representation of these notions, namely: *Portrayal of climate change*, *Portrayal of corporate social responsibility*, *Portrayal of Patagonia*, and the *Role of socio-political institutions*. Moreover, throughout the discussion of each theme, the notions of media portrayal, role of politics and skepticism will be present.

4.2. Portrayal of climate change

Upon conducting the analysis, the first theme that emerged touches upon the portrayal of climate change throughout the mainstream articles and social media comments. The division between deniers and believers in climate change is evident throughout the analysis, and constitutes a base for the conflict online, representing broader issue regarding objectivity of science as well as encapsulating the attitudes towards information available on various news media. At the same time, throughout the articles, the notion of climate change has been observed to be treated as a predisposed concept, with few articles expanding on the issue itself, and instead focusing solely on Patagonia and its new ownership model, which although understood, highlights the aspect of curated media reporting on climate change itself. Additionally, one of the articles provides a description of the event that ends with a direct encouragement to shop Patagonia's most popular products, highliting the consumer-centred approach. Simultaneously, the social media comments allowed user to share their opinions on the issue, further presenting a range of conflicting views towards climate.

4.2.1. Crisis of belief

Before discussing the issue of Patagonia itself, this part of the Results section focuses on the attitudes towards the positioning of the climate change within the discourse — the foundation and the main catalyst for the division, present in both articles and comments. Jonathan Safran Foer, in his book *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast* writes: "As Amitav Ghosh wrote in *The Great Derangement,* "The climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination." I would call it a crisis of belief" (Safran Foer, 2019, p. 16). Further highliting the drastic distinction between acceptance of the changes occurring on our planet and belief in the climate crisis resulting in proactive sustainable activities, present in the attitudes of many, Safran Foer discusses the obstacles present in approaching the climate change as a real, tangible threat to humanity. The findings revealed a considerable amount of deniers who dub climate change a "hoax" or "scam". Moreover, one user justifies his disbelief, bringing climate change

believers' "arrogance" into the debate: "What a tremendously arrogant thought that our species which is temporary and fragile is going to "destroy the planet" (*user*, 2022).

Here, the seeming temporality of the human species is highlighted, directly opposing to the claims, frequently provided by the evidence, of human activities contributing to the change in climate. Following the similar logic, the mentioned temporality of our species assumes that humanity is naturally bound to exploit natural resources of the Earth, given our limited time here. The user further contributed to the debate by simply stating: "The planet is fine" (*user*, 2022).

The findings revealed a divisive dissonance regarding so called "faith" in climate change, which in turns negates any activities supposedly aimed at combatting the issue, as with the case of Patagonia. Climate change is a global, multi-layered and highly complex issue that starts on a local scale, which is later expanded to the global climate which in result once again directly affects society locally (Vainio & Paloniemi, 2011). The complexities of climate change result in it becoming an almost abstract concept, rooted and amplified by a collective action of millions of people. At the same time, such collective action cannot, or should not be regarded without taking into account the behaviour, or role of the individual. Furthermore, these both global and local effects are varying throughout countries and communities, making the comprehension of the issue even more difficult (Vainio & Paloniemi, 2011). Simultaneously, the disbelief in climate change has been linked to the perception that the individual action will not have an impact on a larger scale (Heath and Gifford, 2006). The dissonance rises throughout the need for collective action to combat a phenomenon that is not only statistical and relatively intangible, but also not new: "Ridiculous. The climate is always changing. Its not a crisis. Nothing will come from this. They will do nothing to change the weather" (*user*, 2022).

Vainio and Paloniemi (2011) highlight how climate has always been changing (although not as rapidly without human industrial and agricultural practices), facilitating the belief that human activity does not directly affect it, fuelling the deniers but simultaneously the passiveness of the believers, resulting in further difficulty in assessing its tangible risks and consequences. Regarding the threat and the severity of climate change, one of articles from The Guardian, encapsulates these rhetorics: "the billionaire owner of Patagonia is giving the entire company away to fight the Earth's climate devastation" (The Guardian, 2022). Here, newspapers highlights the drastic changes occurring on the planet, further emphasizing the need for action, and positioning the company as even more altruistic and aware of possible consequences.

4.2.2 Role of media

This part discusses the role of media in discourse regarding climate change as well as its relation to politics, examining the way these notions interrelate when discussing the pro-social corporate tendencies and the way they are portrayed. As observed earlier in the analysis, the way users interact with pieces of media directly influences their understanding of relevant matters.

Swain (2011) writes that the effectiveness of climate change mitigation is directly related to the public understanding of the issue, which is further shaped by the media consumption. At the same time, the mass media have a responsibility to report and inform public audiences on the climate crisis (Vainio & Paloniemi, 2011). Due to increased digitalisation, the abundant amount of dispersed content throughout the digital sphere affect the public opinion daily. Here, Carvalho (2007) writes how media create social representations of climate change, which are fuelled and shaped by the political interests, individual ideologies as well as the interest of the readers. Taking these factors into account of creation of meaning, news media frame the rhetorics of climate change interrelated with "a dynamic and contested issue within intersecting realms of policy, science, and the public" (Swain, 2011, p.162). Touching upon the aforementioned complexities of climate change, the media proceeds with caution regarding the way it reports on the issue. One of the articles stated that: "Climate change, road rage, water insecurity and plastics pollution aren't independent crises – we shouldn't be fighting them as if they are" (The Guardian, 2022). Such statement highlights the complexities of the issue that tend to be omitted or generalised in other articles. The same article prompts for collective action, as "bold, unifying steps are needed in the vanishing time available" (The Guardian, 2022). Here, highliting the aspect of limited time, the article frames these issues as urgent, emphasizing the vast amounts of improvements that have to be done for the sake of the planet. Majority of the articles however, accept climate change as a "given" issue, which is "combatted" or "tackled" by Patagonia, without providing more information on the matter. Swain (2011) writes how media tend to frame climate change news within the underlying social concerns, such as capitalism, the relationship between nature and culture, the processes of defining these issues or various societal transformations. The author invokes Lakoff, who argued about human's tendency to unconsciously reject facts that do not relate to the individual, personal frames used in portraying the world. These frames are what facilitates person's willingness to accept the facts that fall within one's personal values, simultaneously rejecting these arguments and facts that oppose them (Lakoff, 2004). One user's comments encapsulates such rhetoric by bringing into debate the controversial notion of Earth being flat, idea numerously disproven and connected to conspiracy theories and less prominent in academic discourse. Nonetheless, one of the users creates

a parallel between believers of climate change and those who believe that the Earth is flat: There's little difference between people who believe in man-made climate change and people that believe in a flat earth. Both are viewed as mad and/or gullible. (*user*, 2022)

As seen above, the divergence from scientific facts is an inherent part of the conflict between the deniers and those who accept humanity's contribution to the crisis. Both the issue of climate and the doubt regarding planet's shape openly oppose the scientific evidence. This particular comment's credibility can almost be questioned, yet it visualises the broader issue that relates to the news framing of controversial science which can "affect perceived ethics of research" (Swain, 2011, p. 166). The author writes how those who believe in moral neutrality of science perceive a greater usefulness of the research. Additionally, such disputes regarding the credibility of the research can be juxtaposed with some media's tendency to "undermine the scientific status of climate change by presenting it as irrational faith-based religion and its proponents as religious extremists intolerant of criticism." (Swain, 2011, p. 166). Such framing tend to include the socio-political conflict frame, forcing audiences to identify with either side, regarding of their personal beliefs regarding scientific evidence, ultimately politicising the issue of the credibility of objective research: "Climate change is NOT real" (*user*, 2022)

Swain argues how the news revolving around climate change have framed "political, social, and cultural issues into the political agendas of various leaders" (Swain, 2011, p. 167). Thus, the global rhetorics of climate change is seemingly bound to be positioned within the political conflicts. At the same time, this is fuelled by societal tendency to shift the responsibility for solving climate issues to the government and political authorities, turning away from the aforementioned need of collective action, given the individual beliefs and pro-activeness. "Elite Western media" (p. 167) as described by Swain (2011), tend to frame climate change in terms of political constraints and economic drivers. As such, the public response is further categorised and depended on the level of trust towards the current authorities. Vainio and Paloniemi's research (2011) explains how trust in political systems decreased not only the belief in climate change itself, but also the realisation and need for individual action simultaneously fuelling the global polarisation.

4.3. Portrayal of corporate social responsibility

Prior to the application of the concept in the next theme which focuses on the portrayal of Patagonia, the following part discusses the theme regarding corporate social responsibility and brand activism itself. The analysis revealed how controversial the topic of pro-social activities undertaken by a company can be. As discussed above, the division between climate change

believers and deniers transcends into the division regarding this controversial topic per se. The skepticism, need for transparency, suspicion of greenwashing and doubtfulness towards the outcome is evident throughout the analysis, highliting distrust towards CSR present across multiple perspectives.

4.3.1 Aftermath of greenwashing

The global tendency to politicise and polarise the matter of climate change, environmentalism, and sustainability as a whole, damaged the portrayal and increased the skepticism regarding corporate social responsibility — this notion is visible throughout the comments as users who do not appraise Patagonia's decision openly question the real motives behind such radical business move: "And what have they done with the money?" (*user*, 2022)

Brand activism, seen by Sarkar and Kotler (2018) as an evolution of CSR, is said to have diverged from its original goal of achieving societal impact to its engagement in controversial and contested socio-political issues. As such, the values of a particular brand are not necessarily shared by all consumers, resulting in alienation of those less acceptive of company's attitudes towards certain issues. Moreover, due to increased polarisation, incorporating CSR and brand activism can be further characterised by forced adoption of "either progressive or conservative stances on socio-political issues" (Vredenburg et al, 2020, p. 8). Such political divide detaches from the authenticity and understanding of the cause and forces customers and other agents in the market to question the action itself, despite it being political in its own way. Throughout these processes, a major focus lies on the authenticity of the actions taken by the company. Vredenburg et al (2020) categorises four aspects that have to be met in order for the company to be seen as authentic in their prosocial attitudes: purpose, value, marketing messages, and corporate practice (Vredenburg et al, 2020). These elements are interrelational and required to determine itself holistically to create authenticity: "you can always count on Patagonia." (*user*, 2022). As seen here, the first comment shows how consistent, transparent and authentic brand activism allows a company to maintain customer's loyalty. Here, the user believes in pro-social actions of Patagonia, linking one's statement to the company's long history of activism. The Times describes company's pro-social decision as a "philanthropic gesture (which) exemplifies how commercial success can coexist with a social conscience" (The Times, 2022). Failing to maintain the aforementioned elements, may result in greenwashing which, as explained earlier in the thesis is characterised by misleading consumers about the company's socio-political stance, leading to a skewed perception of the firm, damaging its reputation and exploiting real issues that more authentic firms try to solve (Vredenburg et al, 2020):

"Is it really just for the planet? Or is there an alternative motive?" (*user*, 2022). The comment above captures such skepticism, and shows the mistrust towards the company, despite Patagonia image as a leading company in advocating for pro-social corporate practices. At the same time, given that user may or may not be aware of such status, the sceptical comment visualizes the aftermath of greenwashing, which lead to a form or prejudice towards companies that reinforce the rhetorics of trying to combat climate change. As discussed earlier in the thesis, such behaviour harms the overall impact of CSR tendencies and brand activism, fuelling the mistrust and skepticism (Vredenburg et al, 2020). Chen and Chang (2013) write how global environmental regulations are lacking transparency and the sustainability regulations do not meet adequate requirements. With increased cases of greenwashing, a growing number of consumers question the corporate motives behind providing sustainable and pro-social alternatives.

4.3.2 Forced dismissal

This portrayal, further fuelled by the political divide creates a dissonance regarding CSR, forcing the customers to question the companies' actions, despite the fact whether they are authentic or not. In the aforementioned example of FOX News, the political rhetorics openly invite the audiences to question the integrity of more pro-social activities. This does not negate the need for transparency in these processes, however it highlights the polarisation that encapsulate the skeptical tendencies in the public sphere. This visualises the concept closely related to that of greenwashing — "woke washing", defined by Vredenburg (2020) as a strategy of brands who attempt to portray themselves as "being concerned with issues of inequality and social injustice" (Sobande, 2019, p.18) yet failing to do so in practice, where aforementioned four aspects of authenticity are not met.

Both greenwashing and woke washing are interrelated and are used almost interchangeably throughout the rhetorics and portrayal of corporate social responsibility. One of the users, regarding Patagonia, dismissed the decision of Chouinard: "Woke company, not interested" (*user*, 2022) Here, such rejection of the company's activity is not based on the act itself, but on the overall categorisation of the company as "woke", which pro-social rhetorics do not align with the individual's beliefs and values. Moreover, due to the increased popularity of CSR and brand activism, these concepts are nowadays s on a certain level expected by customers (Chen & Chang, 2013). As such, those who fundamentally do not agree with, or believe in the incorporation of prosocial corporate policies view such actions as forcing companies to adhere to more "liberal" and "progressive" standards, once again generalising the issue in terms of the role of politics. Here, another user embodied such rhetorics to separate oneself from the company: "Something tells me

given two equal candidates, the money flows to the left. I don't think I'll be buying any more Patagonia products" (*user*, 2022).

4.4. Portrayal of Patagonia

This theme focuses on the way Patagonia is portrayed, and how is the meaning regarding its pro-social activities constructed throughout the media articles and social media comments. This theme firstly explores the cult status of the company, analyzing how Patagonia's long history of activism influences its image in the eyes of customers and social media users. Next, thesis highlights the division between the cult status of the brand and the personal philosophy of the owner himself, whose vocal, and seen as "eccentric" attitude towards wealth emphasizes the role of the individual and one's ideology in corporate social responsibility. Such relation between the owner and the company directly translates into authenticity of brand activism, contributing to the positive image of corporate social responsibility. Lastly, this section examines the notion of skepticism — an inherent part of the analysis, especially after synthesising the results with social media comments. Building on the previous arguments regarding the role of media, this highlights the role politics and governmental systems play in the portrayal of climate change-related issues, as well as notion of human dependency on private wealth. The notion of capitalism and consumerism regarding Patagonia will be explained in a next theme. "Now Patagonia is trying to send perhaps its most radical message to date – that corporate profits need not always go to share buybacks, outsized CEO pay, yachts or sending rockets to Mars" (The Guardian, 2022).

4.4.1 Historical cult status

Although, throughout the analysis skepticism plays a major role in attitudes regarding CSR, brand activism and Patagonia's organizational change, the positive response from the users visualises the aforementioned brand authenticity and almost cult following of the company. Patagonia often resurfaces as a model in terms of the prosocial corporate practices, and was categorised as a company with authentic brand activism. Vredenburg et al (2020) described Patagonia as one of those companies, whose "values-driven messaging and practices are in sync with progressing social change." (Vredenburg et al, 2020, p. 13) This is further evident as those comments that appraise the decision that often include the statements sharing gratitude towards the company and highlight its integrity: "This, aside from high quality, great customer service, and good treatment of your employees is why I consistently spend my hard-earned money on your products. Well done!" (*user*, 2022) and "This is an amazing act of generosity, environmental

stewardship, and integrity. I've always felt good about buying the many Patagonia items I own, because of the company's excellent principles. I salute the Chouinard family for their gift" (*user*, 2022).

Evidently, the authenticity of Patagonia's brand activism can be seen as key in maintaining a long-lasting relationship with the customers. Moreover, shared values of the company and its customers increase the bond between the two and further visualize the need for trust in maintaining such relation. These supportive comments, with the grateful rhetorics fuel the "cult status" of Patagonia as a leading company in terms of corporate social responsibility. Moreover, the "radical" move of transferring the entire company to Patagonia Purpose Trust and Holdfast Collective in the eyes of many becomes a symbol of possibility of shifting the narrative of the role of companies in society and visualize the tangible, possible way to combat climate change. Users enthusiastically pledge further loyalty to the brand, additionally highliting the feelings of sympathy, admiration and fan "love" towards Patagonia. Known for both environmental and political activism, such as giving their employees paid time off to vote during the election period in the US (Siegel, 2018), the company has managed to influence more than 400 other companies to do the same, including Walmart and Lyft (Blakely, 2018). The political nature of these actions are far from subtle, and Patagonia openly addresses and reaffirm the values that the company stands for. These political values and attitudes are present throughout the articles, with most of the news media emphasizing and highliting the company's prosocial attitudes. As seen throughout the comments, this transparency and integrity is the major source of user's positive feelings towards the decision, further identifying Patagonia as a company that is supposedly a direct opposition to the concept of greenwashing, granting the company its cult status and considerable "fanbase" of loyal customers. While substantial amount of comments praises the decision and the company itself, the persona of the founder of the company, Yvon Chouinard plays a crucial role in the positive portrayal of the move among its supporters.

4.4.2 The role of the owner — values and political ideology

Yvon Chouinard's personal philosophy plays a major role in the way Patagonia functions. His reluctancy towards his wealth has been numerously highlighted by his business partners, co-workers, friends, and journalists. The owner's humble origins and active dismissal of his billionaire status is what makes him seemingly stand out from other billionaires, a notion that will be further explored in the later part of the paper. The appraisal of this decision is evident throughout the comments, granting Chouinard a status of a "hero" or "king", as described by some users.

Moreover, the image of Chouinard's way of thinking is directly visible in the caring, emotional and personal way some users describe him and his family: "Mr. Chouinard is and remains my hero." (*user*, 2022), "This rare gesture warms my heart! Damn the naysayers - I hope this lovely man's selfless action is the start of a beautiful trend, to bolster #ClimateAction in the most meaningful way.. THANK YOU, M. Chouinard!" (*user*, 2022):

> "It's a great read on a truly altruistic family. Patagonia's founder Yvon Chouinard, his wife, and two adult children are transferring ownership of the company after nearly 50 years to two entities to fight the climate crisis. They didn't even set it up to take a tax deduction!" (*user*, 2022)

For users, willingness and possibility to directly thank Chouinard for his decision further highlights the importance of personal involvement of the owner in the pro-environmental activities of his company. Such personal ideology is further highlighted in the research of Chin et al (2013) which examines the relation between political ideology of the CEOs and their influence on CSR activities. In the study, researchers explore how executives' personal political ideologies, especially across conservatism-liberalism dimension influence the pro-social managerial actions and how they reflect their values. Chin et al (2013) provide a definition of political ideology which can be defined as an "interrelated set of attitudes and values about the proper goals of society and how they should be achieved . . ." (Tedin, 1987, p. 65). As such, political ideology embodies and organises one's personal values and beliefs. Regarding the use of the conservatism-liberalism distinction Jost (2006, p. 654) writes that it "has been the single most useful and parsimonious way to classify political attitudes for more than 200 years" (Jost, 2006, p. 654).

Regarding CSR and brand activism, the study (Chin et al, 2013) found that these values have a main effect on CSR — more liberal CEOs would not only adopt but also believe in CSR as an inherent part of the business, despite the financial performance. This contrasts the conservative way of approaching CSR and suggests that such initiatives operate as optional or even skeptical, given that firm's financial condition could allow it. In the case of the analysis, the vocal and open towards his liberal beliefs Chouinard, captures that, which can be observed in the aforementioned examples on how users, customers portray him, and the company. Such conditionality visualises the role of personal involvement of the company's executives within the CSR activities, and pave a way for broader discourse regarding external factors that would facilitate such decisions. Moreover, this directly links to the aforementioned expectancy of the companies to incorporate some forms of CSR

throughout their activity (something that at the same time fuels the dismissive rhetorics due to these actions being "forced" upon firms by the "woke" agenda). At the same time, the businesses face the institutional pressures, such as the media or governmental agencies, to adopt some aspects of CSR, which when handled without the aforementioned set of guidelines may result in a form of either green- or woke-washing. Here, the case of Patagonia visualises not only seemingly authentic, due to personal beliefs of Chouinard represented across various platforms, but at the same time very vocal approach, simultaneously becoming a precedent in both business and socio-political landscape.

4.4.3 Skepticism across perspectives

The previous themes offered evidence about how skepticism played a major role and that it constitutes an inherent aspect when discussing any environmental issue and by extent corporate social responsibility. This section therefore discusses how the brand's decision to "give away" the company to the chosen non-profits was met witch critical responses even by its loyal customers. Interestingly, some of the negative responses came from people who although identified with the company and its vision, still do not fully agree with its decision. Next, the analysis dwells on this skepticism.

Skepticism towards the organizational change was mostly connected to the "true" movies behind this event. Social media commentators who shared their negative opinions, recurrently questioned the integrity of Chouinard, shifting the focus to the inheritance tax. The majority of the skeptical comments touched upon the issues of taxes, emphasizing the dismissal of the altruistic motivations of combating climate change: "A charitable trust protects his cash from taxation and allows he and his children and grandchildren and their grandchildren access to that cash for many years to come, if I am not mistaken" (*user*, 2022), "Sounds like your founder found a way to avoid America's 40% inheritance tax on most of his billion++ fortune." (*user*, 2022), "Skirt your tax responsibility all for 'climate change'. LMFAO" (*user*, 2022).

At the same time, some users defended the company and highlighted that despite paying smaller amount of tax, it is better for the funds to go to a "righteous" cause of combatting climate change, given Patagonia's history of "supporting tax increases that could benefit the planet" (Bloomberg, 2020):"He's actually losing money because he's donating it and he's getting no tax benefits. This man needs to be more widely recognized." (*user*, 2022):

"Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard has always been an environmentalist, paying what he calls his own 1% environment tax for the resources used by, and practices of, his company. Now he's going all in in the awesome challenge of reaching a 2050 Carbon Neutral economy. #ClimateCrisis" (*user*, 2022)

Due to the fact that Chouinard is not selling the company, something that was initially considered, the inheritance tax does not apply in the case of transferring of the ownership. (Bloomberg, 2022) Given the worth of Patagonia, roughly estimated to be $3 billion, the federal taxes are estimated to be more than $700 million. Instead, due to Holdfast Collective's status of 501(c)(4) non-profit, which can make unlimited political donations, and is not income-tax deductible, Chouinard is still bound to pay $17.5 million in gift taxes for his shares, an amount incomparable to $700 million. The spokesperson for Patagonia, Corley Kenna, stated that during the structuring of the transaction "there was never an ask from the Chouinard family that we avoid taxes" (Bloomberg, 2022). The decision was tailored for the company to protect its environmental values, instead of losing control of the wealth that would alternatively go to the government. Chouinard, given the history of philanthropy, such as 1% of all sales each year going to other environmental nonprofits, justifies it by wanting to preserve the company. In the same article, Ray Madoff from Boston College Law School, is wary of such structure, viewing it as "highly problematic from the point of view of democracy, and it can mean a higher tax burden for the rest of Americans" (Bloomberg, 2020). This begs the question of the power dynamics and the institutionalised dependency on the elites that has resurfaced upon conducting the analysis and will be further explored in the later part of the thesis.

The paradox emerges when dealing with the main objective of the trust-fund: combating the climate change — yet the skepticism visible in the comments and articles provide an insight into what would happen if more billionaires would be able to omit them, and if their non-profits funds would no longer be considered as a benefit for all. One of the articles invokes a similar situation from the past, where Barre Said donated his electronics company to a trust led by conservative activist involved in reassuring conservative dominance of the US Supreme Court, as well as countering abortion rights and climate policy (Bloomberg 25, 2020). With the increased political polarisation, the dependency on the wealth of few influencing major political decisions, begs a question regarding such policies. Throughout the articles, representatives of Patagonia seemed aware of the skepticism regarding tax avoidance, highliting the complexities of the situation. Upon this, Ryan Gellert, the company's chef executive has stated the following:

"It was important to them that they were not seen as the financial beneficiaries," (…) "They felt very strongly about it. I know it can sound flippant, but they really embody this notion that every billionaire is a policy failure." (Gellert, 2022)

As mentioned in the earlier part of the thesis, some articles included statements from the representatives of Patagonia being aware of the skepticism, further embracing the company as well as its owner and his family as truthful and committed to his beliefs and values. Moreover, The Guardian (2022) quoted Chouinard who stated that: "Hopefully this will influence a new form of capitalism that doesn't end up with a few rich people and a bunch of poor people" (The Guardian, 2022).

At the same time, some users shift focus to the way products of Patagonia are made, highliting the apparent paradox regarding company's factors of production. Although Patagonia is a leading company in vocal and practical environmentalism and with the case of stewardship giving an example on how corporations could play a vital role in combatting climate change, some users highlight these inconsistencies: "Maybe the company should stop making clothes made from micro plastic (fleeces) if they actually want to help the environment?" (*user*, 2022)

Please keep in mind that there's nothing eco-friendly about wool and @Patagonia is still perpetuating tremendous greenhouse gas emissions (and intensive water, land, and energy usage) via its wool supply chain. They need to switch to 100% vegan wool.
(*user*, 2022)

How much raw materials are used ? How many litres of water is used so far? How many units of electricity are used since inception? And any other natural resources directly and indirectly used??? All business first cause damage to the nature environment in the name of production process and eventually they only come out with some patch work to the damaged nature…(*user*, 2022)

Here, users touch upon the vital topic of the factors of production made by corporation that harmfully contribute to the environment. At the same time, one of the articles quotes another Patagonia's representative, Helena Barbour who admitted that combatting climate change is an ongoing and multilevel process: "Making products creates a huge mess, with horrible impacts around carbon waste, water, biodiversity, social justice – what can we do to try to address that?

There isn't a master playbook that we can get from a consultant or off a shelf somewhere" (The Guardian, 2022).

Throughout the findings, the variety of opinions across various perspectives is evident, with some supporters of Patagonia emotionally approaching and praising the change. Others, on the other hand seem to be more reserved about the way the company proceeds. Patagonia's own employee capture the notion of being aware of certain limitations, nonetheless capturing this change as a big step in global efforts to combat climate change, given the current system. The notion of systemic changes is another recurring theme that will be explained in the following section, focusing on the role capitalism, politics and institutions play in the discourse. Moreover, findings within this theme broaden the debate, taking into consideration aspects of education and role of other international efforts.

4.5. Role of capitalism, politics and institutions

The last theme that emerged throughout the analysis is one that touches upon the role of capitalism, consumerism, and institutions — both governmental and educational. Upon conducting the study, the synthesis of news media articles and social media comments expanded on the current debates, reaching beyond Patagonia's ownership. Although mainstream media focused more on the influence of government on the environmental policies as a result of the company's "radical" decision, the social media comments expanded on the topic of contemporary environmentalism. The comments highlighted the need for changes in the system of education, role of "the one percent", as well as issues connected to overall role of consumerism and capitalism. Moreover, the analysis revealed a pattern of skepticism towards the aforementioned issues, such as dependency towards billionaires, as well as skepticism among supporters of Patagonia itself, who see the move as inconsequential given the current economical system and call on the company to fully embrace sustainable methods of production.

4.5.1 The billionaire paradox

The cult status of Yvon Chouinard and his reluctant approach to his wealth highlighted an important aspect discussed in both mainstream and social media. The power dynamics regarding the societal dependency on billionaires, mentioned in the earlier part of the thesis is thus another pattern emerging throughout the data. With the increased political polarisation, the power to influence politics and government agencies is seen as worrying in the online sphere. At the same time, some

users shared their hopes that more billionaires would follow Chouinard's example of focusing on combatting climate change:

> More of this... Need more of the super wealthy to buy beautiful land and make it parks and recreation areas for everyone to enjoy, keep it out of the hands of people who just want to exploit it (*user*, 2022)

> Imagine if every billionaire did this. It would be the end of capitalism. Also, I'll bet it feels fantastic! Those billions have got to be chains weighing down the soul, and most billionaires don't even realize it, they become addicted instead (*user*, 2022)

Here, the users call on the wealthy to act on behalf of the broader society, allowing more people to benefit from their resources. This seemingly utopian idea conceptualises the personal wealth of the few as a way to combat not only environmental issues, but also social inequality and an alternative to the reinforced capitalistic system. Throughout the analysis, some users additionally mention other famous billionaires, such as Elon Musk or Warren Buffet, calling them out on their passiveness regarding these issues:"Warren Buffet thinks he wins something if he dies with the most money" (*user*, 2022).

> Wow a billionaire that is willing to let his riches work to help improve the many maladies of our world without complete assurance that it will end the particular malady before he donates. Refreshing…take note Elon (*user*, 2022)

Findings reveal a certain need for change in the archetype of a billionaire, calling out on to the wealthy to contribute in global efforts to combat climate change and focus on other, pro-social issues. One of the articles, goes in line with the arguments of users regarding the wealth and corporate expenses: "Now Patagonia is trying to send perhaps its most radical message to date – that corporate profits need not always go to share buybacks, outsized CEO pay, yachts or sending rockets to Mars." (The Guardian, 2022).

At the same time, such acceptance of the power of the wealthy by the public sphere is discussed and visualises another problem. One of The Guardian articles addresses the issue directly, with its headline saying: "Patagonia's radical business move is great – but governments, not

billionaires, should be saving the planet" (The Guardian, 2022), linking back to the earlier discussion regarding the collective agency needed to combat climate change, as opposed to passive shifting of the responsibility to the authorities which are further influenced by the political aspect of the notion. These complexities are further explored in the comments, with some arguing about the overall effectiveness of any policies aiming to battle climate change: "You can't "fight climate change" in the system that we are in. Buying clothing virtuously certainty isn't going to do it either" (*user*, 2022).

Building on the aforementioned skepticism towards corporate social responsibility, billionaires and the corporations itself throughout this thesis, a substantial focus lied on the role consumerism and capitalism seen as a key agent in combatting climate change.

4.5.2 Capitalism and consumerism — purpose

The articles and comments offer insights into the way current financial systems operate, the role of companies in societies and the response to the "bold" and "new" alternatives. Regarding capitalistic tendencies and consumerism, Patagonia's chairman, Charles Conn, has stated: "We're for a reformed capitalism, but we also recognise that unbridled consumption is bad." (The Times, 2022). In another article, Conn states that: "Patagonia's new direction is designed to set an example that disproves the old shareholder capitalism axiom that corporate goals other than profit will just confuse investors" (The Guardian, 2022). This sentiment regarding alternative purpose of corporations within the society is visible throughout the findings, reflected in both some of the articles as well as in the social media comments. At the same time, some users opposed reinforcing such alternatives, as this negates the foundations of traditional capitalism, in which, both culturally and economically, focus lies on personal freedom, individual wealth and profit maximisation, despite social outcome, while at the same time relying heavily on industrialisation. One user embodies such narrative: "In the capitalist religion, this is the worst form of heresy "(user, 2022).

As evident above, it seems that for some users reinforcing the idea of shifting from sole profit maximisation to more sustainable, pro-social solutions negate the rooted in society capitalistic tendencies, resulting in skepticism and more suspicion regarding such decisions, which links back to the fear of either "green-" or "woke-washing" or simply opposing one's beliefs. The findings revealed that such alternative solutions, which do not clearly lie within the capitalist, industrial paradigm are almost instantly considered to be a political opposition to the current way of being. Here, such conversation regarding more pro-social and environmental alternative to the current

system is once again brought to politics, with another one user stating that:"Socialism is a disease…" (user, 2022).

Here, the evident opposition to the sustainable alternatives visualizes the deeply rooted polarisation, and as described earlier in the thesis, a seeming "need" for choosing sides — despite the global issue of climate change, which affects societies with no differentiation regarding politics. At the same time, such sentiment poses a threat towards the collective embracement of the new ways of conducting businesses, in this case seen as beneficial for the planet. Moreover, it questions the possibility of corporations playing a more central role in the society, directly impacting welfare. Regarding the shareholder systems and the role of corporations discussed in the theoretical framework of the paper, Ryan Gellert was quoted stating that:

> The business sector loves to hide behind two faulty sentiments. One is this notion that the No 1 rule of business is to maximise shareholder wealth. And the other is that the way you measure success ... is growth," (…) "If we continue on this path of business as usual, failing to bring a commitment and a level of imagination to solving these [environmental] problems, we know where it's going. (New York Times, 2022)

Regarding the need for authenticity in brands. One article presents a certain level of awareness from Patagonia's executives, with The Times writing how: His [Chouinard's] decision to cede ownership also shows that the market economy is a more decentralised and humane arrangement than critics of capitalism typically acknowledge. (The Times, 2022).

At the same time, and as evident throughout the thesis, skepticism regarding such corporate behaviour is a repeating pattern. This humane and emancipatory stance is contrasted by one of the reporters of FOX News, who stated that:

> When you see a headline like this, you know that there's always something more. He's going to be able to avoid paying a lot of taxes by doing it this way, he's still going to be able to have huge influence over U.S. politics by doing this way, control of the company by doing it this way. (FOX News, 2022)

Moreover, this skepticism does not only come from those who actively oppose such pro-social tendencies. Some users, who identify with company's values shared their concerns regarding consumerism itself: "Cool. But buying more Patagonia is not going to "save the planet." Only a

rapid exit from capitalism will do that." (*user*, 2022), "I love the brand because of this. I don't believe we can combat climate change. Planet earth is way too complex of a system for us to effectively manage. But we can try." (*user*, 2022)

Findings revealed that for some users, Patagonia's change in its structure is considered to be "too little, too late", given the current economic as well as the socio-political state of the world. Regarding the contemporary capitalism, one of the articles stated that "Capitalism holds neither employees nor noble missions in high regard" (Washington Post, 2022), further highliting the discourse regarding switching to more sustainable alternatives, which current system currently does not fully embrace. Going in line with the need for change, one article from The Guardian, whilst appraising Patagonia's decision, focused on providing its readers with more environmental investments that businesses should follow to actively combat climate change: "Capitalism may incentivise scattershot approaches, but bold, unifying steps are needed in the vanishing time available" (The Guardian, 2022). The articles presents five unifying aspects such as rapid restoration and protection of the global ecosystem, focused climate restoration, intergenerational and fair-start rights, as well as equitability-focused post-growth economics (The Guardian, 2022). This need for change in the narrative, as well as collective call to action links with the aforementioned need for global response due to the complexity of the issue. Moreover, the article comments on the promise of Patagonia's new ownership model:

> Patagonia's actions are a powerful step to kickstart the transition of our broken civilisation and economy to a wiser, kinder, more sustainable future. Literally everything that we know and love is at stake (The Guardian, 2022)

This vocal and mobilising rhetorics is an outlier among most of the other articles, directly calling out current issues and the need for alternative solutions in the business landscape, simultaneously further positioning Patagonia as a leader in sustainable industry. The rather hopeful rhetorics and appraisal of Patagonia's decision as seen throughout most of news media, especially pertaining to such stewardship acting as an example for other companies is met here with certain level of skepticism, pertaining to the role of institutions. One of the New York Times articles quotes Ryan Gellert who commented on the passiveness of the government:

> If you believe the climate and ecological crisis is real, if you believe it's largely man made, if you believe it's an existential threat to everything we hold dear, including our own

ongoing existence, as I do, then you ask yourself: What the hell can we do about it?

Governments are coming up short and I have no confidence that is going to change."

(New York Times, 2022)

Building on the aforementioned skepticism towards corporate social responsibility and the corporations throughout this thesis, a substantial focus lied on the role of government, consumerism and capitalism seen as a key agent in combatting climate change. At the same time, another article revealed an issue identified by a law specialist: "But Madoff views these gifts as a failure of government policy. "We are letting people opt out of the support of the government that the rest of us have to participate in," (NY Times, 2022).

Here, such exemption from certain paying taxes, despite the cause, is viewed as anti-democratic in a way personal wealth intervenes in equal approach towards legislation and policy-making. In this view, the seeming environmental passiveness, or the politicised dependency of the government, should not excuse omitting of contribution to the state in the forms of tax, regarding of political affiliation. Such involvement in governmental policies is inconsequential when shifting the responsibility of combatting climate change, or any social issues by billionaires due to their wealth.

Throughout the findings social media expanded on certain issues, with one key aspect being the education of future generations, notion that had been omitted throughout the articles. Building on the arguments regarding capitalistic tendencies embedded in the society and active business models, some users argued about the essential role that education play in formation of the opinions of the future generations: Impressive and unsurprising. Where's the rest of the Business Schools now? Y'all taken note?   Where's the school of Market solutions to inequality and biodiversity?" (*user*, 2022)

This comment, rooted in support of Patagonia, highlights the need for reformed education, one that would include some forms of sustainability focused materials. Although corporate social responsibility as a concept is implemented in some educational institutions' curricula, this comments yet again links to the idea of objective science, importance of evidence and transparent explanation of the current issues, free of political bias, and with a clear purpose of providing access to quality education.

5. Conclusion

The study investigated the mainstream media and social media representation regarding Patagonia's recent change in its ownership, aimed at combatting climate change, focusing on the creation of meaning across the media. Thus, the aim of this final chapter is to present the findings of the research, positioned within the theoretical framework and discourse regarding corporate social responsibility, media, and the role of corporations in the society, pertaining to the notion of climate change. Furthermore, this section will provide limitations of the study along with the suggestion for future research on CSR and media representation.

Climate change is not a new phenomenon, with abundance of researches and news media reporting on the issue since late 60s. At the same time, this concept is globally viewed as controversial, dividing society in terms of how it should be approached and whether it actually poses a threat as big as some news media and studies claim. Since its peak in reporting about climate change in 2007, the concept has been drastically politicised which resulted in global dissonance, confusion and mixed stances on how it should be mitigated. Furthermore, the increase in global digitalisation and the role of media play in the public sphere shifted the aspect of human interaction with technology as well as business and socio-political landscapes, and thus climate change as an issue itself. The constant exposure to various types of media and the abundance of content across the Internet play a vital role in shaping and curating the opinion of the public. Throughout this process, the personal agenda and political influences can be observed, contributing to an increased polarisation of society through mainstream media's tendency to frame certain news in a particular, targeted way. At the same time, the Internet, and in particular social media allowed for a more "emancipatory" rhetorics, where audiences are able to interact with, and inherently evaluate the behaviour of companies. As such, in the recent years, the business landscape observed a rise in corporate social responsibility which focuses on pro-social activities and values of the companies. As many researchers (Chandler, 2020) highlight a vital role that corporations play in the global economy, more focus has been put on their activities outside of profit-maximization, with increased number of companies implementing some of its forms within their corporate activities. The case study of this thesis, Patagonia, is one example of a company known for more radical attitudes towards its pro-social impact, with a long history of brand activism since its inception, fuelled by its owner, Yvon Chouinard. In 2022, Chouinard ceded the control of the company by transferring the ownership to two specially designated non-profits aiming to combat climate change. This radical decision has been met with an enormous response online and became a centre of media attention, with numeral news media reporting on the change. At the same time, throughout these

reports in both traditional media as well as on social media, the responses varied from positive and negative across various socio-political perspectives.

Thus, to shed a light on the relation between mainstream and social media and how its content resonates in the digital public sphere, this research investigated the representation of Patagonia's new ownership across traditional, mainstream news media from the US and UK and on social media. To do so, the sample consists of articles from traditional, mainstream media and comments on social media on Facebook and Twitter. Hence, the study is guided by the following research question: "How is meaning created about Patagonia's founder decision to give away the company to a designated trust and a non-profit organization to fight climate change in September 2022 across the mainstream media from the US and the UK, and social media?"

Utilising qualitative thematic analysis allows for a detailed study of patterns and repeating themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, it traces the interrelations between media, politics, and corporate social responsibility across mainstream and social media. Upon application of thematic analysis to 25 articles and 220 comments regarding Patagonia's change in its ownership, the study identified four main themes: portrayal of climate change, portrayal of corporate social responsibility, portrayal of Patagonia, and the role of capitalism and institutions. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding on the role media and politics play in the portrayal of corporate social responsibility and how audiences interact with mainstream media. Moreover, the study traces the skepticism and polarisation in the discourse regarding impact of corporations on climate change.

5.1. Answer to the research question

The results have provided evidence regarding the inherently divisive and controversial aspect of the way climate change and corporate social are viewed in the digital public sphere. Furthermore, the study indicated how this observed increase in polarisation in the online community highlight the predominant role that skepticism play in portrayal of these issues. In line with Anderson (2009), it simultaneously further emphasizes the mainstream media's role throughout these processes through user's online responses. Moreover, the supposedly positive goal of Patagonia's corporate social responsibility, here focused on sustainability, is contrasted by prominent skepticism towards the concept of CSR itself. This, as argued by Brown (2016), can be seen through politicising these activities, often resulting from the political ideology of the company's executives, simultaneously generalising the problem, forcing customers and users to

choose a side. Thus, in accordance with Hall (1997), the findings revealed how the meaning is created in digital public sphere, highliting the media's power in shaping and regulating social practices and opinions and thus, the way certain events are understood. Furthermore, in accordance with Habermas (1976), the tendency to reinforce agenda-setting as well as discursive power of media in digital public sphere can be observed. Throughout these rhetorics, and given the aftermath of greenwashing, the universal threat of climate change is trivialised and positioned within a binary distinction between *liberal* and *conservative*. Moreover, the harm caused by companies that embodied some forms of greenwashing and woke-washing damaged the portrayal of corporate social responsibility as whole, further feeling the skepticism and suspicions regarding company's motives as discussed by Ghoul et al. (2019).

The findings revealed the need for more transparent legislation regarding CSR activities among companies, as way to combat these suspicions. This goes in line with Brown's (2016) argument regarding the view on corporate social responsibility being vague and open to various interpretations regarding its implementation. At the same, findings revealed that despite the objective nature of research on climate change and sustainability, especially pertaining to humanity's contribution to the issue, there are still those who directly oppose it, as discussed by Lakoff (2004). This further contributes to the dissonance regarding the complexities of climate change as a global concept, as described by Anderson (2009). Furthermore, the analysis revealed how CSR, and inherently climate change are seen by more, but not exclusively, conservative users as a tool used by the left, aimed at gaining control over the political landscape. This is evident throughout the rhetorics of some users, who dismiss and oppose the company due to it being *woke,* notion associated with left-leaning political stance (Chin et al, 2013) and directly opposes the industrialization of society, as argued by Aslaksen (2021).

Throughout more supporting and positive comments, the role of the owner of Patagonia, Yvon Chouinard played a prominent role in assessing company's actions, with many users identifying with the owner, thanking him on a personal level. Moreover, this concurs with Friedman's (1970) and Schwartz's (1996) argument regarding left-leaning managers being more likely to promote corporate social responsibility. At the same time, the prominent skepticism regarding the CSR, Patagonia, and the owner itself can be observed throughout the analysis, expanding the debate on the role of not only corporations per se, but the billionaires who owned them. Some articles from the sample tended to be more openly supportive than others, proving more in-depth analysis of Patagonia's new structure and owners' biography justifying the pro-environmental stance. At the same time, news media such as FOX News, openly doubted the

integrity of the owner, fuelling the skeptical rhetorics regarding the issue of taxes, which in this perspective, negates the overall impact of the decision.

The complexity of the issue is further visualised when dealing with the portrayal of government's role in combatting climate change. Linking it back to the dependency on the billionaire individuals, some articles highlighted how billionaire's ability to control one's wealth without paying the inheritance tax, and instead choosing to distribute it across non-profits and trust-funds, defies the democratic system, reducing tax for the government allowing people to omit certain barriers. Here, the complexity increases as the ultimate decision lies on the wealthy individual, whose political ideology influences the decision. In the case of Patagonia, the designated funds are aimed at combating climate change, however this solely relies on Chouinard's own philosophy. In this particular case, the governmental policies regarding climate change did not convince Chouinard enough to entrust his wealth upon the governmental institution, due to fear of it being distributed across various causes, some negating his political stances. At the same time, the analysis of the findings revealed the skepticism regarding the government itself — the online discourse shed a light on how passiveness of the governments regarding climate issues are a founding problem in combatting it, further increasing the dependency on the personal wealth of the elites. This expands on Banerjee's (2009) argument about separation of corporations from the government regarding the issues of social welfare. Moreover, such dependency can be seen as particularly volatile and depending on one's personal beliefs. Government may encourage, or even force the wealthy to contribute towards certain environmental legislations, however due to divisive and controversial aspect of the issue, these still have to be considered from the political point of view.

Furthermore, the findings revealed how the media tend to politicise and frame corporate social responsibility in a particular way, further linking it with the argument made by Arrora (1995) and Swain (2011). Considering how climate change is differently framed throughout the analysed mainstream media, the diverse rhetorics regarding this issues contributes to the study. In the study, news media report on the issue in diverse ways: treating it as a *given,* universal and well-established concept that does not need further elaboration as in the case of FOX News, providing explanation of the issue highliting its risk and consequences as seen in the Guardian, or omitting the elaboration on the concept itself as seen in Washington Post. Here, the challenge in reporting on climate change as argued by Anderson (2009) can be identified. Socio-political factors are proved to be a crucial aspect in the way climate change related notions are reported on. This contributes to the dissonance regarding not only climate change, but any form of idea of combatting it, here seen with the concept

of corporate social responsibility. The news media with different political stances spectrum report on it in a different way, yet tend to treat it from distance. Here, the exception can be seen in the article of The Guardian which provided solutions on future environmental investments. This visualises the aforementioned tendency to portray corporations as "vehicles of change" (p.2) as suggested by Aslaksen (2021), simultaneously shifting the responsibility from government. At the same time, in the case of Patagonia and CSR across all news media, the issue of taxes have been numerously identified, effectively shifting the discourse from the main reason for the change — combating climate change. Throughout the comments, the "fan-base" of Patagonia's supporters is contrasted with the prominent skepticism towards the "real reason" behind the change in ownership.

The issue of control over one's company is thus a concept depending on one's beliefs. Depending on the polarised, simplified yet universal distinction between *left* and *right*, both sides seem to focus less on the process, but on the political aspect itself, given one's own perspective. As seen with the example of the conservative millionaire who sold his company to a non-profit focusing on restricting abortion rights, issue often combatted by more liberal people, here, from the conservative point of view, Chouinard is framed a as liberal billionaire who avoided taxes and secured his wealth for further control on the company and denying government of more than $3 billion dollars. Despite one's point of view on the issue, the analysis indicated the need for more transparent reporting on the issue of climate change, used as a pawn in the political agendas.

Furthermore, the corporate social responsibility seems to have a parallel problem, with its main assumptions being positive impact on the environment, improved conditions of labor, support of communities, or active involvement in charities being portrayed as a ploy to gain control, especially after increased cases of misleading the public through greenwashing. As discussed earlier in thesis, this discourse reaches beyond the business landscape. Here, the questions regarding corporate social responsibility and inherently climate change are visibly seen to be rooted in the personal consideration of these issues from one's own cultural, political and sociological perspective, directly influencing how the meaning is constructed.

5.2. Future research

This section will explain the limitations of the research and will provide suggestions for future research. Due to the complexity of the sociological relations between politics, media, and ideology and the study's focus on climate change due to Patagonia's model, certain notions of corporate social responsibility such as social inequality or conditions of labour were not considered in the broader discussion. It is important to highlight that the CSR encapsulates wide range of pro-

social activities. Throughout the analysis, the study pertained to the online community composed of the users commenting on the news about Patagonia's change in its organizational structure. As such, the findings cannot be generalised to the broader online sphere, but to the specific users active on social media, consisting of users who either follow Patagonia's Facebook or Twitter profile, followers of the New York Times, as well as other users who although not necessarily follow either, but viewed, and decided to comment under the selected posts. Accordingly, it is likely that number of opinions and beliefs were not covered in the analysis. Furthermore, due to the analysis being conducted by only one researcher, there is a possibility of unconscious omission of certain interrelations. Moreover, despite the transparent presentation of the procedure of qualitative thematic analysis, the study may be a subject to certain subjective influences.

Furthermore, less mainstream newspapers, which tend to be more grounded in their political stances, did not cover the topic of Patagonia which resulted in their exclusion from the sample. Apart from natural possibility of an increased sample of both news media and social media comments, future research could include a separate analysis of considerable amount of news media with a certain political stance, prior to its synthesis with the opposing newspapers, to further analyse how certain newspapers frame its articles.

Moreover, the recent, yet highly specific aspect of Patagonia's decision resulted in fewer articles analyzing the event itself, pertaining to the reporting on the issue. Due to the recency of the event, the process is still taking place, given appropriate amount of time, further research could evaluate on the effectiveness of Patagonia's new structure, specifically pertaining to the notion of transparency and skepticism, aspects prominent in the current study. Additionally, as the news media do not provide the designated space for the comments, some replies could not have been included, thus forcing the study to rely on the comments made on social media.

Thus, future research can contribute to a better understanding of media representation and creation of meaning regarding corporate social responsibility and how users interact with media in the digital public sphere. An analysis of other cases of CSR or, more specifically, environmental stewardship could provide insights into the broader debate on the role of corporations in the society, as well as the reliance on media and politics in the creation of meaning.

References

Anderson, A. (2009). Media, Politics and Climate Change: Towards a New Research Agenda. *Sociology Compass*, 3(2), 166–182.

Arbaoui, B., De Swert, K., & van der Brug, W. (2016). Sensationalism in News Coverage: A Comparative Study in 14 Television Systems. *Communication Research,* 47(2), 299–320.

Arora, S., & Gangopadhyay, S. (1995). Toward a theoretical model of voluntary overcompliance. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 28, 289–309.

Aslaksen, H. M., Hildebrandt, C., & Johnsen, H. Chr. G. (2021). The long-term transformation of the concept of CSR: towards a more comprehensive emphasis on sustainability. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, *6*(1). springeropen. https://doi.org/ 10.1186/s40991-021-00063-9, 1–6.

B Lab. (2022). *B Corp Certification demonstrates a company's entire social and environmental impact.* B Corporation. *https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/certification*

Banerjee, S. B. (2008). Corporate Social Responsibility: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly. *Critical Sociology*, *34*(1), 51–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920507084623

Blakely, L. (2018). Patagonia's unapologetically political strategy and the massive business it has built. *Mansueto Ventures,* https://www.inc.com/lindsay-blakely/patagonia-2018-company-of-the-year-nominee.html

Bhattacharya, C. B., Korschun, D., & Sen, S. (2008). Strengthening Stakeholder–Company Relationships Through Mutually Beneficial Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *85*(S2), 257–272. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-008-9730-3\

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Brown, T. (2016). Sustainability as empty signifier: Its rise, fall, and radical potential. *Antipode*, 48(1), 115–133. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12164.

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage Publications, 63.

Carvalho A (2007) Ideological cultures and media discourses on scientific knowledge: Re-reading news on climate change. *Public Understanding of Science* 16: 223–243.

Chandler, D. (2020). *Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility: Sustainable Value Creation*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Chen, Y. S., & Chang, C. H. (2013). Greenwash and green trust: The mediation effects of green consumer confusion and green perceived risk. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 114(3), 489–500.

Chin, M. K., Hambrick, D. C., & Treviño, L. K. (2013). Political Ideologies of CEOs. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *58*(2), 197–232. https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839213486984

Erikson, R. S., Luttbeg, N. R., & Tedin, K. L. (1988). *American Public Opinion*. MacMillan Publishing Company.

Freeman R. Edward, Jeffrey S. Harrison, Andrew C. Wicks, Bidhan L. Parmar, & Simone de Colle. (2010). *Stakeholder Theory: The State of the Art*. Cambridge University Press, p. 208.

Friedman, M. (1970) The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits. *New York Times Magazine*, 122-126.

Ghoul, S., Guedhami, O., Nash, R., & Patel, A. (2016). New Evidence on the Role of the Media in Corporate Social Responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *154*(4), 1051–1079. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3354-9

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (15–51). SAGE.

Habermas, Jürgen (1976) *Legitimation Crisis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Heath, Y.,Gifford, R (2006). Free-market ideology and environmental degradation: The case of belief in global climate change. *Environment and Behaviour* 38: 48–71.

Heaps, T. (2022, September 26). *Patagonia made Earth its sole shareholder. Will other companies follow suit?* Corporate Knights. https://www.corporateknights.com/leadership/patagonia-made-earth-its-sole-shareholder-will-other-companies-follow-suit/#:~:text=Chouinard%20took%20that%20commitment%20a

Jiang, F., Zalan, T., Tse, H. H. M., & Shen, J. (2015). Mapping the Relationship Among Political Ideology, CSR Mindset, and CSR Strategy: A Contingency Perspective Applied to Chinese Managers. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *147*(2), 419–444. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2992-7

Jost, J. T. (2006). The end of the end of ideology. *American Psychologist*,*61*(7), 651–670. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.61.7.651

Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic Analysis of Qualitative data: AMEE Guide no. 131. *Medical Teacher*, *42*(8), 1–9. NCBI. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030

Kotler, P., & Sarkar, C. (2018, August 20). The regressive brand: The dark side of brand activism. *The Marketing Journal*.

Lakoff, G. (2004). *Don't think of an elephant: know your values and frame the debate.* Chelsea Green, White River Junction.

Latapí Agudelo, M. A., Jóhannsdóttir, L., & Davídsdóttir, B. (2019). A literature review of the history and evolution of corporate social responsibility. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, 4(1), 1. https://doi.org/1 0.1186/s40991-018-0039-y.

Leonidou, C. N., & Skarmeas, D. (2015). Gray shades of green: Causes and consequences of green skepticism. *Journal of Business Ethics,* 401–415 https://doi.org/10.1007/ s10551-015-2829-4.

Perrow, C. (2002) *Organizing America: Wealth, Power and the Origins of Corporate Capitalism*. Princeton University Press: Princeton.

Rodríguez-Vilá, O., & Bharadwaj, S. (2017, August 22). Competing on Social Purpose. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2017/09/competing-on-social-purpose

Regan, M.C. (1998) Corporate Speech and Civic Virtue. A.L. Allen and M.C. Regan (eds) *Debating Democracy's Discontent: Essays on American Politics, Law and Public Philosophy*, pp. 289–306. Oxford *University Press: Oxford.*

Matten, D., & Moon, J. (2008). "Implicit" and "explicit" CSR: A conceptual framework for a comparative understanding of corporate social responsibility. *The Academy of Management Review*, 33(2), 404–424. https:// doi.org/10.5465/amr.2008.31193458.

Safran Foer, J. (2019). *We Are the Weather*. Penguin.

Sarstedt, M., Bengart, P., Shaltoni, A., & Lehmann, S. (2017). The use of sampling methods in advertising research: A gap between theory and practice. *International Journal of Advertising*, 37(4). doi:10.1080/02650487.2017.1348329

Schäfer, M. S. (2015). Climate Change and the Media. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 853–859.

Schembri, Sharon. 2022. "Brand Activism: Case Illustrations from Progressive to Regressive". *Journal of Resilient Economies (ISSN: 2653-1917)* 2 (2). https://doi.org/ 10.25120/ jre.2.2.2022.3942.

Scheidler, S., Edinger-Schons, L.M., Spanjol, J. and Wieseke, J. (2018). Scrooge Posing as Mother Teresa: How Hypocritical Social Responsibility Strategies Hurt Employees and Firms.

Journal of Business Ethics, 157(2), pp.339–358. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3788-3.

Schwartz, S. H. (2001). Value Priorities and Behavior: Applying a Theory of Integrated Value Systems. *The Psychology of Values: The Ontario Symposium*, 8: 1–24. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Siegel, R. (2018, July 6). Patagonia is giving its workers Election Day off. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2018/07/06/patagonia-is-giving-its-workers-election-day-off-and-says-you- should-too/

Skruibytė, I. (2020). The Problems of the Assessment of Corporate Social Responsibility in the International Context. *Management of Organizations: Systematic Research*, *83*(1), 93–112. https://doi.org/10.1515/mosr-2020-0006

Staab, P., & Thiel, T. (2022). Social Media and the Digital Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *39*(4), 129–143. https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764221103527\

Swain, K. A. (2015). Mass Media Roles in Climate Change Mitigation. *Handbook of Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation*, 1–45. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6431-0_6-2

Stecula, D. A., & Merkley, E. (2019). Framing Climate Change: Economics, Ideology, and Uncertainty in *American News Media Content From 1988 to 2014. Frontiers in Communication, 4. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2019.00006*

Siegel, R. (2018, July 6). Patagonia is giving its workers Election Day off. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/business/wp/2018/07/06/pa tagonia-is-giving-its-workers-election-day-off-and-says-you- should-too/

Sobande, Francesca (2019). "Woke-washing: "Intersectional" Femvertising and Branding "woke" Bravery", *European Journal of Marketing*, DOI: https://doi- org.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/10.1108/EJM-02-2019-0134.

Vainio, A., & Paloniemi, R. (2011). Does belief matter in climate change action? *Public Understanding of Science*, *22*(4), 382–395. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662511410268

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

Tedin, K. L. (1987). "Political ideology and the vote." *Micropolitics*, 2: 63–94

Appendix A

References of articles

Aratani, L. (2023, March 12). "We've lost the right to be pessimistic": Patagonia treads fine line tackling climate crisis as for-profit company. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/ business/2023/mar/12/patagonia-climate-crisis-for-profit-company

Articles, T. T. L. (2023, June 21). The Times view on Yvon Chouinard and Patagonia: Climate and Commerce. *Www.thetimes.co.uk*. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-times-view-on-yvon-chouinard-and-patagonia-climate-and-commerce-kdrtcc3hw

Brokaw, T. (2022, September 20). Opinion | Yvon Chouinard Is the Founder of Patagonia. He's Also My "Dirtbag" Friend.. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/20/opinion/ patagonia-yvon-chouinard-tom-brokaw.html

Chambers, S. (2023, June 21). Ryan Gellert on Patagonia's future after Yvon Chouinard gives the company away. *Www.thetimes.co.uk*. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ryan-gellert-patagonia-future-yvon-chouinard-latest-76sdqwfbb

Chiu, A. (2022a, September 14). Patagonia founder gives away company: "Earth is now our only shareholder." *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/ 2022/09/14/patagonia-yvon-chouinard-climate-change/

Chiu, A. (2022b, September 16). 5 things to know about Patagonia's unusual history of activism. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2022/09/15/patagonia-chouinard-environmental-activism-climate/

Emba, C. (2022, September 16). Finally, a billionaire willing to smack back at capitalism. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/09/16/patagonia-yvon-chouinard-billions-climate-donation-capitalism/

FOX. (2022, September 14). *Patagonia founder gives away entire $3B company to help combat climate change*. FOX 13 Seattle. https://www.fox13seattle.com/news/patagonia-founder-gives-away-the-company-to-help-combat-climate-change

Gelles, D. (2022a, September 14). Billionaire No More: Patagonia Founder Gives Away the Company. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/14/climate/patagonia-climate-philanthropy-chouinard.html

Gelles, D. (2022b, September 16). The climate philanthropists. *The New York Times*. https:// www.nytimes.com/2022/09/16/climate/yvon-chouinard-patagonia-philanthropy.html

Letters. (2022, September 21). How investments in the Earth's future should be made by Patagonia and others. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/21/how-investments-in-the-earths-future-should-be-made-by-patagonia-and-others

McCormick, E. (2022, September 15). *Patagonia's billionaire owner gives away company to fight climate crisis*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/sep/14/patagonias-billionaire-owner-gives-away-company-to-fight-climate-crisis-yvon-chouinard

Media Matters. (2022, September 16). *Fox panel downplays climate motivation of Patagonia founder who gave his company to fight climate change*. Media Matters for America. https://www.mediamatters.org/fox-news/fox-panel-downplays-climate-motivation-patagonia-founder-who-gave-his-company-fight

Neate, R. (2022, September 15). *Yvon Chouinard – the "existential dirtbag" who founded and gifted Patagonia*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/global/2022/sep/15/yvon-chouinard-the-existential-dirtbag-who-founded-and-gifted-patagonia

Paris, M. (2022, September 14). Billionaire Patagonia Founder Gives Company Away to Fight Climate Change. *Bloomberg.com*. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-14/billionaire-patagonia-founder-gives-company-away-to-fight-climate-change#xj4y7vzkg

Pendleton, D., & Steverman, B. (2022, September 15). Patagonia Billionaire Who Gave Up Company Skirts $700 Million Tax Hit. *Bloomberg.com*. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-15/patagonia-billionaire-who-gave-up-company-skirts-700-million-tax-hit#xj4y7vzkg

Prescott, K. (2022, December 15). Patagonia owner gives away all company profits to "fight environment crisis." *Www.thetimes.co.uk*. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/you-can-trust-us-with-the-environment-says-patagonia-03f29m003

Rayner, A. (2022, December 18). Patagonia — the cult label fighting the climate crisis. *Www.thetimes.co.uk*. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/patagonia-the-cult-label-fighting-the-climate-crisis-tdmjz3lfh

Rhodes, C. (2022, September 20). *Patagonia's radical business move is great – but governments, not billionaires, should be saving the planet | Carl Rhodes*. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/sep/20/patagonia-billion-dollar-climate-initiative-philanthropy

Sorkin, A. R., Giang, V., Gandel, S., Warner, B., Merced, M. J. de la, Hirsch, L., & Livni, E. (2022, September 16). Philanthropy, the Billionaires' Way. *The New York Times*. https://

www.nytimes.com/2022/09/16/business/dealbook/philanthropy-patagonia-billionaires-way-taxes.html

Steverman, B. (2022, December 14). Yvon Chouinard, Patagonia's Philanthropist. *Bloomberg.com*. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-12-14/yvon-chouinard-patagonia-s-philanthropist-bloomberg-50-2022#xj4y7vzkg

The Independent. (2022, September 15). *Patagonia founder gives company away to environmental trusts*. The Independent. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ap-patagonia-ventura-california-b2168088.html

The Times. (2022a, September 15). *Patagonia's founder Yvon Chouinard gives away fashion brand to tackle climate change*. Www.independent.co.uk. https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/ climate/patagonia-yvon-chouinard-climate-change-b2167968.html

The Times. (2022b, September 16). *The best Patagonia clothing to buy and support the climate change fight*. The Independent. https://www.independent.co.uk/extras/indybest/travel-outdoors/hiking/patagonia-ceo-yvon-chouinard-owner-company-b2168709.html

Social Media Posts References

Links to the discussion threads:

Patagonia. (2022, September 14). Hey, friends, we just gave our company to planet Earth. OK, it's more nuanced than that, but we're closed today to celebrate this new plan to save our one and only home. We'll be back online tomorrow. Twitter. https://twitter.com/patagonia/status/ 1570145799300067330

Patagonia. (2022, September 14). *Hey, friends, we just gave our company to planet Earth. OK, it's more nuanced than that, but we're closed today to celebrate this new plan to save our one and only home. We'll be back online tomorrow*. Facebook. https://z-upload.facebook.com/ PATAGONIA/posts/10167201297170457

Appendix B

Table B.1. Coding frame — Qualitative thematic analysis

Theme	Categories	Subcategories
Portrayal of climate change	Environment	Earth
		Nature
		Environmentalism
		Environmental sustainability
		Ecology
		Concern about environment
	Sustainable solutions	Environmental stewardship
		Entrepreneurship
		Conservation
		Impact investing
		Renewable energy
		Benefit of the planet
		Use of ecological materials
		Paradox of using (exploiting) resources
	Environmental goals and issues	Protection of the environment
		Care about environment
		Environmental protection
		Saving the planet
		Protection of the planet
		Planet protection
		Animal safety
		Pollution
		Climate change
	Skepticism regarding climate change	Disbelief in possibility of combatting climate change
		Skepticism: reg. arrogance through human cause distraction

Table B.1. Coding frame — Qualitative thematic analysis

		Skepticism: good cause, disbelief in the outcome
		Climate change "hoax"
		Using climate change as a cover
		Dissonance reg. climate change
		Skepticism towards climate change
		Climate scam
		Skepticism towards combating climate change
		Misuse
Portrayal of corporate social responsibility	Sustainable approach to business	Corporate Social Responsibility
		Environmental Fund
		Sustainable approach
		Charity
		Sustainable development
		Climate donations
		Activism
		Environmental impact
		Responsible corporate leadership
	Role of company in CSR	Company's awareness
		Company values
		Company culture
		Work-life balance
		Evidence of action
		Corporate ethics
		Sustainability
		Career in sustainability
	Skepticism regarding CSR	Skepticism about sources
		Misappropriation of funds

Table B.1. Coding frame — Qualitative thematic analysis

		Skepticism towards the left
		Anti-socialist views
		Need for factual data
		Capitalist "heresy"
		Need for transparency
		Skepticism towards the fund
		Skepticism towards the effectiveness
		Negative view of social media influencers
		Skepticism towards "wokeness" of the company
Portrayal of Patagonia	Company's status	Cult status
		Legendary status
		Leadership
		Philanthropy
		Exemplary status of the event
		Future
		Cult
		Example
		Generosity of the company
		Positive mission statement
		Appraisal of paying taxes
		Support for patagonia
		Employee care
		Favourite company
		Love for the company
		Strong message for others
		Customers "for life"
		Need for plastic-free products

Table B.1. Coding frame — Qualitative thematic analysis

		Work environment
		Appraisal of the company
		Positive portrayal of the company
		Business success
	Patagonia's Owner	Role of the owner
		Reluctant billionaire
		Love for the owner
		Humanism
		Role model
		Appraisal of the owner
		Appraisal of integrity
		Appraisal of integrity despite not liking the owner
		Legacy
		Heroism
		Philanthropy
		Good billionaire
		Eccentric behaviour (owner)
		Helping future generations
	Brand	Long-lasting products
		Lifestyle
		Forefront of sustainability
		Doing the "right" thing
		Versatility of the target group
		Brand Identity
		Leadership
		Strategy
		Fashion
		High-quality of products

Table B.1. Coding frame — Qualitative thematic analysis

		Love for the company
	Skepticism regarding Patagonia's change	Taxes
		Tax evasion
		Skepticism
		Reporting on taxes
		Awareness of skepticism
		Disingenuousness of government
		Tax avoidance
		Avoidance of the inheritance tax
		Skepticism reg. taxes
		Explanation of tax benefit
		Waste of money
		Marketing
		Suspicion
		Distrust
		Futility
		Shock
		Need for transparency
		Scheme
		Political move
		Distrust
		Uncertainty
		Suspicion
		Anger
	Attitudes towards Patagonia	Family
		Thankfulness
		Positive attitude
		Personal philosophy
		Values

Table B.1. Coding frame — Qualitative thematic analysis

		Philosophy
		Passion
		Consciousness
		Humanity
		Generosity
		Example
		Forward-thinking
		Admiration
		Thankfulness
		Gratefulness (planet)
		Admiration
		Celebration
		Respect
		Pride
		Awareness
		Self-involvement
		Gift
		Example for future generations
		Karma
		Encouragement
		Respect
		Heroism
		Gratefulness
		Class
		Selflessness
		Integrity
		Love
		Heroism
		Encouragement

Table B.1. Coding frame — Qualitative thematic analysis

		Appreciation
		Encouragement
		Political move
		Distrust
		Uncertainty
		Suspicion
		Anger
Role of capitalism and institutions	The role of system	Billionaire paradox
		Failure of the system
		Role of communities
		Belief in climate change
		Negative sales due to political involvement
		Passiveness of the society
		Call to action
		Capitalism
		Scrutiny
		Role of non-profit organizations
	The role of government	Wealth
		Role of governments
		Accountability
		Support
	Societal issues	Society
		Social justice
		Community engagement
		Inequality
		Refugee crisis
		Community engagement
		Unethical aspect of being a billionaire

Table B.1. Coding frame — Qualitative thematic analysis

		Exploitation
		Urgency of billionaires
		Historical events
		Radicalism
		Personal engagement
		Future of the society
	The role of politics	Conservatism
		Liberal values
		Politics
		Need for political transparency
		Political beliefs
	International aspects	China's role in climate change
		India's role in climate change
		International Cooperation
	Skepticism regarding governments	Skepticism towards government
		Skepticism towards policies
		Skepticism towards current education
		Politics
		Disbelief in the system
		Need to battle corruption
	Skepticism towards billionaires	Skepticism towards billionaires
		Greediness of billionaires
		Urgency of 1%
		Showcasing ego
		Negative view of billionaires
		Disapproval of billionaires
		Negative view of Warran Buffet
		Skepticism towards further control

Table B.1. Coding frame — Qualitative thematic analysis

		Skepticism towards billionaires
		Skepticism towards stock market
	Critique of capitalism	Alternative to capitalism / Reformed capitalism
		Critique of capitalism
		Urgency to exit capitalism
		Role of companies in society
		Anti-Conservative tendencies
		Corporate culture
	Wealth	Dependency on the elites
		Wealth distribution
		Moral justification
		Profit
		Power dynamics
	Role of customer	Customer
		Anti-consumerism
	Education	Urgency for business schools
		Political advocacy
		Purpose