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BRANDS AS POLITICIANS
*How Consumers Morally Judge Advocacy
Advertising*

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Abstract

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Key Words: Advocacy Advertising, Political Debates, Morality, Moral Identity, Moral Judgments, Moral Authenticity, Nike, Gillette, Pepsi

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to understand how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising in contemporary consumer culture. The phenomenon was explored with the help of three case studies, namely Nike, Gillette, and Pepsi, all being brands who have taken a political stance in their advertisement campaigns.

Theoretical Perspective: To analyse the empirical material, we first delved into the concept of moral identity, partly referring to the social identity in connection to advertisements. Subsequently, we thoroughly delineated concepts on morality, including moral judgments, the cynicism of morality, and moral authenticity. Thereafter, we discussed the existing model of how consumers perceive advocacy advertising.

Methodology: The present study was conducted in terms of the social constructionist and interpretivist worldview. By using an inductive approach, we designed a two-sequenced qualitative research, beginning with virtual observations and followed by three focus groups. The derived findings were analysed based on the narrative technique, enabling us to explore the phenomenon from a multi-sided perspective and revealing the role underlying circumstances play for consumers morally judging advocacy advertisements.

Empirical Findings: The collected empirical material supported the notion that consumers morally judge advocacy advertising. When forming judgments, consumers rely on their moral beliefs, moral enlightenment, and moral feelings, which are underlying elements of the moral identity. Further, consumers judge the alignment of the brand and issue in advocacy advertising based upon evaluation criteria, involving the (1) brand's moral motives, (2) brand's moral responsibility, (3) brand's moral image, (4) brand's moral choice of the spokesperson and (5) moral brand parodies.

Conclusion: The present study provides essential insights, including a practical framework, brands can use to handle the paradox of solving political issues through their branding strategies. The paper thereby demonstrates how consumers morally judge brands taking a political stance in their advertisements, further providing an in-depth understanding of how advocacy advertising is interwoven with society and politics in contemporary consumer culture.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Research Background	1
1.2 Problematization	3
1.3 Literature Review	4
1.3.1 Defining Advocacy Advertising	4
1.3.2 How Consumers Perceive Advocacy Advertising.....	5
1.3.3 How Consumers Derive Meanings from Conventional Advertising	6
1.3.4 Morality in Advertising	7
1.4 Critique of Literature	8
1.5 Aim and Purpose of Study	10
1.6 Delimitations	11
1.7 Outline	12
2. Theory	13
2.1 Morality in Consumer Behaviour	13
2.1.1 Moral Identity	13
2.1.2 Moral judgments.....	15
2.1.3 Cynicism of Morality	15
2.2 Moral Authenticity	17
2.3 Consumers' Perceptions of Advocacy Advertisements	18
3. Methodology	21
3.1 Research Philosophy	21
3.2 Research Approach	22
3.3 Research Strategy	22
3.4 Research Design	23
3.5 Data Collection Method	24
3.5.1 Virtual Observations	24
3.5.2 Focus Groups	26
3.6 Empirical Analysis	30
3.7 Trustworthiness	31
3.8 Ethical Considerations	33
4. Cases Background	34
4.1 Nike	34
4.2 Gillette	35
4.3 Pepsi	37
5. Empirical Findings and Analysis	39

5.1 Moral Self as a Ground for Moral judgments	39
5.1.1 Moral Beliefs	39
5.1.2 Moral Enlightenment	43
5.1.3 Moral Feelings	45
5.2 Moral judgments on Alignment of Brand and Issue	47
5.2.1 Brand’s Moral Motives	48
5.2.2 Brand’s Moral Responsibility	50
5.2.3 Brand’s Moral Image	53
5.2.4 Brand’s Moral Choice of Spokesperson	56
5.2.5 Moral Brand Parodies	58
6. Concluding Discussion	62
6.1 How Consumers Morally Judge Advocacy Advertising	62
6.2 Theoretical Contributions	63
6.3 Managerial Implications	65
6.4 The Role of Corporations in Contemporary Consumer Culture	67
6.5 Research Limitations and Future Research	68
References	70
Appendix	86

List of Tables

Table 1: Overview of Focus Group Participants	27
Table 2: Evaluation Criteria of Moral Judgments	66

List of Figures

Figure 1: Cynicism of Morality	16
Figure 2: Brand Authenticity	18
Figure 3: Consumers’ Perceptions of Advocacy Advertisements	19
Figure 4: Phases of Data Collection	24
Figure 5: Parody of Nike Advocacy Advertising	59
Figure 6: Parody of Gillette Advocacy Advertising	60
Figure 7: How Consumers Morally Judge Advocacy Advertising	63

1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the concept of advocacy advertising, which increasingly occurred in contemporary consumer culture. The introduction highlights previous studies and concepts related to the phenomenon of brands taking a political stance in their advertisements by emphasizing consumers' perceptions, understandings, and moral judgments. This paper commences by discussing the research background and underlying relevance of the topic and continues with the problematization, arguing for the managerial, societal, theoretical, and political need of this research. Subsequently, relevant literature, concepts, and studies are reviewed, providing an insightful basis for our research on how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements in today's society while also criticising previous literature and outlining current research gaps. Thereafter, the aim and purpose of this study is thoroughly discussed. At the end of the introduction, delimitations and an overview of the study's structure are provided.

1.1 Research Background

“Today’s consumers expect the brands they buy to communicate a purpose and contribute to social change. Now, staying silent on social issues is just as risky as taking a stance” (The Nielsen Company, 2018). This quote reveals a revived phenomenon within the world of branding. More and more international brands are launching campaigns in which political issues are addressed (Chi, 2019). Rather than using traditional product advertising methods, focusing on the direct promotion of goods and services, brands have changed their advertising approach by including messages enforcing social and political change. This contentious type of advertising is referred to as advocacy advertising (Cutler & Muehling, 1989; O’Guinn, Allen & Semenik, 2006; Schumann, Hathcote & West, 1991; Sethi, 1979), implying a company’s effort to clarify its stance in a public debate, seeking to frame the opinion and behaviour of society by particularly targeting the general public (Cutler & Muehling, 1991). In line with radical changes happening in the world, brands increasingly take a stance in public debates, scratching on the political sphere (Edelman, 2018; Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). Therewith, advocacy advertisements are considered as part of corporate social responsibility practices, indicating that they hold specific commitments in terms of morality and ethics towards society (Wang & Anderson, 2008), which aligns with Gustafson (2001), who highlighted that advertisements and morality are two interwoven concepts. The present study delves deeper into how morality and advocacy advertising are linked by exploring how consumers form moral judgments on brands taking a political stance in their advertisements.

Brands are challenged with rising social tension due to inequalities, climate change, racial issues, gender stereotyping, crime, violence, unemployment, and prejudices that are partly evoked by certain disruptive events, such as the immigration crisis (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). Further, brands are faced with critical political challenges affecting their business practices, such as financial and political corruption, or Brexit (Rehkopf, 2018). Moreover, digital

developments have fostered the diffusion of information, news, and protests, leading to a divided and disharmonious society (Dahlberg-Grundberg, 2016). This fragmented cultural and political setting enhances uncertainty and mistrust in society, further inducing social tension (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). In today's highly polarized world, consumers seek brands to step up as progressive activists and assume the responsibility for political and social issues, as governments and institutions fail to do their job, namely serving the public interest (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017).

Generally, changes in culture and society are reflected in the behaviour of brands (Holt, 2002). Hence, brands are now loosening their passive role and become the catalyst for change by increasingly engaging in public debates (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017). Brands are reconciling consumer values by supporting specific ideologies and political stances (Wittwer, 2014) and are further assuming a more active role in society to resonate with consumers' deeper ideological values reflected in their moral identity. Companies become more explicit about their stances and views, focusing on topics like gender and racial equality, immigration, women's rights, and the environment (Nittle, 2018). Thus, the increasing importance of culture and society in advertisements with particular reference to political issues evoked brands to take a clear stance in political debates, also because of consumption activities on the marketplace mirror participation in political debates for consumers in the whole society (Ekström, 2010). Brands taking a political stance can thus be considered as a new approach of becoming more culturally relevant. Burger King launching the pride Whopper campaign in 2014, reaching out to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community with the message "We are all the same inside" (Overly, 2014) or Airbnb touching upon the topic of acceptance in their 2017 released campaign "#weaccept" (Airbnb, 2017), are just a few recent examples of brands taking a political stance in their brand advertisements. By tapping into public political debates, which matter to the society, companies aim to make themselves culturally relevant, by weighing in on political issues and bringing them to the forefront of consumer culture, going far beyond conventional branding strategies (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017).

However, success does not come without risks. Considering the great achievements of brands such as Airbnb (Benner, 2017) in adopting a political stance into their branding strategy, the reputational risks, as well as the potential losses, should not be neglected. Sassatelli (2007) emphasized that consumers have increasingly gained awareness about the persuasive power of advertisements and thus have become more critical towards advertisements. In line, Mark-Herbert and von Schantz (2007) highlighted that companies are facing more scrutiny than ever. Brands are especially often called out to be hypocritical as the public perceives them to have a commercial interest rather than an altruistic interest, indicating a lack of moral decency (Forehand & Grier, 2003). A recently developed critical term referring to this phenomenon is woke washing, describing a gap between the company's actual practice and its marketing communication activities (Vredenburg, Spry, Kemper & Kapitan, 2018). It is similar to the concept of greenwashing but refers to social and political issues instead (Mahdawi, 2018). Controversial messages enhance a moral polemic society (Luedicke, Thompson & Giesler, 2010) and encompass the risk to lose customers, which have a different point of view on the discussed political issue (Ekström, 2010). Also, forms of consumer resistance, such as boycotts,

could damage the brand in the long term (Neilson, 2010). A quantitative study showed that two in three people are belief-driven buyers, claiming that “they choose, switch, avoid or boycott a brand based on its stand on societal issues” (Edelman, 2018, p. 5).

As shown, the concept of advocacy advertising and precisely the act of brands taking a stance in political debates through their advertisements is of high relevance and currency in contemporary consumer culture. Hence, the forthcoming section elaborates on how this study helps to contribute to the understanding of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisement campaigns.

1.2 Problematization

Drawing upon the presented research background, we argue this study to be relevant for brands, political actors, and the society, each of them being discussed in the following. As aforementioned, the changing advertising approach of brands reflected in their attempts to weigh in on the political sphere by addressing topics, such as gender and racial inequality, suggests that this is an area that is gaining increased relevance among brands. The relationship between brands and culture is driven by a circular and dynamic exchange of meaning (e.g. Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Hence, it is imperative for brands to understand society and specifically consumers’ moral judgments of advocacy advertising, which is essentially the underlying motivation of this thesis. Further given the potential benefits and risks, it is no question that brands must take into account how politically inspired advertisements are morally judged by the society to ultimately determine the success or failure of advertising campaigns attempting to weigh in on political issues.

Despite the relevance of the phenomenon for brands, it is equally essential for society and politics to comprehend the dynamics of these politically inspired campaigns. Understanding how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising facilitates a superior comprehension of today’s society. By elaborating whether consumers require brands to engage in politics by taking away responsibility from the government and institutions and bringing up issues and debates in their advertising strategy, the understanding of the society, as well as the political system in contemporary consumer culture, is enhanced. Thus, this study contributes to the societal and political dimensions of today’s culture by providing critical insights on how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements and what expectations consumers hold towards brands in terms of their political responsibility. As already illuminated by a quantitative study from Edelman (2018), the majority of questioned consumers had the opinion that brands are more effective than the government itself, when it comes to addressing societal issues. Also, many people thought that it is easier to get brands to resolve issues rather than the government (Edelman, 2018). This was further elaborated by Bennett (2012), who described a shift in responsible entities from the government towards brands, also caused by the personalization of political issues. We believe that brands become important actors to communicate and address political issues, hence, can govern consumers through these issues by providing certain stances. The shift of responsibilities mentioned above might further frame the political system as a whole and could eventually reshape the process of how consumers

morally judge political issues in general. Thus, it is also essential for political actors to gain an advanced understanding of how the phenomenon of politically inspired advocacy advertising could impact the dynamics and structure of society and the political system.

Having argued for the relevance and currency of the phenomenon, the research question we aimed to answer in this study is as follows:

How do consumers morally judge advocacy advertising?

This study uncovers the fundamental understandings consumers hold of politically inspired advocacy advertisements, precisely, how consumers morally judge this phenomenon. By exploring how the currently undergoing change in branding is judged by consumers, we gather meaningful conclusions for academia as same as practitioners and further illuminate possible consequences for the contemporary consumer culture as a whole.

1.3 Literature Review

In the forthcoming section, we review previous literature surrounding the research question by discerning three different literature streams. We first delve into advocacy advertising by discussing the concept itself and then engage with the somewhat limited research on consumers perceptions of advocacy advertisements. Acknowledging the lacking research, we proceed with the second literature stream of how consumers derive meanings from conventional advertising in today's social environment. This is followed by a review of studies connecting the concepts of morality and advertising. Conclusively, we use the presented literature as a point of reference to depict the phenomenon.

1.3.1 Defining Advocacy Advertising

Advocacy advertising is considered as a corporate social responsibility activity that seeks to frame the opinion and behaviour of the society by clarifying a brand's stance in public debates through advertisements (Cutler & Muehling, 1989; O'Guinn, Allen & Semenik, 2006; Schumann, Hathcote & West, 1991, Wang & Anderson, 2008). Sethi (1979) was one of the first researchers defining advocacy advertising as "the propagation of ideas and the elucidation of controversial social issues of public importance" (p. 70). In line with this definition, McDowell delineated advocacy advertising as an expression of the company's view on social, economic and political issues (1982 cited in Salmon, Reid, Pokrywczynski & Willett, 1985), whereas he especially highlighted the controversial facet of advocacy advertising. In recent years, researchers brought up various synonymic terms that are interchangeably used for the expression of advocacy advertising, including public relations advertising, institutional advertising, image advertising, idea advertising, issue-oriented advertising, counter-advertising, public interest advertising, and adversary advertising (Fox, 1986; Marchand, 1987; Salmon et al. 1985; Sethi, 1979). No matter what term is used, the underlying intention of advocacy advertising is the genuine interest in enforcing social change (Fox, 1986). Haley (1996) emphasized that the reasoning behind brands taking a stance in public debates may vary.

Some brands released advocacy advertising campaigns because they have a genuine interest in social welfare, others wanted to be seen as socially responsible by consumers, and equally, companies aimed to deflect criticism and eventually changed regulations (Bostdorff & Vibbert, 1994; Fox, 1986; Haley, 1996). The latter was argued to be the most frequent underlying cause of advocacy advertisements and thus was also most researched (Cutler & Muehling, 1989). Either way, it is vital that advocacy advertisements, as part of corporate social responsibility activities, are understood as “citizenship function[s] with moral, ethical and social obligations between a corporation and its publics” (Wang & Anderson, 2008, p. 1).

Although advocacy in advertising can be traced back in some form or another to the early 1900s, it increasingly gained attention during the late 70s and 80s (Sethi, 1979). Notably, the increasing awareness and debates on the environment and energy encouraged companies to take a stance in public debates, enabling them to defend their business practices (Miller & Lellis, 2016; Miller & Sinclair, 2009). Hence, a number of corporations integrated advocacy advertising into their marketing strategy, including AT&T, Phillips, Chrysler, Sear, Mobil Oil Corporation, McDonnell Douglas, Association of American Railroads, Alcoa, the Tobacco Institute, and the New York State Trial Lawyers Association (Burgoon, Pfau & Birk, 1995; Cutler & Muehling, 1989; Fox, 1986; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Salmon et al. 1985). In the 70s and 80s, the substantial increase in advocacy advertisement was caused by the rising public attention on the energy and oil crisis (Fox, 1986; Sethi, 1977). Taking a closer look at today’s political and societal climate, the rise of advocacy advertisements occurs in line with rallies, boycotts and public outrage about social injustice (Nittle, 2018), suggesting a change in societal values and ideologies. Despite the rising relevance of advocacy advertising and the underlying dynamics of advertisements and society, only a few researchers explored how consumers perceive advocacy advertising and no studies were found on how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising. Especially the cultural relevance and controversy of political advocacy campaigns makes it imperative for brands, political actors, as well as the society to understand how this phenomenon is judged by consumers in terms of morality.

1.3.2 How Consumers Perceive Advocacy Advertising

In contrast to consumers’ perceptions of conventional advertisements (e.g. Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998), the meanings and understandings consumers derive from advocacy advertisements are not a very widely researched area (i.e. Haley, 1996). In line with the previous review of advocacy literature, only one study explored consumers’ perceptions of advocacy advertising in terms of credibility, which is reviewed in the following. A framework to describe the source of credibility being the consumers’ perceptions of advocacy advertising was developed in 1996 by Haley. He argued that consumers’ perceptions are depending on a triangular relationship between the self, the organisation, and the communicated issue.

Firstly, Haley (1996) highlighted the relationship between the organisation and the self, whereby shared values between the consumer and the company and the likability of the service or product are crucial elements to decide upon whether the advertisement is credible. Secondly, the author described the fit between the organisation and the issue as being a crucial factor for

consumers' perceptions of an advocacy advertisement's credibility. Thus, he argued that the fit between the communicated issue and the company itself must be given, for a brand to be perceived as credible. Lastly, Haley (1996) explained the relationship between the self and the issue as playing an important role when developing perceptions of the advocacy advertisement's credibility. Thereby, perceptions are created through the importance of the issue to the consumers' self and the importance of the issue to society in general (Haley, 1996). As this model of consumers' perceptions of advocacy advertising is further used as a theoretical lens, more detailed information about this concept can be found in chapter two.

1.3.3 How Consumers Derive Meanings from Conventional Advertising

Given the lack of literature concerning how consumers form moral judgments on advocacy advertising, we take a step back and review the literature available on how consumers derive meanings from conventional advertising, further elaborating on morality in advertising. Thereby, we aimed to get an advanced understanding of the situational context moral judgments are formed in, since advertisements are one of the most important origins of symbolic meanings from the brand to the consumer (e.g. Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Goldman, 2005; Leiss et al. 2018; O'Donohoe, 2001) but also a moral source for society (Gustafson, 2001).

Generally, symbolic meanings serve essential needs of consumers such as the expression of their selves and identities (e.g. Bhat & Reddy, 1998; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Hammerl, Dorner, Foscht & Brandstätter, 2016), the building and communication of their self-image (e.g. Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hammerl et al. 2016), the differentiation towards others (Hammerl et al. 2016) or the process of social identification (Park, Jaworski & MacInnis, 1986). As highlighted by Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998), symbolic meanings operate in two directions, namely "outward in constructing the social world: social-Symbolism, and inward towards constructing our self-identity: self-Symbolism" (p. 2). Hence, the created meanings are both relevant for the culture as a whole and a culture product themselves (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Generally, the interrelation between consumers and advertisements can be described as dialectic, portending consumers taking the meaning of the advertisements while at the same time also assigning particular meanings based on their personal view of the world (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Lannon & Cooper, 1983). This conception of symbolic ideologies demonstrates that advertising is driven by society the same way as advertising drives society.

The allocation of the derived meanings can vary and is depending on the consumers' background and present situations (Lannon, 1992 cited in Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Livingstone, 1995 cited in Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998), which further aligns with Weilbacher (2003), who described the decoding of information as depending on the context, the habits and attitudes of the consumer. In line with these arguments, O'Donohoe (2001) stated that attitudes towards advertisements are framed by the consumers' "personal experiences of ads and their beliefs about wider issues regarding its relationship with society" (p. 93). These perspectives were further broadened by Leiss, Kline, Jhally, Botterill and Asquith (2018), describing the "opposed views on advertising, mirroring the divergence of opinion in society

as a whole” (p. 9). Thus, consumers derive meanings from advertisements based on their mindsets as same as through interrelations within the society.

As emphasized by Anderson and Meyer (1988 cited in Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998), “meaning is not delivered in the communication process, rather it is constructed within it” (p. 5), which aligns with Goldman (2005) who stated that every advertisement is built within a framework, interpreted by the consumers through the exchange of meanings. Also, Anderson and Meyer (1988 cited in Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998) described that consumers derive meanings from advertisements through the communication processes about the advertisement between each other. Moving towards another direction, Weilbacher (2003) pointed out that previous experiences with the brand, such as other advertisements or marketing activities, are mentoring consumers through their meaning generation process. In contrast to the opinions mentioned above, he emphasized the communicated message of the advertisement as being the most critical factor for the creation of meaning. Additionally, the concept of ambivalence is a standard description of consumers’ experiences of advertisements (O’Donohoe, 2001). Moreover, consumers can assign positive and negative meanings towards particular objects at the same time, caused by “tensions between reality and expectations, task and choice overload, conflicting roles, and conflicting cultural values” (Otnes, Lowrey & Shrum, 1997, p. 80).

1.3.4 Morality in Advertising

Advertising is often associated with negative connotations, as several researchers argued that it is the immoral evil of society (Kirkpatrick, 1986). Among other, advertising “makes people buy products they don’t need; ... it is deceptive and manipulative; it is intrusive, irritating, offensive, tasteless, insulting, degrading, sexist, racist; it is loud, obnoxious, strident and repetitive to the point of torture; it is a pack of lies; it is a vulgar bore” (Kirkpatrick, 1986, p. 1). This harsh criticism demonstrates how interwoven morality and advertising are. Research about morality in terms of advertisement can be traced back to the early beginnings of the Journal of Advertising (Zinkhan, 1994). When referring to morality in advertisements, we use this term interchangeably with ethics, which was also observed in other literature (e.g. Caruana, 2007; Zinkhan, 1994).

As defined by Frankena (1973 cited in Zinkhan, 1994), ethics are “a set of moral principles directed at enhancing societal well-being” (p. 1). Generally, Zinkhan (1994) stated that advertisements require practitioners to take moral decisions. According to him, consumers judge advertisements based on what they believe is morally right or morally wrong, which aligns with Simpson, Brown and Widing II (1998), who emphasized that consumers either judge an advertisement as being ethical or unethical. The authors further described these evaluations being connected to the consumers buying decisions, which could eventually lead to consumer activism in the form of boycotts, among others. This involvement can be explained by Pollay (1986), who highlighted that the notion of advertising changed from the mere promotion of the product towards more meaningful content, even referring to the consumers’ life as a whole. Further, it can be connected to Gustafson (2001), who described that advertisements are interwoven with morality in society and “makes certain forms of behavior

more accessible, more visible, and in some degree more socially acceptable” (p. 215). Thus, the author described advertising as having the strength to contribute to or to drive societal changes.

However, as highlighted by Frazer (1979), what is perceived as ethical in advertisements is also challenged through changes in society and thus changing continuously. One of the most recent studies on advertising and morality was published by Cohen and Dromi (2018), who investigated “how a professional community like advertising maintains a collective sense of morality, and how it provides its constituent individuals with the means to present themselves as living up to a moral standard” (p. 176). Thereby, they found that moral values are delivered via narratives, through which “individuals ... interpret their work as reflecting and confirming their own moral standards” (Cohen & Dromi, 2018, p. 178). Generally, the relations between morality and advertisements are widely researched areas for example in the fields of corporate social responsibility (Wang & Anderson, 2008), environmental marketing (Davis, 1992), advertisements for children (Pollay, 1986), the tobacco industry (Zinkhan, 1994), or the ethical dilemmas advertisers face in general (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004), however, they lack the connection to advocacy advertisements.

1.4 Critique of Literature

Having reviewed the available and related literature on conventional advertisements, advocacy advertisements, and morality in advertising, this study proceeds with the critique of the presented literature and highlights where the present study can contribute.

Considering that advertisements were described as one of the essential sources to create meanings for the consumers (e.g. Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998) and morality of society (Gustafson, 2001), it becomes apparent that in previous literature scholars have recognized the importance of meanings transmitted from brands to consumers through advertisements. As illuminated in the previous chapter, various research on conventional advertisements indicate underlying dynamics between values, norms, and advertisements (e.g. Boutlis, 2000; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Goldman, 2005; Leiss et al. 2018; Lovett & Jordan, 2010; O’Donohoe, 2001; Umiker-Sebeok, 2012). Further, the process how consumers make sense of conventional advertisements (e.g. Lannon & Cooper, 1983; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Otnes, Lowrey & Shrum, 1997), the symbolic meanings consumers derive from brand advertisements (e.g. Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Gustafson, 2001; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Hammerl, Dorner, Foscht & Brandstätter, 2016) and morality in advertising (e.g. Frazer, 1979; Pollay, 1986; Zinkhan, 1994) are widely researched areas, indicating a great importance for scholars and practitioners to understand how consumer might morally judge advocacy advertising. The literature mentioned above provides in-depth knowledge on how consumers extract meanings from conventional advertisements, and what role the values, norms, and morality of society play within these processes and advertising practices, indicating a clear relevance for exploring how consumers make sense of advocacy advertising.

Most of the reviewed literature on ethics and morality in advertising and marketing is published within the area of social responsibility (Wang & Anderson, 2008), environmental marketing (Davis, 1992), advertisements for children (Pollay, 1986), the tobacco industry (Zinkhan, 1994), or the ethical dilemmas advertisers have to face in general (Drumwright & Murphy). Therefore, we argue that there is a lack of literature exploring the connection of morality and advocacy advertisements from a consumer perspective. Especially since advertisements have the strength to drive social change (Fox, 1986), combined with the aim of advocacy advertisements to promote these socially relevant ideas (Sethi, 1979), we believe that it is crucial to understand how consumers form moral judgments on these commercials. We argue it is likely that there is a difference in how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements than conventional advertising campaigns due to the controversial nature of advocacy campaigns. Further, we believe that existing literature lacks the contemporary consumer culture perspective, which is why we aim to narrow this gap down by positioning our research as a contribution within a bigger discussion on the tensions between branding and politics by exploring the morality of advocacy advertising campaigns in today's society.

Despite the extensive literature available on how consumers morally judge and make sense of conventional advertising, only a few studies tapped into the consumers' moral judgments of advocacy advertisements. Also, a considerable amount of literature exists concerning the managerial side of advocacy advertising. Here, we identified two main literature streams on advocacy advertising, namely (1) pure descriptions of campaigns (Bostdorff & Vibbert, 1994; Marchand, 1987; Miller & Lellis, 2016; Miller & Sinclair, 2009; Sethi, 1979) and (2) the outcome and efficiency of advocacy advertising (e.g. Burgoon, Pfau & Birk, 1995; Fox, 1986; Salmon et al. 1985), explicitly referring to sponsor attitude (e.g. Rifon, Choi, Trimble & Li, 2004), corporate community relations (e.g. Dean, 2002), corporate identity attractiveness (e.g. Marin & Ruiz, 2007), attitude towards advertising (e.g. Sinclair & Irani, 2005), and purchase intention (e.g. Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). The available literature provides an insightful understanding of advocacy advertising, however, merely portrays the phenomenon from a managerial perspective. Indeed, the literature stream on advocacy advertising lacks a consumer perspective that connects the concepts of morality and consumers' perceptions of advocacy advertising.

As aforementioned, Haley (1996) delved into the consumers' perception of advocacy advertising by investigating its credibility in regards to the consumers' perception of the organization, the issue, and the self. While this is a crucial step in gaining a profound understanding of advocacy advertisements, it lacks a practical side of how corporations can use Haley's findings (1996) in their branding practices and is missing the underlying factors evoking these perceptions. Further, it neglects the aspect of morality. The author provided an external framework that provides guidance on which perceptions play an important role in consumers understanding of advocacy advertisements. He highlighted that the perceptions are formed within a triangular relationship between the self, the issue, and the brand, however, his research failed to provide profound knowledge on how consumers generate these perceptions. Especially, considering that advertisements can frame the morality of society (Gustafson,

2001), we argue that Haley's research (1996) lacks the connection of morality and advocacy advertisements.

Instead of merely assessing the credibility of the fits between the corporation, the issue, and the self as suggested by Haley (1996), we argue that consumers form moral judgments on how morally authentic the alignment between the brand and the issue is. We believe that consumers are likely to use their personal moral stances and identity. Thus, it is essential that advocacy advertisements are understood in terms of their moral, ethical and social obligations between a brand and its public due to advocacy advertisements primarily promoting moral, ethical and social values that consumers refer to when forming judgments. It becomes apparent that there is a lack of research combining advocacy advertising and the underlying moral aspects, which is why we identified the urgency to explore the moral judgments consumers' form on advocacy advertisements more in-depth.

Moreover, the study of Haley (1996) was conducted a rather long time ago and therefore, lacks a contemporary context. The present study contributes with more relevant and current findings as well as implications, improving the overall understanding of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements in today's society. Also, considering the importance of the cultural context in advertising (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998), we emphasize the lack of recent studies on advocacy advertising as well as the lack of research on the role advocacy advertising plays in contemporary consumer culture. The context of advocacy advertising has changed since it was first defined in 1970. In line with available literature on advertising in today's consumer culture (Holt, 2002), we believe that advocacy advertisements have been differently judged in terms of morality and authenticity in the 80s in comparison to now due to changing norms, values, cultures, and ideologies and therefore calls for a newer research.

In sum, we argue this study to be relevant due to various reasons. As illuminated in the problematization, it is of high relevance for brands, society as well as political actors to understand how consumers morally judge the paradox of brands assuming political responsibility, partly through advocacy advertisements. Drawing upon this relevance, it was astonishing that very limited research exists on how consumers make sense or morally judge advocacy advertising. We aim to fill this gap and provide unique research exploring the underlying criteria consumers apply to judge the advocacy advertisement's morality and authenticity. Further, we seek to highlight patterns consumers derive from advocacy advertising in contemporary consumer culture, significantly contributing to the understanding of advocacy advertising from a societal, managerial, and political facet.

1.5 Aim and Purpose of Study

The aim of this study is to advance the understanding and knowledge of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising and what this revived phenomenon means to consumers in contemporary society. Here, we seek to identify evaluation criteria that consumers apply to judge the morality and authenticity of a brand's advocacy advertisement. Given the growth of the managerial, societal and political relevance of advocacy advertising in today's society, we

seek to provide an enhanced understanding of how consumers morally judge the paradox of brands tapping into the political sphere in times where the government fails to do so.

Brands taking a political stance in their advertisements challenges conventional advertising approaches and respectively also challenges previous assumptions about advertising. Thus, this paper is set out to understand contemporary advocacy advertising campaigns, incorporated by brands to clarify their point of view in a political debate. By comparing the moral judgments derived from three different advertising campaigns, namely Nike, Gillette, and Pepsi, we seek to uncover the underlying criteria of these to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from a consumer perspective.

As previously outlined, the importance of this study derives from the increasing relevance and currency of brands taking a political stance in society in line with the lacking consumer perspective of this phenomenon. Despite the increasing opportunities and threats of brands taking a political stance in their advertisements, little attention was devoted to how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising in today's society. Therefore, we as marketing and brand management students have a keen interest in exploring these underlying moral meanings in more detail. The findings of our study enable theorists as well as practitioners to gain an in-depth understanding of consumers' moral judgments on advocacy advertisements, providing further insights on consumers' lives and society at large. In reference to our intended theoretical contributions, we aim to extend the available literature on advocacy advertising by adding the consumer dimension and provide brands with a tool to assess the success of an advocacy campaign before releasing it. As aforementioned, we aim to contribute to Haley's study (1996) by outlining the underlying criteria consumers use to judge the morality and authenticity of a brand and its advocacy advertising. Brands must understand what ultimately determines the success or failure of advocacy advertising campaigns. At the same time, this study is of relevance for the political system as the governing activities of brands can change the dynamics of society, further impacting the political system of the society.

1.6 Delimitations

This study focuses on three carefully chosen advertisements from companies operating within the fast-moving consumer goods industry. The chosen case examples are Nike with the advertisement "Dream Crazy" (Nittle, 2018), Gillette's advertisement "We believe: the best men can be" (Gillette, 2019a) and lastly Pepsi "Live For Now Moments Anthem" (Solon, 2017). These case studies were chosen due to their currency, enabling the researchers to align these campaigns with ongoing social debates and current structures in society. The focus on young adults further limits the scope of this study, which is reasoned by the fact them being described as a highly relevant target group for brands and specifically message-oriented advertisements (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Nittle, 2018). To be able to answer the research question of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising, the phenomenon is explored from the consumer perspective. In this respect, it is essential to highlight that consolidated opinions reflect the consumers' views. Finally, we cautiously take into account the differences in the level of expression and attached meaning each product holds for consumers. As such,

clothing and shoes by Nike or drinks by Pepsi can be utilized by consumers to express a clear message, whereas razors from Gillette might not be applied in the same way.

1.7 Outline

The study is divided into six main chapters. At the beginning of the thesis, the reader is provided with an overview of the background to be able to comprehend the researched phenomenon fully. Chapter one further includes a literature review, enabling the reader to grasp upon the most critical streams and concepts for this research as well as the intended theoretical and practical contributions. This section is then followed by a summary of the critique of the reviewed literature. Also, the aim and purpose of this study as same as the delimitations are presented, arguing for the relevance of the research question. Chapter two discusses the theoretical lenses used for this study. After that, chapter three proceeds with the methodology, describing and elaborating the chosen qualitative research approach and philosophical perspectives, respectively. In chapter four, the relevant cases of this study are introduced, providing the reader with an insightful background on the phenomenon. Chapter five continues with the analysis of the empirical material, in which findings are put into relation with theory. In chapter six, the empirical findings are discussed and concluded with respect to the research question and purpose. Further, the findings are positioned in the literature and theory, which were presented in chapter one and two. Here, also the theoretical contributions and practical implications are discussed. Finally, the limitations of the study are presented and the possibilities for future research highlighted.

2. Theory

In this chapter, the theoretical lenses used to analyse the empirical material are presented. Firstly, we delve into morality in consumer behaviour, including the moral identity, moral judgments, and cynicism of morality. After that, related material of moral authenticity and the Doppelgänger Brand Image is presented, which is followed by a discussion on consumers' perceptions of advocacy advertisements. All the expounded concepts are used as a guide for this study, enabling us to grasp consumers' meanings and moral judgments on advocacy advertisements precisely.

2.1 Morality in Consumer Behaviour

Given the fact that companies take political stances in their advocacy advertisements to facilitate social change (Fox, 1986) that eventually drives peoples' constructions of the world, moral conflicts can emerge (Gustafson, 2001). Also, Wilk (2001) argued that morality and consumer behaviour are two closely interwoven concepts, sometimes even described as being inseparable. The lens of morality, therefore, functions as binoculars, enabling us to explore how consumers form moral judgments on advocacy advertisements.

2.1.1 Moral Identity

First, the concept of moral identity is discussed, which represents an individual's moral traits, feelings, and behaviours (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Moral identity is an underlying driver of moral behaviour and thus relevant to consider when exploring moral judgments (Reed, Aquino & Levy, 2007). The connection between the self and judgments on advertisements can further be derived from general social identity research (Choi & Winterich, 2013).

Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) acknowledged advertisements to be one of the most effective sources of symbolic meanings for consumers, which aligns with Gustafson (2001), who also described advertisements as a source of symbols, assisting in the process of creating meanings and morality within society. Generally, symbolic meanings of brands are communicated through advertisements and serve essential needs of consumers, such as the expression of their selves and identities (e.g. Bhat & Reddy, 1998; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Hammerl, Dorner, Foscht & Brandstätter, 2016), the building and communication of their self-image (e.g. Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hammerl et al. 2016), the differentiation towards others (Hammerl et al. 2016) or the process of social identification (Park, Jaworski & MacInnis, 1986). Accordingly, Ágnes (2009) emphasized that advertisers aim to attract consumers by addressing issues which are relevant for consumers' identities to reproduce them. As further argued by Pollay (1986), "advertising provides us with vocabulary: a set of words and the concepts they express with which we structure our perceptions and judgments, defining in large measure how "reality" is conceived" (p. 29). The literature on general social identity suggests that consumers' identities play a crucial role when forming judgments. Hence, we consider related literature functions as a lens in exploring consumers' moral judgments on advocacy advertisements.

Morality is a complex phenomenon that gains meaning through its socially constructed nature (Caruana, 2007). Judgments about what is morally right or wrong depend on personal interpretations and are characterized as being social processes (Caruana, 2007). Hence, these are crucial factors when discussions about morality are encountered (Caruana, 2007). Caruana (2007) described the dynamics between morality and consumption as a construct where “right and good is the product of a continual process of political, social, technological and religious reorganisation of life” (p. 300). Especially from a contemporary point of view, individuals personally evaluate the “right and good for themselves” (Caruana, 2007, p. 302). Consumers hold an image in their mind of what is morally right or wrong in terms of characteristics, feelings and behaviours (Pizarro, 2000; Reed, Aquino & Levy, 2007), this is also referred to moral beliefs and values (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Thereby, moral identity is defined as the degree to which moral actions and conducts are relevant to consumers’ self-identity and thus positions itself as a component of a person’s social self (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Reed, Aquino & Levy, 2007). More precisely, Aquino and Reed (2002) delineated moral identity as a “self-conception organized around a set of moral traits” (p. 1424). Consumers use their moral identity as a resource for perceptions, conduct, and behaviour (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Hence, moral identity serves as a solid basis on which consumers form their moral judgments on, indicating that a “person’s moral reasoning predicts his or her moral behaviour” (Aquino & Reed, 2002, p. 1423).

As presented in the introduction chapter, advocacy advertisements arouse controversial opinions in society. We, therefore, assume that moral conflicts take place, whereby some consumers argue in favour of the brand’s moral stance and others against it. We believe that the concept of Identity Work as Moral Protagonism by Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler (2010) can serve as a critical lens to analyse consumers moral identities and the moral judgment of advocacy advertisements. As described by Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler (2010), brands have the potential to mediate moral conflicts by evoking tensions of myths and ideologies. An interplay between the moral protagonist and an antagonist, acting upon opposing moral beliefs, takes place. Therefore, “different consumption-mediated identity goals and modes of distinction all invoke a moralistic dichotomy between those who are proponents of a moral order and those who would defile or undermine these galvanizing normative values and ideals” (Luedicke, Thompson & Giesler, 2010, p. 1017). Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler (2010) referred to the internal perspective of morality as contributing to the process of identity building, the personal as well as the collective. The authors further developed a model which describes the consumer identity work through moral protagonistism and consists of two different elements, namely the mythic resources and ideological. Both are delineated as shaping the consumers’ identity work process, in which consumption is seen as a form of moral protagonistism. When protagonists, the advocates of the brand, get into a conflict they “invoke a historically established, countervailing set of ideological meanings to portray these condemnations” (Luedicke, Thompson & Giesler, 2010, p. 1028). According to Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler (2010), moral protagonists defend the meanings and values they hold as an enthusiast of the brand. Also, they highlighted that these opposing views in the form of stable narrative structures result from differing situations and contexts.

2.1.2 Moral judgments

Consumers judge advocacy advertisements in terms of morality and moral norms. Hence, we argue that it is crucial to gain an in-depth understanding of moral judgments, enabling us to analyse the empirical findings through this theoretical lens.

Moral judgments can be defined as an individual's "prescriptive assessment of what is right or wrong" (Trevino, 1986, p. 604), highlighting the evaluation of actions being perceived as morally justified or not. According to Nielsen and McGregor (2013), a moral norm "provides directions for how people should exercise" (p. 473). Nielsen and McGregor (2013) further identified two different kinds of norms, namely, descriptive and injunctive. Thereby, they delineated descriptive norms as the "people's perceptions of what people think ought to be done" (p. 475) and the injunctive norms as "what is commonly approved or disapproved of within a particular culture" (p. 475). Hence, they are pointing towards the existence of an internal and external perspective, which aligns with Wilk (2001), who described judgments about morality as having a dual nature, consisting of the human experience and public discourses. He specified the latter one as referring to a broader context, namely "cultural, symbolic and political" (Wilk, 2001, p. 255) discourses. Nielsen and McGregor (2013) further stated that "morally irresponsible consumer actions are blameworthy and morally responsible consumer actions are praiseworthy" (p. 479), capturing the social construction and evaluation of this phenomenon. In line, Lovett and Jordan (2010) divided the process of moral judgments into different levels. Here, they described the level as deciding whether just the consumer's self or also the public and social factors are involved during the process of moralisation. Thereby, the authors further stated that on some levels, not just one's own preferences or decisions are morally judged, but also the ones from other people. Lovett and Jordan (2010) further described the process as moral escalation, implying that the level can be changed through certain aspects, precisely, the moral judgment about one's self can be extended towards others, which can be triggered by "narratives and other stories" (Vitz, 1990 cited in Lovett & Jordan, 2010, p. 185).

2.1.3 Cynicism of Morality

As advocacy advertisements arouse controversial opinions in society, we argue that consumers cynically judge the morality of commercials to make sense of them. Therefore, the theory about cynicism in morality is presented in the following section.

Bertilsson (2015) emphasized that cynicism is a critical facet in reference to consumers' evaluation of morality. A framework developed by Bertilsson (2015) conflates the concepts of morality and cynicism around the consumption of brands by identifying three different perspectives, namely "cynicism toward the market" (p. 449), "cynicism toward other consumers" (p. 449), and "cynicism toward the self" (p. 449) (see Figure 1). Bertilsson (2015) characterised these components as the "enlightened disbelief in the morality of brands" (p. 454), "the enlightened disbelief in the morality of the consumers" (p. 456) and "consumers' reflexive disbelief in their own moral enlightenment" (p. 459). Even though he described the consumers as enlightened about immoral acts, they still notice being part of these consumption practices. As further emphasized by the author, cynicism is the "consciously acting against

better knowledge” (Bertilsson, 2015, p. 464), exemplifying the moral positions of consumers as same as today’s situation on the market at large.

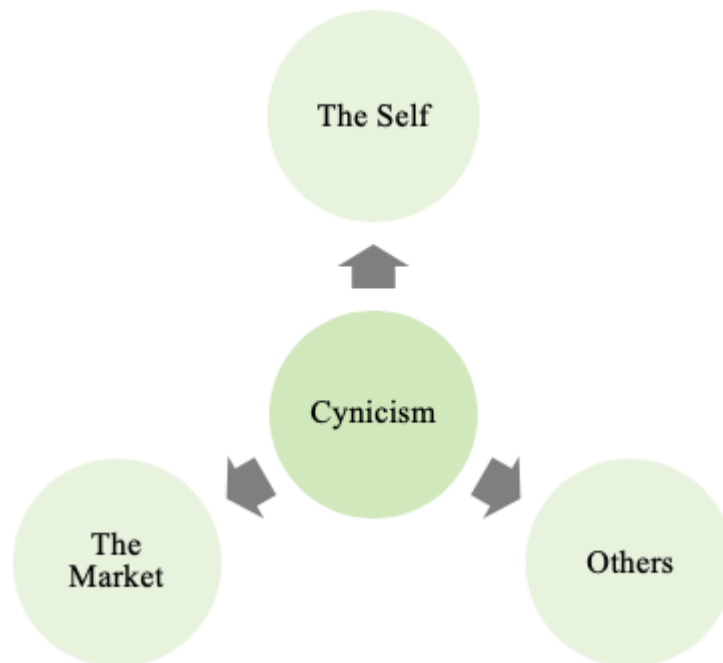


Figure 1: Cynicism of Morality (Own Figure in line with Bertilsson, 2015)

Another framework describing the interrelation of cynicism and morality of consumption was developed by Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011). They explained cynicism as being the result of an evolving distrust within the consumer culture, resulting from unfulfilled promises of economics and politics. Also, advertisements have become a source for cynicism by doubt towards certain messages (Pollay, 1986). As further verified by other literature, consumers have developed a suspicious behaviour towards the intentions behind certain marketing activities and brands in general (Chylinski & Chu, 2010). Here, cynicism functions “as a psychological tool ... to resist marketing techniques and is linked to suspicion toward corporate virtuous discourses” (Odou & de Pechpeyrou, 2011, p. 1800). Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011) described cynicism as existing on two different levels, whereby the first one is about expressions and resistance towards specific effective tactics from marketers and the second questioning the whole ideology of consumerism. Cynicism is not just a tool of individual resistance towards marketing, it also helps consumers to “regain control over their existence” (Odou & de Pechpeyrou, 2011, p. 1800).

In conclusion, these concepts highlight the cynicism dimension of consumer morality for the consumption of brands in general and towards marketing techniques. We can identify an exciting opportunity in applying these concepts to the present study, exploring the recent phenomenon of advocacy advertisements more in-depth and understanding how consumers form moral judgments on them.

2.2 Moral Authenticity

When exploring how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements, we believe that authenticity is one of the main factors during the evaluation of morality. Here, we anticipate that consumers draw connections between morality and authenticity, which is why this lens is expected to be insightful. Because brand authenticity is socially constructed (Beverland, 2005a), the concept can provide critical insights on consumers' in-depth understandings and judgments. Generally, also communication activities such as advertising are identified as playing a pivotal role in the perception of a brand's authenticity (Beverland, Lindgren & Vink, 2008). Therefore, this section presents relevant theory regarding this concept.

As stated by Gino, Kouchaki and Galinsky (2015), morality and authenticity are directly linked concepts. The authors argued that inauthenticity is experienced as immoral, whereby being inauthentic implies "being untrue to oneself" (Gino, Kouchaki & Galinsky, 2015, p.984). Also, Beverland, Lindgren and Vink (2008) divided authenticity in approximate and moral authenticity, the latter one being highly relevant for the present study. To achieve moral authenticity, a connection between the own moral values and the brand's moral values must be perceived, as both are essential factors when evaluating an advertisement's authenticity (Beverland, Lindgren & Vink, 2008). Further, moral authenticity is attained when consumers sense that the brand is driven by personal motivations and genuine interests rather than with the intent to generate economic benefits (Beverland, Lindgren & Vink, 2008), which is also further described by Beverland (2005a; 2005b; 2006), whereby he emphasized that the motives of a brand behind certain actions are one of the most critical factors of authenticity. He argued that if the commercial interest is overruling the brand's motivation, the perceived authenticity can be ruined. Beverland, Lindgren and Vink (2008) further emphasized that consumers use their own moral values as a reference point and try to assess if "the brand is committed to traditional moral practices" (p. 12) in terms of an advertisement's moral authenticity.

The concept of moral authenticity can further be supported by literature on general brand authenticity. Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland and Farrelly (2014) defined brand authenticity as "a subjective evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a brand by consumers" (p. 1091). Today, consumers seek to create authentic selves through their consumption practices and thus create their own identities to express themselves (Beverland, 2005a). As further identified by Schallehn, Burmann and Riley (2014), an authentic brand is "clear about what it stands for" (p. 194) and can be described as having its own identity in mind instead of randomly following trends. It particularly points towards the paradox of brand authenticity in contemporary consumer culture, implying that "brands must remain true to an authentic core while also remaining relevant" (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2001; Keller, 2003 all cited in Beverland, 2005b, p. 1004). Also, Burmann, Halaszovich, Schade and Piehler (2018) developed a concept describing relevant factors of consumers' perceived brand authenticity (see Figure 2), namely consistency, continuity, individuality and liability. Brands must behave consistently over a long period of time to be perceived as authentic and should further highlight their uniqueness and distinctiveness in comparison to other competitors (Burmann et al. 2018). Moreover, a brand must be reliable and behave in a socially responsible manner (Burmann et al. 2018).

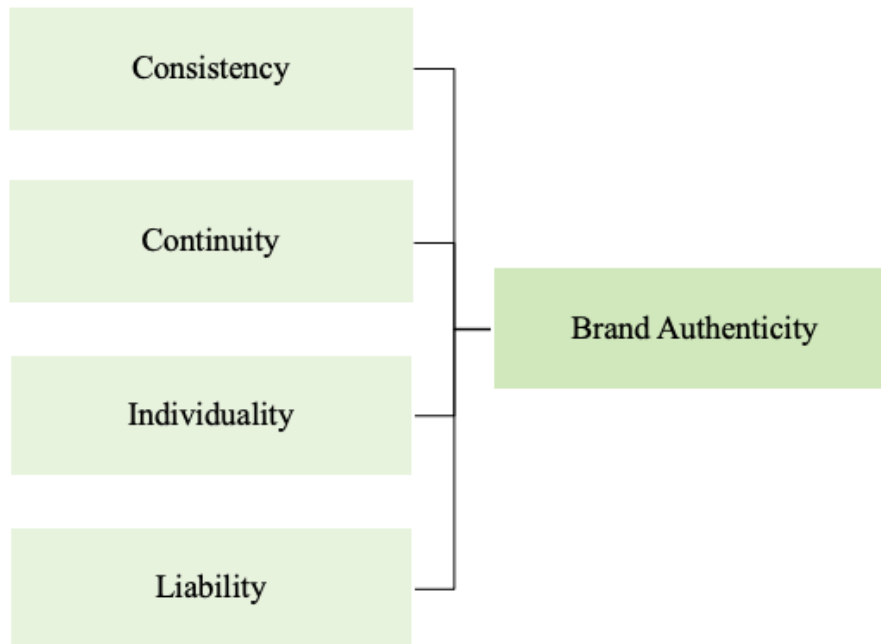


Figure 2: Brand Authenticity (Own Figure in line with Burmann et al. 2018)

When engaging in emotional and controversial branding, the Doppelgänger Brand Image is a strongly related concept, which can lower consumers' perception of a brand's authenticity (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006). The Doppelgänger Brand Image can be defined as "a family of disparaging images and stories about a brand that are circulated in popular culture by a loosely organized network of consumers ... in the news and entertainment media" (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006, p. 50). Thus, this concept describes the emergence of parodies, criticising the brand through communicating opposed meanings by using humour and satire (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006). As further highlighted by Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel (2006), the Doppelgänger Brand Image has the strength to shape behaviours and beliefs of consumers due to the twisted meanings facilitated by these parodies. Consumers "create an identity-enhancing morality tale, premised on the consumption ideal of authenticity" (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006, p. 59).

As we aim to explore how consumers judge advocacy advertisements in terms of morality, we believe that the Doppelgänger Brand Image could be a tool consumers use to express their opposing emotions, opinions, and point of views. Furthermore, the interpretations and reactions from consumers towards these parodies provide essential insights. By comprehending the meanings of Doppelgänger Brand Images, we can make meaningful inferences, helping us to answer our research question.

2.3 Consumers' Perceptions of Advocacy Advertisements

As already presented in the previous literature review, one study about conditions for consumers to perceive advocacy advertisement as credible exists (Haley, 1996). We believe that the connections between the self, the brand, and the issue function as a useful lens for

analysing the empirical material, facilitating us to explore how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements. According to Haley (1996), consumers form their perceptions on the credibility of an advocacy advertisement based on a triangular relationship between the perception of the issue, the self, and the company (see Figure 3). Thus, the author described the perceptions of consumers regarding the brand’s credibility as a result of the underlying fit between these three elements. When gathering the primary data, we expect the process of meanings to be similar by deriving moral meanings from these three elements of advocacy advertisements. Therefore, we apply the external triad framework of Haley (1996) to the analysis of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements. In the following, we describe Haley’s framework (1996) in more detail.

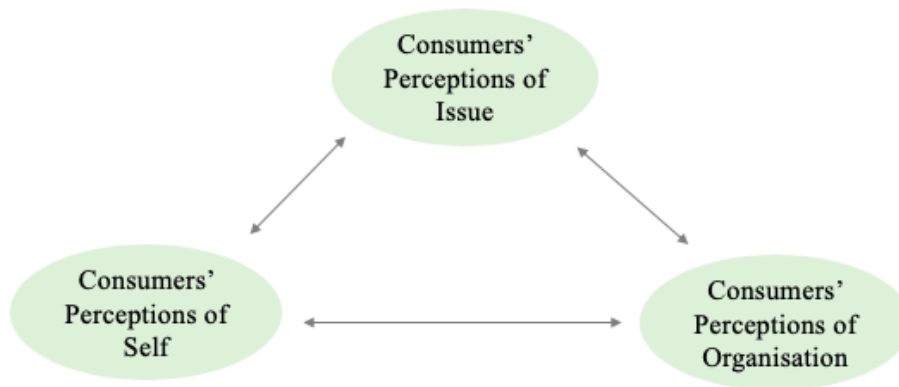


Figure 3: Consumers’ Perceptions of Advocacy Advertisements (Own Figure in line with Haley, 1996)

Firstly, Haley (1996) identified the communicated issue and the self as crucial for generating credibility. According to Haley (1996), consumers evaluate the fit between these two components based on four themes, namely “the importance of the issue to self, importance of issue to society, my action can help, and nobody can help” (p. 30). Whereas the first two factors are self-explaining, the two other ones need further elaboration. The factor “if my action can help” (Haley, 1996, p. 30) describes the subjective opinion of consumers if his or her action helps to solve the issue (Haley, 1996). Whereas Haley (1996) pointed towards another direction with the last component: “that nobody can help” (p.30), implying that consumers believe a company does not have the power and ability to solve the communicated issue.

In terms of the fit between the company and the issue, consumers perceptions about credibility of the advocacy advertisement also derive from four themes, namely “logical association, expertise, personal investment and intent” (Haley, 1996, p. 29). Here, the logical association is referred to as the evaluation of the connection between the company and the issue, whereby consumers examine if there is expertise justifying the companies’ engagement in an inevitable debate (Haley, 1996). Haley (1996) further outlined that people who deliver the advocacy message are also playing an important role to be perceived as credible, referring to the personal investment.

Considering the last interrelation between the self and the organisation, Haley (1996) identified three themes, namely if the “organization was recognizable and likable, understood the consumer, and shared common values with the consumer” (p. 27). These factors refer to the

size of the company communicating the issue as going hand in hand with its credibility (Haley, 1996). Furthermore, Haley (1996) outlined that consumers perceive the advocacy advertisement's level of credibility based on their personal opinion about the company's products. Lastly, also the general fit between the company's beliefs and themselves shaped consumers' perceptions towards the published advertisement being credible or not (Haley, 1996).

3. Methodology

In the forthcoming chapter, the methodology is discussed by outlining how research objectives have been achieved and justifying the methods used to achieve these objectives. Firstly, the studies underlying research philosophies are discussed, which is followed by the research approach. Thereafter, the research strategy, in line with the chosen research design, is highlighted. Accordingly, the data collection is presented by outlining the detailed procedure of collecting empirical material. Followed by the research analysis, we argue how the empirical material is framed and analysed. After that, the trustworthiness of this study is taken into consideration by discussing the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of this research. Finally, we reflect upon the ethical dimension of this study.

3.1 Research Philosophy

First, we elaborate upon the philosophical perspective underlying this empirical study, that is the ontological and epistemological position. Research involves several occasions, in which we make assumptions about the nature of realities and human knowledge (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Hence, we aim to be very transparent about our research process by providing a clear overview of the underlying philosophies we used to understand our research question, data collection methods, and interpretations of our findings. Indeed, we elaborate on how we see the world, as described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012). In accordance to the postmodern understanding of reality, we believe that different truths exist simultaneously and view the nature of reality depending on different observative perspectives and contexts (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson & Jaspersen, 2018). As such, we understand that brands are a social construct, which consumers perceive and understand depending on the societal context (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). We believe that the phenomenon of advocacy advertising in the contemporary consumer culture is differently perceived from protagonists and antagonists due to opposing views. Thus, there may never be a definite answer to what exact meanings consumers derive from advocacy advertising. Nevertheless, this study provides a sequence of a perspective illustrating the consumers' moral judgments on this phenomenon.

To answer the research question of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising, we believed that it is essential to explore the phenomenon with different types of empirical material. We applied two qualitative methods, enabling us to view the phenomenological happening from different perspectives. Hence, our ontological choice for this study can be described as the relativist position (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018), also referred to as interpretivism (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Further in line with the consumer culture concept, we agree that reality as such and brands especially are constructed by society and are given meanings by consumers in their daily interactions with others, making it imperative to understand how consumers morally judge such. Consumers build their self as well as the social identity through meaningful consumption of brands and more specifically through the consumption of advertisements (Mihalcea & Catoi, 2008). This study aims to understand how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising and which criteria consumers apply to evaluate whether advocacy advertising is morally authentic. Hence, we as researchers appreciate

different constructions and meanings people associate with their experiences rather than focusing on fundamental laws to explain behaviour. By acknowledging the existence of socially constructed brands, we can create a profound and nuanced understanding of the proposed phenomenon. Therefore, the social constructionism epistemology is considered as best suitable to grasp the subjective meanings, judgments, discourses, and experiences consumers associate with advocacy advertisements (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018).

3.2 Research Approach

In reference to the purpose of the research, this study is of exploratory nature. In line with Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's definition (2012) of exploratory studies, we seek to gain new insights on consumers' moral judgments of advocacy advertising. Hence, we aim to get a better comprehension of the nature of the phenomenon. In this study, we further chose to apply an inductive research approach (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). As noted in the literature review, the concept of advocacy advertising has been extensively researched. However, it is limited to organization focused outcomes and effects. Thus, there is a lack of research explaining the consumer perspective with particular reference to how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements. Merely Haley (1996) delves deeper into how consumers perceive advocacy advertising, however, fails to acknowledge the morality perspective as same as the underlying evaluation criteria consumers use to evaluate the morality of an advocacy advertisement.

Given that the main objective of this study is to explore how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising, the inductive approach was most suitable. We collected qualitative empirical material to explore the phenomenon, identify themes, stories, and patterns. Hence, the focus of this study was to build and generate theory rather than falsify or verify existing theory (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In that sense, it is vital to notice that we used existing theory as a lens to study the phenomenon. We applied known premises to generate untested conclusions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The strength of choosing an inductive research approach lies in generating meanings from the collected data set to identify patterns and relationships and to understand underlying dynamics of the phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012), which was the ultimate aim of this study.

3.3 Research Strategy

To grasp the subjective understandings consumers hold of brand advocacy advertisements, we embraced a qualitative study. Aligned with our social constructivist worldview, we aimed to understand consumer behaviour in a dynamic and social context. Therefore, we argued that a case study strategy is most suitable to comprehend consumers' moral judgments on advocacy advertising. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) delineated case study as a "method that explores a research topic or phenomenon within its context, or within a number of real-life contexts" (p. 179). As further argued by Saunders, Lewis and Thornston (2012), case studies provide answers to why, what and how questions, which aligns with our main research question, focusing on how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising. Drawing upon our

choice of strategy, we would like to highlight further that this research incorporated a multiple case study. We carefully chose three different advocacy campaigns, all weighing in on the political sphere and generating a controversial public reaction. The chosen brands are Nike, Gillette, and Pepsi. Given the similarities of these cases, the multiple-case study strategy enabled us to accurately comprehend the social context of each brand, facilitating the development of patterns on how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising.

Furthermore, it is crucial to outline that a holistic case study was applied since the named brands are seen as organizations as a whole (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). By exploring how consumers make sense of advocacy advertisements in multiple cases, a combination of qualitative collection methods in the form of virtual observations and focus groups were conducted to obtain a rich and diverse empirical material on the same phenomenon. In that sense, we grasped experiences, impressions, opinions, and views from consumers.

3.4 Research Design

The research design outlines how we proceeded to answer the research question by explaining and justifying what, how, and where data is to be gathered (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Drawing upon the previous discussed underlying social constructionist philosophy, we chose to adopt a qualitative research design, enabling us to collect in-depth empirical material. A multi-method qualitative study was conducted using a variety of qualitative research techniques and procedures to gather relevant data and information about consumers (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). We decided to use multiple qualitative methods not merely to triangulate, but rather to enrich the collected data. Beginning with thorough virtual observations, we aimed to observe consumer behaviour during their engagement in online activities on the brand's campaigns, enabling us to gain a multi-sided understanding of the cases. Having explored the phenomenon from an observable position, we decided to further collect in-depth empirical material by conducting three focus groups. Possibly, we could have also considered interviews as a suitable method to explore consumers' underlying moral judgments of the three chosen advocacy advertisements. However, we believed that focus groups provide us with the most relevant insights through discussions and interactions between participants (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). As underlined by Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998), advertising generates meanings, which then "emerge in interpersonal communications among consumer and later become socially shared meaning" (p. 6). To be able to grasp these subjective meanings, we believed that virtual observations were essential to explore consumer behaviour in their familiar virtual setting, similar as focus group interviews enabled us to ask in-depth questions, further clarifying the socially shared meanings and debates. By combining these two data collection methods, we could best comprehend consumers' moral judgments and gain in-depth insights into the underlying patterns of consumer morality.

In line with the research design, it is of importance to highlight the time horizon of this research project, referring to the time frame in that the study was conducted. This study was of cross-sectional nature, involving an analysis of "a particular phenomenon at a particular time" (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012, p. 190). A determined time frame of ten weeks was given

for this project. Thus, the cross-sectional study was the most suitable time horizon for this research project. The cross-sectional study also fits as it provides a snapshot of the current situation, that is, consumers' current behaviour and moral judgments.

3.5 Data Collection Method

Based on the purpose of this study, the data collection was divided into two phases. The first phase explored the phenomenon from the consumer perspective through virtual observations, enabling us to gain a holistic understanding of each case and the corresponding consumers' responses. It notably facilitated the investigation of consumers' online moral judgments of advocacy advertising. In the second phase, we gathered more in-depth information on consumers' understandings of morality and the underlying moral judgments by conducting three focus groups. Figure 4 illustrates the sequences of the two phases.

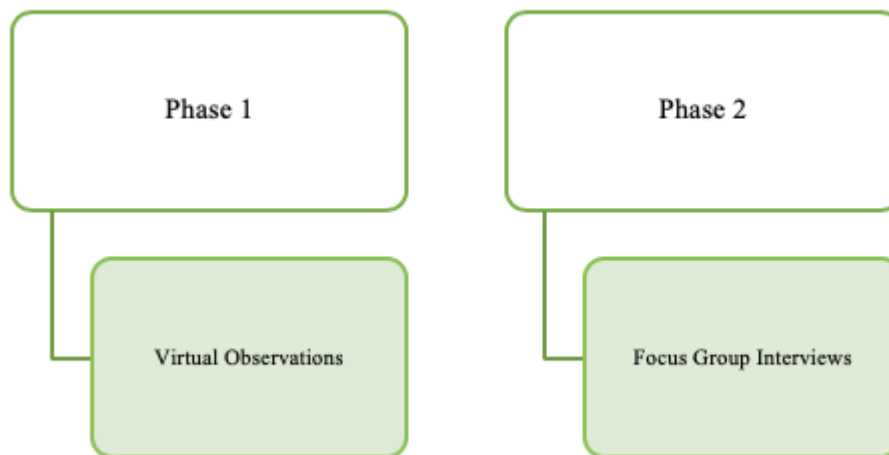


Figure 4: Phases of Data Collection (Own Figure, 2019)

In the following section, we outline each phase in more detail by elaborating on the relevant empirical material collection methods. As aforementioned, the use of multiple data sets and the triangulation of qualitative research methods enhanced the quality of this study and eventually provided a profound basis for the empirical analysis.

3.5.1 Virtual Observations

The virtual observation approach was deemed to be most appropriate to uncover how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising. Hence, one of our primary sources of the material collection was acquired through the internet, more specifically, social media platforms. We have taken inspiration from participant observations in line with interpretative text analysis to conduct virtual observations on social media (Kozinets, 2002; Kozinets, 2010). Our aim of such observations was to discover how people form moral judgments on the brand, the issue, and other consumers, what they talk about on social media and which meanings they attach to the brand's moral actions in the three campaigns. The research method of virtual observations is similar to the netnography approach of Kozinets, Dolbec and Earley (2014), describing an ethnography conducted on the internet, among others also including the context

of social media, which enabled us to explore “rich, diverse, cultural worlds” (Kozinets, Dolbec & Earley, 2014, p. 262) and to interpret the online interactions and discourses between the audience and the brand. Kozinets (2010) further acknowledged that knowing the underlying elements of the studied online field is crucial as it affects the “types, forms and structures of online communication” (p. 87). In this study, we conducted observations on social media channels without interfering as researchers. Hence, we took on an observable role, which enabled us to get an accurate picture of how consumers morally judge the three advocacy campaigns. We merely observed comments, hashtags, and other meditative tools posted concerning the campaign videos, in which consumer engage, interact, and debate with the brand and each other. Here, we acknowledged that consumers tend to be more polemic on the internet and do not as quickly insult and confront people face to face (Wright, 2018). For this study, only archival data was used, expressed by consumers through text, visual forms, videos or audios on chosen social media platforms (Kozinets, Dolbec & Early, 2014).

Sampling Principles

The determination of the platforms for the observation has been two-fold. First, we decided upon which platforms provide us with the needed accessibility of the empirical material. As the unit of analysis is the moral judgments consumers form on advocacy advertisements, we were particularly interested in collecting judgments towards the brand as well as towards other consumers. All of the campaigns were released through social media. Thus, we believed that collecting data from these platforms was most suitable.

Moreover, today’s interactions and communication about brands increasingly occur online and specifically via social media (Cone Communications, 2015). Therefore, we decided to look deeper into Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter due to their interactive nature and excluded WhatsApp, Pinterest, and Snapchat due to their private sphere, respectively. Second, we used the netnography platform criteria, specially designed for social media channels by Kozinets, Dolbec and Earley (2014) to determine the most appropriate social media channels for the virtual observations.

- A. Degree of being relevant to the research question
- B. Amount of traffic of posting
- C. Number of discrete message posters
- D. Extent of richness of data
- E. Amount of between-member interactions

Having limited the array of available platforms, we applied all five criteria to decide on the most suitable social media platforms. In Appendix B, the complete Table, illustrating the evaluation of the social media channels based upon the five criteria mentioned, can be found. Thereby, each platform was evaluated based upon a scale ranging from one to five, the latter one being the most suitable and best selection. Drawing upon the evaluation of different social media platforms, we decided to conduct online observations on the following channels:

- Nike: YouTube & Twitter

- Gillette: YouTube & Facebook
- Pepsi: YouTube

After having determined the relevant social media platforms, we analysed all available comments and interactions posted before the 1st of May 2019 concerning each advocacy campaign on the brand's channels, which enabled us to gain in-depth insights on how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising in the contemporary consumer culture. For all brands, we recorded detailed notes as well as copied and pasted the content of the online empirical material and discourses to be transparent throughout the research process. This enabled us to exhaustively explore consumers' moral judgments and interactions with the brand and other consumers.

3.5.2 Focus Groups

As aforementioned, three focus group interviews were conducted to explore how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements. We especially argued focus groups to be relevant for this study as they enable us to gain in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon and further made it accessible to explore the interaction and transfer of meanings between consumers and the brand (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). To be transparent about our data collection, we outlined how the participants of the focus group were chosen by arguing for our sampling strategy in the forthcoming section. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the topic guide and the design of the focus group.

Sampling Selection

Considering the appropriate selection of participants for the focus group research, we chose young adults in the form of general consumers to be most suitable for the intention of this study. In line with the convenience of accessibility, young adults are also described as a highly relevant target group for brands (Kotler & Sarkar, 2017; Nittle, 2018). Further, studies showed that young adults resonate better with advertisements that engage rather than sell, as they are committed to societal and public welfare issues and care about the company's corporate social responsibility (Ace Metrix, 2014; Hoffman, 2014; Nielsen, 2017). Given these characteristics, we argue that companies specially design advocacy advertisements for young adults, and hence, we mainly focused our choice of focus group participants on young adults. According to several researchers, a well-designed focus group consists of between six and twelve participants (Baumgartner, Strong & Hensley, 2002; Bernard, 1995; Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Krueger, 2000; Langford, Schoenfeld & Izzo, 2002; Morgan, 1997). A focus group should include enough participants to yield an insightful and fruitful discussion, yet it should not be too large as a bigger group might create an environment in which not all participants feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts and opinions (Baumgartner, Strong & Hensley, 2002). The focus groups conducted for this study were the size of six to seven people. The participants represented a newly formed group that we, as researchers constructed by selecting the members.

To approach possible participants, we posted an announcement in different Facebook groups to get access to a broader audience, who is voluntarily willing to contribute to our research. We believe that consumers, who proactively agree to participate in the focus group research, are more likely to be interested and engaged in the topic. Given that not enough people approached us through Facebook, we purposely asked students from the Lund University if they would be willing to join our focus group research. Drawing upon the selection of the participants, we applied a purposive sampling method, namely the convenience sampling strategy, which is commonly used for focus group research (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Overall, we attempted to create a diverse group of consumers by paying attention to the diversity of nationality, gender, and study backgrounds. The diversity of the focus group enriched the discussions on advocacy advertisements in a societal context. Table 1 provides an overview of all focus group participants.

Table 1: Overview of Focus Group Participants (Own Table, 2019)

(Changed) Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Studies
Focus Group #1				
Anna	Female	23	Austrian	M.Sc. International Marketing and Brand Management
Luisa	Female	25	German	M.Sc. Corporate Entrepreneurship and Innovation
Jenny	Female	24	German	M.Sc. Corporate Entrepreneurship and Innovation
Lana	Female	26	Brazilian	M.Sc. Applied Cultural Analysis
John	Male	25	German	M.Sc. Corporate Entrepreneurship and Innovation
Dennis	Male	27	Austrian	M.Sc. Corporate Entrepreneurship and Innovation
Alex	Male	28	German	M.Sc. Corporate Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Focus Group #2				
Lisa	Female	24	German	M.Sc. Managing People, Knowledge and Change
Cullen	Male	24	German	M.Sc. Biotechnology
Luis	Male	25	Croatian	M.Sc. Strategic Management
Lotta	Female	28	Ecuadorian	M.Sc. International Marketing and Brand Management
Ben	Male	25	Irish	M.Sc. Strategic Management
Lucas	Male	27	German	M.Sc. Strategic Management
Focus Group #3				
Tim	Male	25	German	M.Sc. International Marketing and Brand Management
Mary	Female	24	South Korean	M.Sc. Finance
Robert	Male	24	German	M.Sc. Economic Growth Development
Hanna	Female	25	Austrian	M.Sc. International Marketing and Brand Management
Susi	Female	26	Austrian	M.Sc. International Marketing and Brand Management
Daniel	Male	25	German	M.Sc. Innovation and Global Sustainable Development

Focus Group Design and Topic Guide

The focus groups were conducted in a closed and private location at Lund University. In the chosen room was a big table, enabling the participants to face each other, facilitating the

discussions. The participants were further provided with snacks and drinks to create a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. Both of us researchers were present during the discussions. While one person took notes, recorded and observed the discussion, hence, took on the role of the assistant moderator, the other researcher was responsible for moderating the focus group. This was important to generate a feeling of consistency and to avoid confusion on the sides of the participants. Since we chose to conduct a semi-structured focus group, questions were prepared in advance to interfere and encourage the discussion, if needed. The topic guide of the present study can be found in Appendix A. The questions were the same for all three cases and just in some specific situations, individual follow-up questions were asked to gain interesting insights in more detail or to clarify certain statements.

The focus groups commenced with a brief introduction of the researchers. After having introduced ourselves and the topic, the participants were provided with information about the structure of the focus group. Also, the permission for recording was obtained, and the consent form further explained (see Appendix C). Subsequently, everyone introduced themselves and gave background information to their person, making the participants familiar with each other and creating a more private setting, where people feel comfortable sharing their feelings and honest thoughts. Throughout the focus group, we applied the video-elicitation technique, indicating that we elicited the campaign videos of all three brands. Although all advertisement campaigns were released within the past two years, it is useful to recall the advertisements to avoid any misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Moreover, Schubert (2006) has argued that video-elicitation is a proper technique for discovering experiences and views of participants on certain events.

The focus group continued with the presentation of the first advertisement, “Dream Crazy” (Nittle, 2018) by Nike. Thereafter, participants began the discussion by sharing their feelings and thoughts of this advertisement. Whereas the first part of the discussion aimed to address the brand in this specific case, the second part of the questions encouraged a dialogue towards more general topics. After having finished the first discussion, the next advertisement, “We believe: The best men can be” (Gillette, 2019a) from Gillette was shown. Here, we followed the same structure as we did with the prior case and the same accounts for the third advertisement from Pepsi “Live For Now Moments Anthem” (Solon, 2017). At the end of the discussion, we asked all participants to share their general opinion on advocacy advertising. After the first focus group, minor adaptations to the questions were made to improve the quality of the following two groups. Thereby, one of the questions was formulated differently, and another one was taken out due to repetitive reasons. Overall, this setting and structure of the focus groups enabled us to gain an advanced understanding of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements by observing and enhancing dialogue with each other. The three chosen case studies further functioned as facilitators to make the topic more tangible for the participants.

3.6 Empirical Analysis

As part of the research design, it is essential to elaborate on how the collected empirical material was framed and analysed. In qualitative research, there is a blurry line in creating and analysing data (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Indeed, knowledge is co-created by the interactions of the researcher and participants. In this circular research process, we developed an abundant amount of information and data. To facilitate the comprehension of the empirical material, we systematically framed our collected data. There are several analytical procedures one can use to frame qualitative data, the one being most applicable for this study is discussed in the following. Whereas the findings from virtual observations were reported in writing, the focus group interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, enabling us to focus on the focus group while still being able to interpret and analyse the findings accurately.

For the nature of this study, we applied the narrative analysis, that is a distinctive form of discourse analysis, focusing on how “people create and use stories to make sense of the world” (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018, p. 262). In that sense, stories were not considered as a set of fact but rather as “devices through which people represent themselves [and their worlds] to themselves and to others” (Lawler, 2002, p. 242). We argued that the narrative analysis is most suitable to explore the phenomenon of how consumers morally judge and advocacy advertising in contemporary consumer culture, as it provides meanings that help to explain the phenomenon as well as the role the underlying circumstances and resources play for consumers’ moral judgments of advocacy advertising. In line with Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998), we argued that narratives are conditioned by social context and constructed in social interactions. The corresponding narrative identity theory suggested that an individual’s identity is built through the stories told or not told (Lawler, 2002). A source of narratives is among other advertising, which Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) argued to be a symbolic resource of which consumers construct narratives and make sense of their life. Drawing upon the extensive symbolic resource advertising holds for consumers’ narrative, we believed to get the most out of the empirical material by incorporating narrative analysis techniques.

In this study, first, an approach of thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) was applied to identify what moral judgments consumers form on advocacy advertising. Consequently, a variation of the performative narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) was administered, combining both the analysis of spoken words and gestures. This study specifically emphasized the societal context and view of narratives as being socially constructed, and hence, aimed to highlight underlying factors such as linguistic markers, critical activities, and sequences of events (Riessman, 2008).

The analysis was conducted in a four-step process in line with the approach presented by Easterby-Smith and his colleagues (2018): (1) selection, (2) analysis of the narrative, (3) re-contextualization, and (4) interpretation and evaluation. Arguing for the selection of stories and storytellers, we chose three case stories to be most relevant for this study as they build profound and illustrative examples, providing the ability to shed light on the phenomenon and correspondingly answer the research question. Aligned with our research purpose, the

storytellers in this study were consumers, and the stories were gathered through virtual observations and focus groups. Moving further to the second step, namely the analysis of the narrative, we carefully examined the three different plots by identifying relevant main actors, activities, and places, as described in the case background. By combining two data collection methods, we could first analyse what understandings consumer established with the thematic narrative analysis (referring to the second step) and then put these into a societal context with the performative narrative analysis (referring to the third step). The third step specifically brought in the social, cultural, and political background of the story, storyteller, and the audience. Finally, the analysis ended with the interpretation and evaluation of the findings. Here, the background, meaning, and the function of the story were examined and assessed together, enabling us to reflect upon the relevance of this research for the proposed question.

3.7 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness is often used to evaluate and assess the quality of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba's approach (1985) involves the consideration of five dimensions: credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity. For the purpose of this study, we consider these five criteria to evaluate the trustworthiness.

Credibility refers to the extent of how research captures what it says is going to be captured and is considered to be one of the most critical dimensions of a study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As previously noted, this research is focused on the consumers' moral judgments of advocacy advertising. To enrich the empirical material collection, we first became acquainted with the phenomenon to comprehend consumers' judgments of advocacy advertisements better. Moreover, we used two different sets of empirical material collection methods not only to provide triangulation but also to gain more advanced knowledge of the judgments derived by consumers. Virtual observations are specifically designed to gain in-depth knowledge upon the consumers' underlying behaviour, hence, being an appropriate method to capture the consumers' moral judgment of advocacy advertising.

Similarly, focus groups enabled us to grasp consumers' understanding by analysing the debates, interactions, judgments, and discussions between participants. Further, all questions of the focus groups were checked upon and discussed with all researchers as well as the assigned supervisor, ensuring that questions were formulated correctly and provided internal consistency. Moreover, we transcribed and summarized the three focus group interviews after they have been conducted and sent the results to the interviewees, enabling them to confirm findings and avoid misunderstanding. By allowing all interviewees to comment on the transcripts, we ensured that all findings and interpretations accounted for their actual personal views.

Dependability refers to the likeability that other observers and researchers will reach similar observations and findings over similar conditions in line with the extent to which the empirical collection and interpretation were transparently executed (Cope, 2014; Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Throughout this study, we tried to be as open and transparent about the research process as possible. On no account did we attempt to hide or cover relevant information. We aimed to describe the research design in a way that future researchers can easily replicate it. However, it should be acknowledged that the research methods were appropriated to the subject of study, which implies that the conducted observations and focus groups are dependent on situational factors. Assuming the continuous availability of the analysed platforms where the digital campaign videos were discussed, it would be possible for other researchers to replicate the online observations, which enhances the dependability of this study. The focus groups, however, are more difficult to imitate as such discussions depend on the individual participants and the societal context. Overall, we provided very detailed information on the research design, implementation, empirical material collection and reflected upon the effectiveness of the chosen methods (Shenton, 2004), enabling other researchers to conclude similar findings.

Confirmability is defined as “the researcher’s ability to demonstrate that the data represent the participant’s responses and not the researcher’s bias or viewpoints” (Cope, 2014, p. 89). In qualitative research, subjectivity is implied to a certain extent in describing, understanding, and interpreting the phenomenon. Hence, it is essential to be aware of personal biases and to adopt a “contextually relevant self-position” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 18). We attempted to integrate a reflexive approach to this study, as described by Alvesson (2003) reflexivity “stands for conscious and consistent efforts to view the subject matter from different angles and avoid or strongly a priori privilege a single, favored angle and vocabulary” (p. 25). We analysed the phenomenon from a multi-sided perspective, involving two sets of empirical material. Moreover, we extensively described how we made interpretations and derived conclusions from the collected empirical material, enabling us to exemplify the direct connections of empirical material and findings. In specific, we used in-text quotes from virtual observations as well as focus groups to clarify our themes and interpretations.

Transferability is delineated as the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to another context or even the same situation at a different set of time, which is usually limited in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Considering that this study is built upon three case examples, each having distinct conditions, the transferability of this study was somewhat limited. However, the unique characteristics of each case also enhanced the transferability, as it made the collected data more applicable to the general rather than having identical examples. Nonetheless, it is vital to consider the context of each case example. As all three brands are big and international corporations, it is more credible to transfer the knowledge of this research to similar structured, situated, and branded companies. This is in line with Bassey (1981), arguing that practitioners can apply the findings to their own position if the environment is similar. We attempted to describe the cases, situations, and underlying factors of the study as thorough as possible to enable other researchers to compare the instances of the phenomenon to their own. Ultimately, the qualitative study must be understood in its situational context.

Finally, the last and most recent added dimension of authenticity refers to the “ability and extent to which the researcher expresses the feelings and emotions of the participant’s experiences in a faithful manner” (Cope, 2014, p. 89). Similar to the dimension of confirmability, we used

precious quotes from the focus groups and virtual observations to underline and delineate our interpretations. By doing so, the reader could grasp how we expressed the feelings and emotions of the participants, enhancing the study's authenticity.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics refer to the appropriateness of the researchers' behaviour concerning participants and people affected by the research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). To ensure that the conducted study was ethical, all focus group participants were asked and informed about the topic and the purpose of the research study. Every participant had the right to withdraw or decline participation. In reference to the focus group, participants were asked to share their thoughts and opinions not only with the researchers but also inherently with other group participants. On the one hand, this raised a severe invasion of privacy concerns. On the other hand, it constrained the free speech of some participants. Given the boundary of some participants having firm opinions, other members could have felt pressured and unable to clarify their point of view. Whenever a situation occurred in which we had the feeling that someone was being too assertive, we constrained this behaviour by counteracting.

Further, we put a high emphasis on anonymity by being explicitly careful with personal confidentiality and personal rights. In no sense, we forced or pressured any of the participants to answer the questions in the focus group. Before each focus group session, participants were asked for their permission to audio-tape the discussion and informed about the intention to use the collected material and their right to remain anonymous. In terms of online observations, the people, whose behaviour was observed and analysed, could not be notified that they were part of a research study. However, people who comment, post and share statements and information online consent that others can access it (Townsend & Wallace, 2016). Hence, it is public information available to anyone. Moreover, the analysis did not refer to a specific persona in that sense but instead aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and the actual content and context of the comments.

4. Cases Background

For this study, three recent case studies were chosen and are further introduced in this chapter. The carefully selected advocacy advertisements were released by the international brands Nike, Gillette, and Pepsi and are presented in the following based on a narrative structure, consisting of the prologue, the story, and the epilogue. All three campaigns engage in contemporary political debates, arousing controversial opinions among society, making them valuable sources to explore. Through the case studies, we aimed to explore consumers' moral judgments on advocacy advertisements in detail.

4.1 Nike

Nike has always been a brand that emphasized the importance of innovation and doing good for the community (Nike, 2019a). Correspondingly, the brand has a long history of bringing up social and political issues in its advertisements, such as ageism, discrimination, gender issues, and inequalities (Chadwick & Zipp, 2018). Nike's underlying purpose is to inspire people and to make sports equal for everyone by breaking boundaries (Nike, 2019b). In 2018, Nike released an advertisement campaign named "Dream Crazy" (Nittle, 2018). Thereby, Nike took a stance in a political debate by featuring the athlete Colin Kaepernick, who aroused controversial opinions among society through his silent political protest during a football match. We believe that this advocacy advertisement holds essential insights into how consumers make sense of such. Firstly, due to the strong debated and contradictory opinions consumers hold and secondly, through the embeddedness of the conflict in contemporary consumer culture.

Prologue

In 2016, Colin Kaepernick, a former football player of San Francisco, decided to kneel down instead of stand for the national anthem (Creswell, Draper & Maheshwari, 2018). The action of taking a knee during the national anthem aroused from the history of sports, through which a specific stance or protest is symbolized (Mindock, 2019). Thereby, Kaepernick raised his voice against racial injustice, inequalities, racism, and police brutality (Creswell, Draper & Maheshwari, 2018). At that time, police brutality was a huge public debate in America, including several viral videos where police officers shot unarmed African American people (Mindock, 2019). Also, other football players knelt down during the national anthem and joined the silent protest (Fritze, 2018). Kaepernick's action invoked controversial reactions within society (Mindock, 2019). Whereas some people labelled his protest as disrespectful and unpatriotic (Mindock 2019), others praised him for standing up in this debate (Vera, 2018). Since his kneel, Kaepernick was honoured with several awards, even appointing him the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience and GQ naming him as the citizen of the year (Vera, 2018).

In discussions about his action, not just the public shared their thoughts, but also politicians such as Donald Trump and institutions like the National Football League got involved (Mindock 2019). Trump weighed in on this issue negatively by stating that people taking a

knee during the anthem should be fired from the team due to their disrespect towards America (Fritze, 2018). Also, Mike Pence, the vice president of the United States, made his negative understanding of the silent protest clear by leaving a game where several football players took a knee during the national anthem (Fritze, 2018). The National Football League commented on this debate with an official statement, explaining that the players were not acting in an unpatriotic manner but also stated that everyone has to stand during the national anthem to honour the flag and anthem itself (Vera, 2018). As a consequence, Kaepernick became a free agent, as no team was willing to assign him (Vera, 2018).

The Story

In Nike's campaign "Dream Crazy" (Nittle, 2018), which appeared in line with the 30th anniversary of the company's tagline "Just Do It" (Nike, 2019b), Nike featured the aforementioned former football player Colin Kaepernick, who functioned as the spokesperson of the whole story (Tyler, 2018; Nittle, 2018). As he played a vital role in the advertisement (Creswell, Draper & Maheshwari, 2018), Nike took an explicit political stance with this campaign, in favour and support of his action, which is also shown by the fact that they consciously decided to make him part of the campaign. The advertisement itself displayed different professional athletes, including Serena Williams, by portraying their childhood and backgrounds before their professional careers in sports and their assignment with Nike (Golden & Thomas, 2018). Moreover, the advertisement supported disabled, diverse, and activist athletes, engaging in a social-related debate (Creswell, Draper & Maheshwari, 2018).

Epilogue

After having released the advertisement, Nike had to face a considerable backlash, where the reactions of consumers were contradictory (Nittle, 2018). On the one hand, people sympathised with the campaign, seeing the importance of engaging in these social and political issues (Nittle, 2018). On the other hand, people accused Kaepernick of dishonouring the American flag, reflecting this criticism on Nike (Nittle, 2018). These non-sympathisers, also described as antagonists, began to boycott the brand by even burning their Nike clothes and shoes (Chadwick & Zipp, 2018). Nonetheless, Nike's stock rose five percent, illuminating the overall success of this campaign (Nittle, 2018). Again, politicians such as Trump shared their opinion publicly, arguing the brand's political stance to be a risky choice, further showing their negative perception of the invoked political discourse (Bieler & Bonesteel, 2018). Kaepernick, the central figure of the advertisement, has still not been assigned to any football team (Fritze, 2018). He filed a lawsuit against the National Football League and agreed on a quiet settlement (Pettersson, 2019).

4.2 Gillette

Gillette was founded in 1901, is owned by Procter & Gamble, and is selling grooming products for men (Gillette, 2019b). Besides always striving for innovation, Gillette is describing itself as a producer of high-performance products (Gillette, 2019c). In regards to its marketing activities, Gillette emphasizes the strong connection towards sports, also facilitating the high-quality products and at the same time functioning as a passionate connection between the

consumers and the brand (Gillette, 2019c). This can also be observed when reviewing formerly released advertisements, featuring famous athletes such as Shaquem Griffin (Gillette, 2019d). Also, masculinity and gender stereotypes seem to be leading themes in most of their former advertisements (Brandes, 2013). Thus, Gillette entering the political sphere by weighing in on the #MeToo campaign with its campaign “We believe: The best men can be” (Gillette, 2019e) is a promising case study to explore the underlying meanings these advertisements hold for consumers in today’s society.

Prologue

The #MeToo movement was first initiated in 2017 when the investigations against Harvey Weinstein, a famous Hollywood producer, began, who was accused of sexual harassment and sexual assault by two actresses (Wünsch, 2018). Many other actresses claimed that they experienced the same, which generated much buzz around the issue (Wünsch, 2018). As further explained, Alyssa Milano, another actress, motivated other people, who experienced similar things, to take action and to post their experiences under the hashtag #MeToo (Wünsch, 2018). Thus, the hashtag became the ultimate symbol of the movement, empowering women to fight for gender equality and protest for the relevance and worrying amount of sexual harassment incidents (Wünsch, 2018). Several other well-known names were dropped and accused of being involved in sexual harassment incidents, for example, politicians such as Donald Trump (Wünsch, 2018). The debate even reached the European Union parliament, stating that all cases of sexual assault are being investigated and aimed to be solved (Wünsch, 2018). Thenceforward, sexual harassment was defined as a violation against human-rights (MacKinnon, 2019). Further, the Time magazine has chosen the person of the year 2017 to be all people, who broke the silence on sexual assaults in the #MeToo movement (MacKinnon, 2019).

The Story

At the beginning of 2019, Gillette released the advertisement “We believe: the best men can be” (Gillette, 2019e), replacing their 30-year-old tagline “The best a man can get” (Taylor, 2019). In this short film advertisement, which Gillette uploaded on their YouTube Channel (Gillette, 2019e), several topics such as toxic masculinity, bullying, and sexual harassment were addressed. Hence, Gillette engaged in the #MeToo movement (Gillette, 2019a). At the beginning of the video, reporters read out headlines of the news, including sexual harassment and toxic masculinity and further mentioning the #MeToo campaign. A little boy getting bullied by lots of other boys, crying in his mother’s arm about it, men in a theatre laughing about a scene where a man is flirting with a woman by grabbing her buttock are only some of the main scenes in the commercial.

Later in the video, Gillette contrasted these sceneries by changing the story to how men should have behaved instead, also featuring a former National Hockey League player Terry Crews, stating that men have to hold other men accountable for these happenings. One of the key messages of the advertisement was: “because the boys watching today, will be the men of tomorrow” (Gillette, 2019e). Gillette took a clear stance on these issues and became part of a widely discussed political debate in today’s society (Dreyfuss, 2019). It is further crucial to

point out that Gillette did not advertise any of its grooming products but rather the idea of making the world a better place, by condemning toxic masculinity (Lyons, Topping & Weaver, 2019; Taylor, 2019).

Epilogue

As illuminated by the public opinion, the advertisement aroused a lot of controversial reactions, positive as same as negative (Lyons, Topping & Weaver, 2019; Taylor, 2019). Some go even thus far as describing the brand of facing a boycott (Baggs, 2019). As stated by Damon Jones, the vice president of global communications and advocacy at Procter and Gamble: “We’re not saying all guys are bad. We’re not trying to misrepresent any one individual. What we’re saying is, as a collective group, let’s have a little less bad behaviour and more good. That’s the big message behind it” (2019 cited in King, 2019). In the same interview, Jones highlighted that Gillette realises the responsibility it possesses as a company to engage in these political conversations (King, 2019). One month after having released the advertisement, Gillette further highlighted that they are donating to several non-profit organizations in the United States, which are working on fighting these issues (Gillette, 2019a; Gillette 2019f).

4.3 Pepsi

Pepsi is a refreshment brand belonging to the parent firm PepsiCo and is offering three different drinks, namely regular Pepsi, Diet Pepsi, and Pepsi Max (PepsiCo, 2019). The brand is known as the biggest competitor of Coca Cola and for sponsoring the halftime show of the super bowl (Forbes, 2019). In 2017, Pepsi released an advertisement, engaging in the Black Lives Matter movement (Solon, 2017). Due to the political statement Pepsi gave in this commercial, we believe that it is an interesting example to explore how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements.

Prologue

The Black Lives Matter movement was first initiated in 2013 after an unarmed African American teenager was shot by a man, who was later not accused of his murder but was cleared (Tedeneke, 2016). As a reaction, Alicia Garza posted on Facebook “Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.” (Alicia Garza cited in Tedeneke, 2016). Through this activism, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was introduced and used for similar incidents. As stated by Tedeneke (2016), Black Lives Matter is a “chapter-based national organization working for the validity of black life” (Tedeneke, 2016). Another incident related to the Black Lives Matter movement took place in Baton Rouge in 2016, involving the African American woman Ieshia Evans (Evans, 2016). She was part of a riot, standing right in front of police officers and was arrested for the obstruction of a highway (Evans, 2016). The picture of her standing in front of police officers, who were about to arrest her went viral around the world, symbolizing the protests of the Black Lives Matter movement (Evans, 2016).

The Story

In 2017, Pepsi released a commercial as a response to the Black Lives Matter movement, called “Live For Now Moments Anthem” (Solon, 2017), featuring the celebrity Kendall Jenner. The

video was uploaded on Pepsi's YouTube channel, but removed on the next day. Currently, it is accessible on the YouTube channel named Kendall and Kylie (2019). In the video, Kendall Jenner was part of a photo shooting, while on the street a massive but friendly fictional protest is going on. The people in the fictional protest were from diverse nationalities and were holding signs, calling for peace and action. The advertisement continued with Kendall Jenner interrupting the shooting, taking off her blond wig and makeup, and joining the protest. The protest was just about to clash with police officers, standing in a row, when Kendall Jenner went to the forefront of the protest, handing a Pepsi can to one of the police officers, soothing the tensed situation (Solon, 2017). At the moment the officer took the bottle, the music stopped. During the whole advertisement, Pepsi's colours and product placements were visible.

Epilogue

The brand faced a considerable backlash after releasing the advertising, permanently being accused of the mere intent to generate profit rather than driving social change (Solon, 2017). Also, the missing commonalities with the real Black Lives Matter movement had caused upset reactions in society (Victor, 2017). The pivotal scene of the advertisement was described as replicating the photo of Ieshia Evans (Evans, 2016). As a reaction towards these highly negative responses, Pepsi immediately deleted the commercial from all of its online channels and further publicly apologized for their mistakenly controversial messages (Hobbs, 2017). The CEO Indra Nooyi took a clear stance during a press conference, defending the advertisement and stressing that Gillette was portraying a peace march and no protest march, hence, without any intention to diminish the Black Lives Matter movement (Taylor, 2017). Also, Kendall Jenner gave an official statement, whereby she stated that she neither had the intention to trivialise or deride the Black Lives Matter movement nor to harm anyone (Entertainment tonight, 2019).

5. Empirical Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, the collected empirical material from the focus group research and virtual observations is presented and analysed. All three brands are analysed together in each of the developed themes, providing an advanced understanding of our results. Overall, the analysis is structured based on our empirical findings. First, we delve into which role the perception of the moral self plays in advocacy advertising. Second, we elaborate moral judgments consumers form about the alignment between the brand and issue in advocacy advertisements. Thereby, we outline specific evaluation criteria that consumers use when forming moral judgments.

5.1 Moral Self as a Ground for Moral judgments

The present study indicates that the moral self is a crucial component of advocacy advertising. Whereas it could be observed that brands aim to frame the morality of society by bringing up political issues in advocacy advertisements, our study further shows that consumers morally judged advocacy advertising based on their personal interpretations, which are strongly connected to consumers' moral identity. The moral self-constituted the ground on which consumers based their moral judgments of the advocacy advertisement, which aligns with Caruana (2007), who stated that moral judgments about right or wrong depend on individual interpretations. Consumers also repeatedly referred to their own moral beliefs, moral enlightenment, and moral feelings in discourses about advocacy advertisements, which supports the findings of various scholars, who argued that the moral self is the base for moral actions, precisely the formation of moral judgments (Blasi, 1983; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Harter & Monsour, 1992). We found that moral judgments rely on moral identity and stem from the moral structure of an individual. Thereby, we observed that consumers considered their moral understanding and their perception of whether morality is essential for themselves to judge how other consumers or the brand conveyed their moral stances, that is, either morally or immorally. This is in accordance with Blasi (1983), arguing that there is a clear connection of what consumers believe to be moral and the way they behave in terms of morality. Moral understanding is thus an essential guide for brand judgments and actions and relies on how the moral self makes sense of an advocacy advertisement. In the following, the three underlying elements of the moral identity, used by consumers to judge the advocacy campaign, are discussed in more detail, providing empirical quotes of the conducted focus group research and virtual observations.

5.1.1 Moral Beliefs

One of the main findings we observed was that consumers used their own moral beliefs to evaluate how congruent they are with the moral beliefs conveyed in the advocacy message. Especially the personal relevance of the moral beliefs in the advocacy advertisement played an essential role in whether and how consumers morally judged the advocacy campaigns.

The primary research on Nike's advocacy advertisement showed that the understanding of what Kaepernick's kneeling during the anthem stood for divided the society's opinion. Thus, moral

conflicts were aroused by the brand, as described in the research from Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler (2010). First, it upset people who argued that the advertisement and specifically Kaepernick was disrespecting the American flag. Further, the specific phrase from the commercial Kaepernick narrated “Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything” (Golden & Thomas, 2018) aroused contradictory opinions, which especially rallied moral antagonists of Nike, claiming that he is disrespecting the ones who serve in the military. The word sacrifice is commonly connected to veterans sacrificing their lives for the country, which is why consumers were upset about Nike bringing the word sacrifice into connection with an athlete. This act contradicted with the moral beliefs these consumers possess, as they strongly emphasized that veterans should not be compared to athletes. The following statement on YouTube highlighted this:

“Taking a knee while the anthem is playing. It is a slap in the face to everyone who has served or are serving, some who gave the ultimate sacrifice for all American rights, no matter what race, creed, or whatever” (Virtual Observations: Pastor Mark Stephens).

Thus, it becomes apparent that consumers felt it was morally wrong to either disrespect the flag or the ones who served in the military. This portrays an injunctive norm, explained by Nielsen and McGregor (2013) as “what is commonly approved or disapproved ... within a particular culture” (p. 475). Consumers also highlighted that the action of Kaepernick did not align with their own moral beliefs, labelling the protest as an immoral act, further applying the descriptive norms according to Nielsen and McGregor (2013). In contrast, other consumers, even veterans themselves, argued that they understood and appreciated the kneeling as an act of a peaceful protest. Thereby, consumers perceived it as morally right to kneel during the anthem and could identify their own moral beliefs with Nike’s advocacy message. Accordingly, a vast amount of consumers defended the First Amendment right to peacefully protest, partially as a response to the immoral antagonists (Luedicke, Thompson & Giesler, 2010), as highlighted by Monica Day:

“I am a veteran. I served in the Navy and I have NO problem with kneeling. It’s covered under the First Amendment. Hence, I’m not a part-time patriot. If I were then I will have a problem with it. But again I don’t because it’s American to peacefully protest anything you like. As long as you do not injure another person or display terroristic behaviour. Literally, everything else falls under the First Amendment” (Virtual Observations: Monica Day).

Drawing upon these statements, it becomes popular that Nike’s consumers evaluated the advertisement based on their personal moral beliefs. Whereas some valued the First Amendment right as highly relevant to them, others seemed to put a higher value on the underlying values of the American flag and how the advertisement downgraded sacrifices veterans have made. Therefore, the advertisement was perceived to be of higher relevance for people who could identify their own values with the advocacy advertisement or who found Nike’s campaign to contradict with their personal values. This aligns with various studies, arguing that the relevance of moral beliefs indicates the extent to which consumers engage in

moral behaviour (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Either way, consumers felt the need to clarify their values by supporting or discouraging Nike's communicated values and moral stance, which aligns with the theory presented by Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler (2010), emphasizing that consumers become protagonists or antagonists of brands based on the underlying myths and ideologies.

In the case of Gillette, especially the focus group participants were able to identify themselves with the advertisement, which did not necessarily mean that they perceived it as positive, but they felt more acquainted to the target market of the advertisement than in the cases of Nike and Pepsi. Cullen highlighted this: "I guess it is better relatable than the previous ad... it affects me more than seeing disabled people doing sport" (Focus Group). The participant thereby argued to be more affected by the advertisement as he can relate to the story and message of the advocacy campaign. This was further supported by Luisa arguing:

"I thought it was quite relatable when they played or like put the video of the father and the daughter, which was obviously made by a phone into the video ... he was being a role model in that moment on kind of encouraging his little daughter, which is a more relatable thing than super short advertisement with just actors inside" (Focus Group: Luisa).

Again the participant emphasized that she could relate to the advertisement as the story was presented realistically. Both quotes show that the moral values presented in the advocacy advertising were of relevance among the focus group participants. Despite this overall positive connection and the majority of consumers agreeing on the importance of the message, it was further pointed out that consumers perceived the advertisement to be inappropriate and morally wrong in the sense that it communicates the generalization of all men being sexual harassers. This was highlighted by Ben: "it kind of portrays men as like predestined from birth to go on to commit sexual assault..." (Focus Group) and was further supported by John:

"What I learned here is like that they implied that being a boy, like in the traditional way of fighting on the grass with other boys or fighting in general is connected to treat women badly, right? I mean this connection, you can be a boy you can play rugby, soccer, whatever and you can do fights and treat your woman like really well. So in that way I do not like the connection here" (Focus Group: John).

The participant elaborated that Gillette connected the scenes of the advertisement showing boys and men doing daily things with the annotation of being an indicator for boys to become sexual harassers, which he perceived to be questionable and morally wrong. With this statement, John expressed his disagreement with the communicated moral beliefs in Gillette's advocacy campaign. Thereby, he made use of his own moral identity, which is in line with the study from Aquino and Reed (2002), stating that this is the resource for moral judgments. Another aspect brought up in this matter was the consumers' accusation that Gillette was exploiting the #MeToo movement and hence mocked the people who have been actual victims of sexual harassment. Luis particularly highlighted this immoral act:

“At that time, it was I think at the height of #MeToo the whole thing, it was seen I think by many of women who actually were like posting on Twitter that #MeToo hashtag. I think when they saw this ad, Gillette was how do you say, not just making fun but mocking or something like that but totally twisting the story” (Focus Group).

This accusation of downgrading the political movement was further supported by Lana: “I think it is really simplistic the way that they put the issue” (Focus Group), thereby referring to Gillette simplifying the issue as if the solution was at hand. Shown by the last two quotes, the majority of consumers could not identify themselves with the communicated moral beliefs and criticized the advocacy message as a whole. Overall, consumers perceived Gillette’s message to be necessary. However, they argued that the message was communicated with the wrong values being at the forefront. The #MeToo movement was not accurately represented and the generalization of all men being sexual harassers hampered consumers to sense a congruence in their own and Gillette’s moral beliefs, leading to consumers judging the advertisement as immoral. The underlying theory again supports that the more relevant moral beliefs are for consumers, the more likely are consumers to morally judge others’ values and beliefs (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

Empirical findings of Pepsi’s advertising demonstrated that the communicated moral beliefs did not resonate with the majority of the interviewed consumers, mostly because consumers had difficulties comprehending the message of the campaign. Lotta particularly highlighted this: “I do not even know what this message is supposed to mean” (Focus Group), making it challenging for her to identify with and relate to the advocacy message. Others argued that Pepsi did not fully understand what the Black Lives Matter movement was about, hence, discrepancies in terms of moral values and beliefs associated with the political issue could be observed. One focus group participant highlighted Pepsi’s immoral act by stating: “Just picturing the riot and having fun and then like going up to the policeman and giving him a Pepsi ... you do not do that; it seems so wrong and definitely not credible” (Focus Group: Lotta). In the focus group, consumers further brought up that the people who are part of the Black Lives Matter movement could feel more offended by the advertisement due to the fundamental value the issue plays in their lives. Daniel highlighted that by stating:

“They [Pepsi] had like massive problems especially from the Black Lives Matter movement ... because like, I think these people can relate to the issue even more and felt offended even more. We do not feel personally offended. We just think it [the advertisement] is shit, but they are actually the people who think like Pepsi is making like everything they fight for at the moment look completely ridiculous” (Focus Group: Daniel).

Shown by this quote, the focus group participant argued that Pepsi downgraded the Black Lives Matter movement and therewith consumers who are part of it could not identify themselves with the communicated moral beliefs but instead countered those. Consumers perceived Pepsi’s advertisement to be inauthentic in that it simplifies the issue. A connection can be

drawn to Burmann et al. (2018), who highlighted that missing liability leads towards an inauthentic perception.

All three cases show that the more consumers could identify themselves with the moral message or the communicated issue, the more relevant was the advertisement for them. This is supported by various researchers, arguing that the more relevant moral beliefs and values are for the consumers, the more likely are consumers to engage in moral actions, such as moral judgments (Aquino & Reed, 2002). If the moral values communicated in the advertising contradicted with consumers' personal moral beliefs, they expressed their disagreement by sharing what they believe to be morally right. This is further in line with Caruana (2007), arguing that consumers have an opinion of what is morally right and wrong and base their personal interpretations on this underlying understanding of morality. Further, our study supports the findings of Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler (2010), highlighting that brands evoke protagonists and antagonists among consumers based on the underlying myths and ideologies of the brand's stance.

5.1.2 Moral Enlightenment

Our study further shows that consumers used their moral enlightenment on the brand and the political issue to form moral judgments on the advocacy campaigns. In reference to Nike's advertising, interviewed consumers felt superior to others and argued that the personal level of knowledge plays a vital role in whether the political issue and advertisement is crucial to oneself. This was among others highlighted by Dennis "I mean in the end the young consumers are not thinking that far" (Focus Group) and by Ben "I think we are bit more pragmatic" (Focus Group), referring to their superiority to other consumers. These quotes show that consumers who possessed a certain level of knowledge on the addressed issue in Nike's advocacy campaign were able to evaluate the advertisement on a higher level, eventually leading to stronger criticism towards the advocacy advertising. Alex touched upon that by stating: "I definitely see it or viewed as a danger for especially young or youth who might not reflect so much and might think in a simpler way. They just accept everything that is said about the issue and will not question Nike's stance in it" (Focus Group: Alex).

Similar behaviour could be observed about Gillette, consumers judged the advertising by using their political enlightenment or assessing others' knowledge on the political issue. Anna, for instance, highlighted: "I assume they are people, who really need this type of political education" (Focus Group). Thereby, she emphasized that the lacking political enlightenment of others could be enhanced by watching Gillette's advocacy campaign. This was further supported by Ben, who argued: "I guess we are kind of all aware of not sexually harassing women, but I guess there are people who have not seen this advertisement, who need to see this advertisement and do not know it" (Focus Group). Drawing upon these statements, we observed that the interviewed consumers did not feel targeted by the advocacy message as they believed that they are already conscious of the political issue. This aligns with the theory of Bertilsson (2015), who described this as cynicism towards others, being a process "where consumers project an enlightened disbelief in the morality of other consumers" (p. 449). Indeed,

consumers perceived themselves as enlightened consumers and therefore felt protected from this type of advertisement and the corresponding moral message, eventually making them morally superiors.

In contrast, consumers argued that others must watch Gillette's advocacy advertisement to become more enlightened on the issue and change their behaviour, accordingly, referring to other consumers' lacking political knowledge. Further, it stood out that Gillette's consumers who argued that they already possess a high level of political enlightenment criticized and judged the advocacy advertising on a much higher level. This aligns with Ritson and Elliott (1995), arguing that consumers construct images of self and others based on the meanings that they derive from advertisements. The importance of the brand knowledge could be observed as consumers referred back to Gillette's history, as shown by Tim: "I think it is very political as well in a sense or like knowing the history of the brand and how they positioned themselves within society" (Focus Group). Furthermore, Robert highlighted the importance of political enlightenment:

"So like this understanding of political advocacy in advertising is really dependent on groups and I think especially in the groups where toxic masculinity is very high which also correlates to education of course it is like a cool advertisement whereas all the more critical educated people and maybe interpreted differently but maybe they are not even the clients for like the addressed clients for that advertisement" (Focus Group: Robert).

This quote reveals that consumers perceived a difference in who requires a moral training on a particular issue. Accordingly, consumers lacking political enlightenment require more political education by brands.

Drawing upon our primary research on Pepsi, it stood out that consumers argued for younger and less political enlightened people to be more acquainted to the campaign as older, perhaps more educated consumers. During the focus group, Dennis particularly highlighted this:

"But I mean, the target group must be fairly young ... I would not say it is the typical 50, 60-year-old American men or women who should be put in the target group for that movie. Maybe it is more like 16 to I do not know 30. And they might like such advertisements better than other target groups, also because they maybe do not know much about the issue" (Focus Group: Dennis).

Consumers who possessed a certain level of knowledge on the issue and the brand's prior stances found it to be morally inauthentic how Pepsi conveyed the advocacy message:

"Like casually walking through a Black Lives Matter demonstration, where actually people died, and they had massive riots and then they display it like I think that is like taking authenticity away from the Black Lives Matter movement" (Focus Group: Daniel).

By this statement, Daniel emphasized that he perceived Pepsi's advocacy advertising to downgrade the Black Lives Matter movement, in which people died and were injured. Therewith, he relied on his political knowledge and enlightenment of the brand and the issue to form moral judgments on Pepsi's advocacy campaign.

All three cases demonstrate that consumers used their personal level of political enlightenment on the issue and the brand to form judgments about advocacy advertising. We could observe that more politically enlightened people tended to be more critical in their judgments due to their broadened expertise on the specific topic, whereas the same consumers believed that less educated and specifically younger people would be less critical about it and require the education provided by the advocacy message. Therewith, we observed that politically enlightened consumers felt superior to the moral message and hence argued it to be more critical for other consumers, who are less knowledgeable of the issue and the brand. This can be put into reference with Bertilsson (2015), who emphasized that consumers possess enlightened disbelief in other consumers.

5.1.3 Moral Feelings

Moral emotions are based on moral beliefs and further appeared to play a vital role when consumers morally judged the advocacy campaigns, which is in line with Pizzaro (2000) who argued that emotions are "reliable informers of the moral priorities of an individual" (p. 362). In terms of Nike's advocacy advertisement, consumers communicated their emotions, indicating that they have morally judged the advertisements based on emotions they associated with the message. The story and message Nike illustrated in the campaign touched a variety of consumers, as highlighted by an online consumer: "Oh man... the goosebumps you get while watching..." (Virtual Observations: Syanth Dinesh). Nike's advertising was further understood as personal motivation and inspiration by several consumers, as emphasized by Hii Andrew:

"I listen to this when I wake up, go to work, at the gym, and before I go to sleep. So much INSPIRATION #DreamCrazy" (Virtual Observations: Hii Andrew).

As shown, consumers used Nike's advertising as a source for inspiration and motivation, encouraging them to react to the mentioned call to action "Just Do It" (Nike, 2019b). In contrast, Nike evoked negative feelings of hate and being downgraded, as emphasized by Michelle Z: "I hate Nike. If I would had a pair, I would burn them" (Virtual Observations). Lisa further supported this:

"In the end, I felt quite like an average person who does nothing really extraordinary. Like if you see people like that doing crazy things, you feel like what do I do" (Focus Group).

Drawing upon these statements, it becomes popular that consumers made sense of Nike's advocacy advertising through expressing their personal emotions. This process was subjective and was firmly based on how well the consumers could identify itself with the advocacy

message and campaign. When consumers felt targeted by Nike's message, this eventually led to a more positive moral judgment.

Moreover, Gillette's advocacy advertisement evoked emotions among the consumers, showing that consumers used their personal feelings to judge the campaign morally. This behaviour was observed during the focus group, where one of the participants was emotionalized to tears while another one got goose bumps, pointing out a personal connection and empathy towards the communicated advocacy message. This supports the findings by Pizarro (2000), arguing that empathy leads to consumers being motivated to make a judgment. These positive feelings were further conveyed via social media:

“The team at Gillette put together a truly amazing commercial and as a mom of (3) I truly appreciate this. It was so well done, brought tears to my eyes” (Virtual Observation: Marisa Sullivan).

It could be observed that there are those who enjoyed the advocacy campaign and argued that it was merely trying to reinforce positive behaviour. These consumers perceived a feeling of empathy towards the advocacy message. In contrast to these positive perceptions, Gillette's advertisement also evoked negative emotions among a large group of consumers, as stated by Luis: “It was a bit offensive”, pointing towards the generalization of the issue. Another participant of the focus group went further and expressed his hate: “I am getting pissed” (Focus Group: Dennis). These negative feelings associated with the campaign were also observed during the online observations:

“ShouldBeCalled..WeBelieve:WhiteMenAreBulliesSexualHarassersAndRapists”
(Virtual Observations: Leighton Corcoran).

The previous quotes show that consumers, particularly men, felt criticized by Gillette's advocacy message. They understood the message as an insulting generalization of all men being sexual harassers, indicating that the majority of men have to change their behaviour. Hence, consumers questioned whether it is fair and legitimate for a brand to represent toxic masculinity as a common feature of society. Being accused and attacked by a brand that has previously communicated apparent gender stereotypical advertisements, contradicting their new advocacy message, gave consumers the feeling of hate and offensiveness. These feelings were underlying drivers of moral judgments, as referred to by Pizarro (2000). Drawing upon the personal feelings that Gillette evoked with their advocacy advertisement, it becomes popular that especially men, who represent the target market of Gillette, felt offended by the advertisement due to the generalization. In contrast, women showed somewhat positive emotions towards the advocacy advertisement. The feelings further revealed to what extent consumers judged the campaign and explicitly illustrated how the moral judgment of Gillette's advertisement was based on consumers' personal feelings associated with the campaign.

Similar behaviour could be observed about Pepsi's advocacy campaign, consumers used their personal feelings to judge the advocacy campaign morally. In Pepsi's case, merely negative

feelings were evoked. In fact, consumers expressed confusion: “I am confused” (Focus Group: Luisa) and offensiveness: “Because I think if it offends me or I think it is offending to people who actually have to go on the streets or have to go to riots” (Focus Group: Lisa). Moreover, these negative emotions were underlined with statements expressing hate: “I hate this advertisement, why would Pepsi do something like that” (Virtual Observation: DDarknight). Some other consumers perceived Pepsi’s advertising as entertaining due to its mad ridiculousness: “It is a crazy advertisement, right? For many different reasons, I would say. First one being it’s just ridiculous” (Focus Group: Tim). The statements about Pepsi’s advocacy campaign show that on one side consumers could not grasp what the campaign was about since it was lacking a storyline and on the other side, consumers interpreted the storyline themselves, leading to a feeling of offensiveness and hate, as the advocacy campaign did not align with what the Black Lives Matter movement stands for.

All three cases indicated that consumers used their personal feelings to judge the moral appropriateness of the advocacy advertisements. Thereby, consumers repeatedly referred to the extent the advertisement resonates with themselves. Especially, if a brand criticised a particular behaviour and the questioned consumer felt spoken-to, the advertisement evoked negative emotions of being morally downgraded and offended as if these men were not good enough examples of how men ought to be. In contrast, consumers who did not feel targeted by the criticism of the issue, but at the same time supported the message, merely based their judgments on positive feelings. These consumers were already enlightened about gender equality and toxic masculinity or not mainly targeted by the advertisement, so they were not offended, but agreed that other consumers needed to change and that the advertisements did a good job in this respect. These findings support a variety of available studies on moral emotions (Batson, Turk, Shaw & Klein, 1995; Feshbach & Roe, 1968; Pizarro, 2000). Prior research showed that the more similar the moral beliefs and values of an advertisement are, the more likely are consumers to show a positive feeling of empathy in their moral judgments (Batson, Turk, Shaw & Klein, 1995). Reversely, if consumers sense a feeling of accusation, they are more likely to have negative emotions towards the moral actor, in this case, the brand, and base their moral judgments on that (Pizarro, 2000).

5.2 Moral judgments on Alignment of Brand and Issue

Our study showed that consumers made sense of advocacy advertising by judging the moral authenticity, respectively. We identified that consumers repeatedly referred to the alignment of the brand and issue, arguing that the more congruent these two elements are, the more morally authentic the advocacy advertisement was perceived. Here, we observed a division of moral protagonists and antagonists, either supporting or opposing the ideological values supported in the advocacy advertisement and by the brand in general. This is in line with the work from Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler (2010), who described brands as having the potential to mediate moral conflicts by evoking tensions of myths and ideologies. Further, we observed that consumers’ support and discouragement was mainly directed towards the brand, neglecting debates, and discourses with other consumers. While the participants evaluated how well the brand and the issue align with each other, they judged the moral authenticity of this alignment

by using specific evaluation criteria. This one-sided moral judgment was already recognized by Zhou and Whitley (2013) in the context of negative celebrity publicity, as they highlighted that consumers form ethical judgments on how performed action of public celebrities resonate with the own sense of morality, that is, the moral identity, and whether the act is seen as damaging to the society. Given the observation that consumers formed moral judgments to make sense of advocacy advertising and derive how the organisation and the issue align with each other, our study yielded potential threats and opportunities that were prevalent among consumers to perceive congruence between the organisation and the political issue. The forthcoming section elaborates in detail which criteria consumers applied to judge the moral authenticity of the alignment between the brand and issue.

5.2.1 Brand's Moral Motives

The overarching criterion consumers used to morally judge the alignment of the brand and issue is dependent on the brands underlying moral intention that drove the creation and publication of the advocacy advertisement. Generally speaking, consumers found it essential that brands balance their own interest with the interest of society in advertising campaigns to evaluate an advertisement as morally right. This is in line with Trevino's definition of moral judgments (1986), whereby individuals judge "what is right or wrong" (p. 604). Especially for advocacy advertising, in which the focus lies on contributing to society and evoking social change, it was imperative for brands to uphold altruistic attributions and focus on the societal rather than the economic benefits.

In reference to Nike's advocacy campaign, consumers argued it to be created merely for monetary purposes, as highlighted by Chris Cole: "Nike's advertising was strategically controversial for economic gain and profit" (Virtual Observations). Another consumer challenged the morality of the brand by referring to Nike's underlying commercial intention:

"They are still a company trying to achieve certain monetary goals. So they are not trying to be more complex, but rather to generate profit. It is a touching and good ad, but I would be careful to really hold it as a credible and moral institution" (Focus Group: Cullen).

Consumers understood Nike's advertising as a tool to boost sales, questioning the moral dimension of the brand's motive, clearly also judging its moral authenticity in terms of missing liability (Burmah et al. 2018) and genuineness (Beverland, Lindgren & Vink, 2008). Furthermore, consumers found Nike's motive to lack actual enforcement of social change and improvement of society's well-being, also highlighting the lack of moral authenticity. In other words, consumers believed that Nike is putting the brand's interest before the society's and thus perceived Nike as a non-caring, immoral actor. In that sense, several consumers cynically asked how Nike is contributing to the Civil Right movement, as highlighted by Deborah Sanders: "Glad that sales and stock price is up. Can we use some of the money raised for a legal fund to support victims of police brutality? Is that dream crazy enough?" (Virtual Observations). Our findings further suggested that consumers preferred to see actions rather

than mere talking in advertisements, as illustrated by Lisa: “I do not see the point of just putting out an advertisement and raising awareness instead of really doing something” (Focus Group).

Similar to Nike, Gillette received considerable criticism on their underlying motivation of the advocacy campaign. Consumers especially highlighted that Gillette’s political stance in its advocacy advertisement seemed to serve as a tool for differentiation rather than with the moral intent to promote social change. A participant in the focus group particularly highlighted this:

“So, how would you differentiate your product in such a market via such political statements. So I am pretty sure like the intention of huge companies is not really to change something, it’s just differentiation at the next level because otherwise they would have done it during the last 30 years, because there was always like a political movement every year” (Focus Group: Dennis).

Whereas the understandings from the focus group were brought up relatively neutral and argumentative, the observed online commentators were more aggressive and cynical in their argumentations. Sloth from The Goonies highlighted this: “attacking and demonizing your own loyal customers, genius marketing strategy” (Virtual Observations) and further supported by Mark Chen: “Gillette translation: actually we could not care less, as long as our angle through politics sells” (Virtual Observations). Again, consumers questioned Gillette’s altruistic intentions and highlighted the sole monetary intention of the brand. Through this, their cynical behaviour can be interpreted as the distrust towards marketing techniques in general, which is described by Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011) as enforcing cynical behaviour. Consumers accused Gillette to not care about the political issue and hence claimed the brand to exploit the movement to increase sales. Further, it was unclear for consumers how making a statement about social justice can be understood as a sufficiently motivating factor in the purchase of razors products given that these products are consumed privately. Ben specifically highlighted this: “I think it is kind of like you are being taught ethics from a razor company even though razors are just normal products you use on a daily basis and no one really cares for them” (Focus Group).

These results were further compared to the consumer behaviour observed in Pepsi’s advocacy advertisement. Pepsi’s consumers went one step further by claiming the brand to not only have an economic intention but further to be capitalistic.

“Pepsi, an obviously capitalistic enterprise with the end goal of producing profit” (Virtual Observations: SJ Cross).

Therewith, Pepsi was accused of trivializing the Black Lives Matter movement as their capitalist nature contradicts with the aim of social justice. Consumers judged the whole ideology of consumerism, which leads according to Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011) to cynical behaviour. In accordance to the economic motivation, consumers additionally pointed out that a company should not just stand up for change in political debates, but also take actions to make change happen to be perceived as morally sound. Several consumers illustrated this:

“I would rather see a company really doing something in real life and getting involved socially, maybe changing their product location, changing the wages or actually being involved in certain charities and an ad is just something very imaginary for me” (Focus Group: Cullen).

In line with the criticism of brands' moral stances, consumers perceived brands that merely promote political standpoints to raise awareness and generate profit as less morally authentic and therefore as immoral actors. This understanding of morality was well summarized in the focus group by Anna: “Practice what you preach” (Focus Group).

In sum, consumers emphasized the importance of the balance between the companies own and societal interests. The present study demonstrates that consumers accused brands of putting their interests first, precisely, aiming mainly towards monetary and economic benefits. In these cases, consumers did not perceive the advocacy advertisements as morally right and authentic. Consumers perceived it to be morally right if a brand focused on altruistic attributions in advocacy advertising, whereas immoral acts were described as having egoistic intentions. Further, consumers emphasized the importance to act upon what is talked, otherwise, the brand's moral motives could become a barrier hindering consumers from perceiving the alignment of the organization and issue to be morally authentic. If there was no actual effort taken by brands to enhance social change, the advocacy advertisement was perceived as immoral, again indicating that the brand is not genuinely supporting the political issue but rather exploiting it for its own benefit. The underlying dynamics of moral authenticity and the brand's moral motives can be connected to prior theory, as other scholars found similar results. For instance, Beverland, Lindgren and Vink (2008) stated that to be morally authentic, brands have to hold a genuine interest in their actions and should always focus on the personal motivation as the driving factor (Beverland, Lindgren & Vink, 2008). This is further specified by Beverland (2005b; 2005b; 2006) who emphasized that commercial interests should not be superficial. Consumers even brought the term *woke washing* up, which was derived for brands taking a political stance, describing the gap between the company's actual practices and marketing activities (Vredenburg, Spry, Kemper & Kapitan, 2018). Already Bhattacharya, Smith and Vogel (2004) and Frankental (2001) identified corporate social responsibility to be part of the core business activity rather than merely being a PR or marketing hype. Hence, both authors argued that words must be supported by and inextricably linked with action.

5.2.2 Brand's Moral Responsibility

Also, the level of a brand's moral responsibility was used by consumers to morally judge the alignment of the communicated issue and the organization, legitimizing its engagement in a particular issue, explicitly referring to the brand being the right actor to bring up the political issue.

In reference to Nike's advocacy advertisement, we observed controversial opinions on whether it is the brand's responsibility to bring up political discourses. Some consumers argued that big

companies such as Nike possess the right amount of power to enforce social change and thus should use its reach and power effectively, as explained by Anna:

“I think it is [brands taking a political stance] important, because if society fails to do that, and if our politicians fail to do that, then at least somebody who has the budget and who has the like the network and the reach, I think they should do it” (Focus Group: Anna).

With these statements, consumers argued that Nike should make use of its power to enforce social change as it is Nike’s responsibility to address political debates in their advertisements as same as in their positioning. They highlighted that Nike has the budget, reach, and power to trigger social change and thus is also able to attract the attention from a significant number of consumers, eventually being able to educate consumers. It also stood out that consumers do not trust other institutions, such as the political system, to tackle the discussed issues, as shown in the quote above. Precisely, consumers recognized that other instances, such as politicians, failed to solve political issues and hope that the brand can help by using its reach and power. This shift of responsibility in today’s society can be connected to the theory of Giesler and Veresiu (2014), who argued that social and political issues are transferred from the government to consumers. Crises surrounding social injustice are not solved by the government, but rather pressured on brands which then bring up political issues in their advertisements with the aim to govern consumers to become more responsible and morally sound.

In contrast, other consumers argued that branding should not become more complicated than it is, implying that it should not be the brand’s moral responsibility to engage in political debates. Having moved the complex dynamics of politics to the environment of branding, consumers felt as they required a more sophisticated decision-making process as the political meanings to a brand’s choice became more apparent. Alvaro Garavito cynically highlighted that by arguing: “I always wanted my shoes to be political, thanks Nike ;^)” (Virtual Observations). Tori B supported this argument further:

“LMAO 😊 ... There is no "right and wrong" here, it's a shoe commercial. Not a political one. Nike does not just sell to "Americans" so chill out. I just want my shoes, not more Patriotic bullshit okay” (Virtual Observations).

In other words, consumers would have preferred if Nike did not engage in political debates, as it turned the purchase of the brand into a more polemic and political decision, that is, wearing Nike products was eventually understood as a political statement by others.

Similar behaviour could be observed in our focus group research and virtual observations on Gillette, whereby we also found that consumers morally judged Gillette’s advocacy advertisements in terms of the company’s responsibility to take a political stance. As a positive perception among the participants, Anna stated: “I think it is good because I feel like it is their [Gillette] responsibility” (Focus Group). Also, Jenny agreed, “it is good and important that they bring out that message. Considering what happened...” (Focus Group), further referring to the

contemporary context, relevance, and currency of the communicated issue. In line with these arguments, Luisa emphasized that it is essential to stress the issue of toxic masculinity, however, she questioned whether Gillette has the legitimacy to do so:

“So at least they bring this topic on the table, which is important. If they are the perfect ones to provide you with this topic on the table, I am not sure, but at least they do it and it is in the states mainly, or I did not know the advertisement before, but maybe I is even more important to kind of bring it up” (Focus Group: Luisa).

This negative annotation of Gillette not being the right moral actor to engage in political discourses was predominant among the opinions of Gillette consumers. The majority of consumers believed that they do not need a corporation, especially one they trust in and buy products from like Gillette, to tell them what it means to be masculine and accusing them of toxic masculinity. Consumers further argued that Gillette should not take over the responsibility to communicate social change and political standpoints. For instance, Ben stated in a sarcastic tone: “I think it is kind of like you are being taught ethics from a razor company” (Focus Group), which was further supported by Lana highlighting that “it is not Gillette who is supposed to talk about it” (Focus Group). Overall, these statements indicate that consumers found it essential to discuss the political issues and also appreciated when a higher instance is bringing them up due to their broad reach. Consumers preferred to seek political information and discourses from other sources, as emphasized by Lana: “If I want to be informed politically, I would look at somewhere else, not a brand” (Focus Group). This aspect was further twisted around by John, who stated that “I do not want to buy anything and think about like political decisions I have to make when I buy this product” (Focus Group). He referred to a certain kind of symbolism, pointing out that he does not want his purchase decision to become symbolic by brands gaining a political and polemic meaning. This aligned with the worries of another participant, who further explained: “That just becomes a new set confusing complex” (Focus Group: Lana). Prior theory already suggested that brands and especially also advertisements have a symbolic meaning that consumers use to express their identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Escalas, 2004). As outlined by consumers, it can also be applied in the other way around, indicating that the issue adds symbolic values, such as a political meaning, to the brand that consumers do not want to express in coherence with their moral identity and hence perceive it as unfavourable when brands engage in these political debates.

Consumers also questioned Pepsi’s expertise by claiming, “all of this seems a bit much for just a Soda” (Virtual Observations: King Dione). This comment points out that consumers accused Pepsi of not having the legitimacy to communicate the issue as it was beyond the brand’s expertise to engage in this political discourse. Lula B. further pointed this out: “don’t use cultural movements to sell soft drinks” (Virtual Observations). Therewith, consumers questioned how Pepsi was connected to the political issue of social injustice. They perceived the brand to tap into an area which is beyond its responsibility as it addressed issues and ideas that Pepsi has neither the expertise nor the power to solve. Merely tagging along on the bandwagon of different themes is perceived as morally inauthentic by consumers, as emphasized by Tim:

“I guess the Black Lives Matter movement that was going on during the time this ad was launched. Because that is a very, very important political movement. Right? And they were like, okay, let's just go with the flow” (Focus Group: Tim).

This quote highlighted how consumers considered Pepsi as not taking the political movement seriously but instead make use of it as it is currently trendy. According to Schallehn, Burmann and Riley (2014), merely following the trends can impede authenticity. Therewith, consumers formed moral judgments on whether it is the brand's moral responsibility to bring up this critical political issue and if it is authentic or not.

All three cases demonstrate that consumers evaluated the alignment of the issue and the brand based on its moral responsibility. Thereby, moral judgments were based on a brand's legitimacy of communicating a specific issue, also portraying a possible barrier or endorser for consumers to perceive the advertisement as morally authentic. In all three cases, consumers acknowledged that the advocacy advertisements brought up an urgent message that needed to be communicated. However, the brands were not perceived as the right moral actor to do so, referring to their underlying legitimacy. Prior research suggested similar findings and indicated that heterogeneity among the political issue and the brand's core business is a crucial element making up a brand's responsibility (Bhate, 2003). Questioned consumers did not appreciate brands entering the political sphere due to their perception of the political issue being beyond the scope, expertise, and moral responsibility of brands. Given the nature of big corporations being to drive profit, consumers judged the moral responsibility and expertise in terms of driving social change and questioned it as being compatible with such. Hence, we identified a brand's moral responsibility as a significant criterion consumer apply when forming moral judgments on the alignment between the brand and the issue in an advocacy advertisement.

5.2.3 Brand's Moral Image

In terms of the brand's responsibility, our study shows that consumers used previous brand's moral images to form judgments about the moral alignment of an organization and an issue in advocacy advertisements.

Consumers perceived Nike's campaign “Dream Crazy” (Nittle, 2018) as morally logical and further argued that it is reasonable for the brand to engage in discussions about the Civil Rights movement, as emphasized by Anna: “I think they always stood for that you can achieve anything, so it [the brand image] did not change. It just got a little bit enforced” (Focus Group). Moreover, Tim supported this argument, “the message comes from a credible source in that sense, like their history gives them credibility to claim such a stand” (Focus Group). In other words, consumers perceived Nike's previous brand's moral image to be aligned with what is promoted in its current advocacy advertisement, that is, the image of inspiring people to make sports equal for everyone by breaking barriers. Nike makes this mission further visible in its slogan: “Just Do It” (Nike, 2019b) and thus ensured moral consistency in its branding practices. When consumers morally judged Nike's previous brand image to make sense of the alignment

between the organization and the political issue, they used their knowledge on prior moral connotations associated with the brand. Hence, our findings suggest that the moral positioning and previous brand image of Nike helped consumers to make sense of the alignment of the Civil Right movement and the brand.

In comparison to Nike, we observed that Gillette was perceived as inauthentic and immoral due to its inconsistency in terms of the brand's moral image. Gillette's history, precisely the brand image, has usually been understood as a support for apparent gender stereotypes, having a strong connection to sports, and enforcing a masculine brand image. Several consumers highlighted this:

“Earlier commercials of Gillette were more portraying men as like tough guys and stuff like that. They were not touching this soft side of men” (Focus Group: Luis).

“I think Gillette is more famous for having, like very sexist advertisement campaigns for like years and years and years” (Focus Group: Daniel).

Considering that the previous brand image of Gillette was connected to the complete opposite of attributes that are promoted within its newer advocacy advertisement, it is no surprise that consumers recognized this change and formed moral judgments about this shift of images. Indeed, consumers even described Gillette as hypocritical, further highlighted by Ben:

“It is quite hypocritical from them as well considering what Luis [other focus group member] said about their history of advertisements have been exactly the opposite of this advertisement” (Focus Group).

Overall, it becomes apparent that Gillette's new advocacy campaign contradicted with earlier moral images. Due to the inconsistencies in positioning, consumers questioned whether it is morally legitimate for Gillette to present itself as a supporter for the progressive view of masculinity given that it has spent the past 30 years reinforcing gender stereotypes. Consumers would have liked Gillette to communicate the moral change in their brand image more clearly by also shifting their images in other aspects. For instance, consumers pointed out that Gillette's razors are still more expensive for women and are only available in pink colour, which is commonly known as a girly colour, as highlighted by David Sith: “No thank you, Procter & Gamble. I do not support a toxic company that charges women more money for shaving products” (Virtual Observations).

In accordance with the findings of Nike and Gillette, consumers also identified Pepsi's previous moral image as an indicator for the misalignment of the organization and the issue. Consumers nostalgically referred back to previous advertisements, claiming those to be much more interesting and morally suitable, as highlighted by Ryan Walker: “Remember the Britney Pepsi commercials ... we want that Pepsi back” (Virtual Observations) and further supported by Jordan Delacruz:

“Let us all remember the good old days when Pepsi had Britney, Beyoncé, and P!nk do their advertising, not his vanilla popsicle stick looking ass rich no good for anything but walking and chewing gum at the same time hoe” (Virtual Observations).

Given that consumers nostalgically discussed previous advertisements, it becomes popular that consumers' image of Pepsi's became worse than it was before. Indeed, consumers had difficulties in understanding the underlying story of Pepsi's advocacy advertisement and judged it by referring to the brand's history, particularly previous advertisements and promoted images.

Drawing upon the findings of this criterion, it becomes apparent that consumers judged the morality of the advocacy advertisements based on the brand's moral image. Thereby, former communication activities as well as the general brand history consumers had manifested in their minds were important. Also, Keller (1993) argued that the “brand image refers to the set of associations linked to the brand that consumers hold in memory” (p. 2), pointing towards events and actions of the past. In the case studies where the previous brand image was perceived to align with the discussed political issue, consumers evaluated the brand to be morally authentic. In contrast, when the brand image did not align with the new brand's communication activities, consumers were not able to comprehend the advertisement and perceived it as immoral. Given these findings, we interpreted that consistency in a brand's moral image is critical for the authenticity and legitimacy of brands, which was previously supported by Burmann et al. (2018), who identified consistency as crucial for enhancing authenticity. When brands decide to bring up a political issue, they need to make sure that the company adheres to that path, as highlighted by Hanna: “They must actually stick to that political stem” (Focus Group). If a company fails to provide consistency and congruence in its positioning, the previous brand image can evolve into a critical barrier hindering consumers from perceiving an alignment between the organization and the issue. The importance of consistency can further be broadened with continuity, pointing towards the consistent behaviour over a long period (Burmann et al. 2018). In the empirical material, consistency and continuity were often evaluated through the comparison between the moral dimension of the current advocacy advertisement and past commercials respectively, which were in some cases representing other moral values and ideals, indicating that the brand image was neither consistent nor continuous.

When further comparing the consumers' judgments on the brand's image, one can recognize a paradox. On the one hand, consumers expected brands to deal with current issues in line with current societal values, but on the other hand, they perceived the brand as morally inauthentic when it did not stay true to its brand image and core. This aligns with previous theory and findings (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2001; Keller, 2003 all cited in Beverland, 2005b), which also described this type of dichotomy. Overall, previous brand images can eventually hinder consumers from making sense of the advocacy advertisement in a morally authentic way and thus can be delineated as a potential barrier.

5.2.4 Brand's Moral Choice of Spokesperson

Another criteria that consumers used to judge the morality of the alignment between the brand and issue was the chosen spokesperson of the advertisement. Our study shows that for organizations to align with the political issue, it was crucial that the spokesperson stands for similar values as the issue as well as the brand. Our findings further suggest that consumers morally judged how a brand communicated the issue as well as how aligned the actions taken are with the character of the brand.


Referring to Nike's advocacy advertisement, our findings revealed that consumers had controversial opinions on whether Nike's spokesperson, Colin Kaepernick, was an excellent choice to illustrate the message and issue in the advertisement. Indeed, a clear distinction between antagonist, discouraging Nike's choice of spokesperson, and protagonist, supporting Nike's decision, was apparent. Some consumers valued Nike for standing up for its brand ambassador, even though Kaepernick was excluded from the National Football League, as highlighted by Re-G:

“It is crazy, everyone that tries to bring peace always get hate in return. Proud of #Nike for having @Kaepernick7 back” (Virtual Observations: Re-G).

As shown in the quote, Nike's action of continuous encouragement was perceived to align with Nike's mission to support its athletes no matter what is happening. Hence, consumers understood it as an authentic and morally right act. In line with that, consumers perceived Kaepernick to be an authentic person representing the message of the advertisement, as he is biracial, being adopted as an infant by white parents. In contrast, other consumers criticized Nike for choosing Colin Kaepernick as a spokesperson because they perceived him as a footballer, who stood up for the Civil Right movement in times his football career was diminishing, intending to gain pure attention and money. Islandblader explained this further:

“Great commercial, next time pick a real athlete, an accomplished one, and not an attention-grabbing wash up whos angry about how his career was starting to fail” (Virtual Observations: islandblader).

Another key criticism consumers expressed was the choice of the message in alignment with the spokesperson. Nike used the word sacrifice in its message, which is commonly used in the military for veterans who sacrificed their lives for the country. Therewith, consumers felt offended by Nike using the word sacrifice in relation to Kaepernick, who did not serve in the military and hence did not sacrifice his life for the country. Tammy Brockman specifically highlighted this:

“Nike you had a decent commercial going until Kaepernick became your face. Unreal you would align with someone who has sacrificed nothing compared to an American Soldier. #StandForTheAnthem ” (Virtual Observations: Tammy Brockman).

Nike's reference to sacrifice aroused much attention and was the underlying barrier that kept consumers from perceiving Nike as well as their advocacy advertising as morally authentic. The inconsistency between the spokesperson and the message, partially impacting the alignment of the organization and the issue, affected how consumers made sense and morally judged advocacy advertising.

Similar behaviour could be observed in the case of Gillette, indicating that consumers perceived the spokespersons as a facilitator for the authentic alignment of the brand and the issue. To clarify, we identified the men, that are, the actors, in Gillette advertisement as spokespersons of the message and used them as a point of reference for the participants of our focus group and the online observations moral judgments on this aspect. Alex highlighted this: "Of course, I identify more with ... men" (Focus Group) and also stated by Jenny: "Maybe it also kind of depends on whether you are female or male and how you feel addressed" (Focus Group). These two statements show that consumers could better relate to the advertisement in which their own gender was represented and targeted. Therefore, we interpret that consumers made sense of Gillette's advocacy advertisement based on the gender of the spokesperson and to what extent they could identify themselves with the spokesperson. By using no prominent spokesperson but somewhat normal men, it was easier for consumers to relate to the advertisement and stories. Luisa particularly emphasized this: "I thought it was quite relatable when they played ... the video of the father and the daughter" (Focus Group). The perceptions of Gillette's advertisement showed that the inclusion of regular people could enhance the consumers feeling of belonging. They were able to identify themselves with the message and portrayed situations, suggesting that when the choice of regular people as spokespersons in the advertisement is equivalent to the target market, it enables consumers to identify and relate to the advertisements, which further enhances the moral perception of a brand's alignment with the issue.

Similar to Nike, also Pepsi used a spokesperson in its advocacy advertisement that is a public figure and prominent among young consumers. Kendall Jenner is an American model, mainly known through the reality soap "Keeping up with the Kardashians" (Victor, 2017). She is famous for her fashion and beauty sense and is considered as a role model for many young adults, specifically women (Victor, 2017). Consumers criticized Pepsi's decision to use Kendall Jenner as a spokesperson, as they perceived the choice of the spokesperson as immoral and inauthentic. Indeed, consumers had difficulties seeing the connection of Kendall Jenner to the brand and the issue, as highlighted by Jenny: "I did not get what Kendall Jenner had to do with this" (Focus Group). Ben enforced this perception and further criticized the illustration of Kendall Jenner being the solution for peace: "to think that Kendall Jenner can solve it all with a kind of a bit ludicrous" (Focus Group). Considering these statements, it became apparent that consumers recognized an inconsistency in the spokesperson values and Pepsi's message. OK Howard further emphasized this:

"I think it is complicated, but a big part of it is that it uses people of color as props, and shows Kendall Jenner, a privileged white girl, as the hero of a movement she just found out about, while the people who are actually affected by things like police brutality, like

a hijabi woman and black men, stand around and clap for her. It is sort of like cultural appropriation, in the sense that these people seem to have been marching/fighting for something for a while, and a white person steps in at the last second and takes all the credit” (Virtual Observations).

As shown, Kendall Jenner was not perceived to have strong affiliations with fighting for minorities or social movements but instead focuses on the promotion of herself, her fashion style, and her beauty ideals. Pepsi chose a public figure that is a white woman born into a celebrity family recognized by its enormous wealth. Given these attributes, it was not transparent for consumers why Pepsi chose her as a spokesperson besides her being prominent and popular among young adults. Many consumers were outraged by the incongruity of Kendall Jenner as a spokesperson in a movement against police brutality and racial injustice. Indeed, consumers described Pepsi’s choice of spokesperson as insensitive and not aligned with the brand’s moral message.

While making sense of the advocacy advertisements, consumers also morally judged the spokesperson, who is communicating the issue. Thereby, it was perceived as authentic when the spokesperson stood for similar values as the brand and was aligned with the communicated issue. In sum, we identified that it is imperative to distinguish between a public figure and a regular person as spokesperson in advocacy advertisements. For a public figure, the spokesperson’s public values, acts, and opinions are essential and must align with the brand values to be perceived as authentic. Given that the personal opinion of the spokesperson played such a crucial role in assessing whether an authentic and morally right alignment of a brand and issue can be formed, it is further of relevance to take the controversial character of the spokesperson into account. This is in line with Priester and Petty (2003), who discovered that an untrustworthy spokesperson arouses more elaborations of the public than a trustworthy one. Consumers must be able to see a connection of the spokesperson, the issue, and the brand, only then they can make sense of the brand’s advocacy advertising. In terms of the representation of regular people in advertisements, that are not prominent among consumers, our study suggests that consumers must be able to relate to the situations the spokesperson plays in. Because consumers sought to create their own identities through the consumption of brands (Escalas & Bettmann, 2003 cited in Escalas & Bettmann, 2005), we argue that also the identity of the spokesperson is portraying specific characteristics on the consumers’ selves. In sum, the choice of a spokesperson is a critical criteria used by consumers to morally judge the advocacy advertisement and can evolve into a barrier hindering consumers from perceiving an alignment of the brand and the issue, if it is not carefully selected.

5.2.5 Moral Brand Parodies

During the process of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements, they also became actively involved in the discourse by expressing personal opinions on the brand and their stances. In the case of all three brands, consumers created parodies and posted them online to clarify their understanding of the advocacy advertisement. By playing upon humour, satire, and cynicism, consumers morally judged the brand’s political campaign, further enhancing the

barriers of the alignment between the organization and issue. This phenomenon was discovered explicitly during online observations and demonstrated that several images around the brand existed among consumers. In terms of Nike's advocacy advertisements, consumers disagreed with the choice of the spokesperson representing the campaign, arguing that the term sacrificing should not be applied to an athlete, because it instead stands for the sacrifices veterans made. Hence, consumers felt offended by the advertisements and illustrated that by creating parodies of the advocacy campaign, as it can be seen in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Parody of Nike Advocacy Advertising (Virtual Observations: Ubaldo Garcia)

Consumers used a picture of the veteran called Pat Tillman, who was a football player himself but stopped playing professionally after the 09/11 attack to serve in the army and later passed away in a friendly fire. With this parody, consumers highlighted that they perceived Pat Tillman to be a more credible spokesperson than Colin Kaepernick due to his background and show their disagreement with how Nike communicated the political message. Consumers argued that Colin Kaepernick did not sacrifice his life as Pat Tillman did and thus should not be put into relation with the word sacrifice. This perspective and opinion were communicated through parodies, showing the consumers disagreement and moral judgments. Similar consumer behaviour was observed regarding Gillette's campaign, whereby consumers positioned slogans of Gillette's advocacy advertisement on photos where the brand has positioned itself differently. Consumers thereby morally judged the behaviour of the brand by pointing out their anger in a cynic way, also comparing the brand's previous image with the new message of the advocacy advertisement.



Figure 6: Parody of Gillette Advocacy Advertising (*Virtual Observations: Andy Carr*)

As shown in Figure 6 above, Gillette previously created a marketing campaign in which women were dressed in tight suits, promoting Gillette products to men. Accordingly, the current advocacy advertisement was perceived as contradictory and questionable, as it criticizes, in this case, the previously portrayed objectification of women. Consumers recognized the inconsistency between these two marketing campaigns and mirrored this immoral act by creating parodies. In line with Odou and de Pechpeyrou (2011), this highlights the distrust of consumers towards marketing techniques but also supports the argument of Chylinski and Chu (2010), who emphasized the development of suspicious behaviour of consumers towards the intentions behind marketing techniques in general. This also aligns with Bertilsson (2015), who described consumers as having “enlightened disbelief in the morality of brands” (p. 454), which is portrayed in these parodies.

Given these two examples of parodies consumers created, we observed several other images published online surrounding the advocacy advertisements of the analysed brands. This was also described by Kozinets and Handelman (2004), stating that consumers become actively involved in expressing their personal opinions about the brands and their political stances. When consumers raised criticism, an opposing view was spread towards other consumers, and hence, a cynical brand image was created. Our study suggests that consumers made sense of advocacy advertisements by morally judging the brand’s stance and clarifying their opinion in the discussed political debate through parodies. This satire served as an output for the consumer’s moral disagreement, judgment, and criticism, while at the same time, it created different polemic imagery and symbolism around the brand. The images were pointing towards discrepancies, portraying the brand as an immoral actor. In relation to this, the authors Nielsen and McGregor (2013) stated that “morally irresponsible consumer actions are blameworthy and morally responsible consumer actions are praiseworthy” (p. 479). We can transfer this statement to advocacy advertisements, which are either praised or blamed by the consumers, the latter one being in the form of creating a Doppelgänger Brand Image (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006). This aligns with the findings of Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel

(2006) who described these parodies as “a family of disparaging images and stories about a brand that are circulated in popular culture by a loosely organized network of consumers ... in the news and entertainment media” (p. 50). Also, they stressed that these critiques towards a brand are weakening the authenticity. Justified thereby, we identified brand parodies as a critical criterion for the consumers’ perceptions of the advocacy advertisements as being morally authentic. This is also because consumers who are exposed to these parodies might build their moral judgments on these parodies.

6. Concluding Discussion

In the following section, we discuss the findings of the analysis, derived from the primary research in the form of focus groups and virtual observations by connecting them to previous literature and theory. We commence with a summary of the main findings, and present a newfound framework, portraying how consumers form moral judgments on advocacy advertisements. This is followed by a thorough discussion of our findings in the context of previous literature and theory, referring to theoretical contributions and contradictions. We continue by putting these findings on a higher level and arguing what they mean for brands, society, and politics. Finally, we outline our research limitations and provide suggestions and guidance for future research that could contribute to this field.

6.1 How Consumers Morally Judge Advocacy Advertising

This research aimed at gaining an advanced understanding of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising in contemporary consumer culture. What made this a topic of high relevance within academia lies in its contribution to the understanding of changes happening in the world of branding and politics. More and more companies are engaging in political debates without really knowing how consumers morally judge these advocacy campaigns. Similarly, consequences for the society and political system have not been fully understood. Referring back to our research question of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertising, we found that the underlying essence of consumers' moral judgments is their moral identity. Whereas it could be observed that brands intend to frame the morality of society by engaging in political discourses through advocacy advertisements, the present study demonstrates that consumers morally judged advocacy campaigns based on their own identity by referring to their moral beliefs, moral enlightenment and moral feelings in discourses about advocacy advertisements. Whereas the moral identity served as a profound basis, consumers applied this personal moral understanding to judge the alignment between the brand and the political issue in advocacy advertisements. Both the moral identity and consumers' perceptions of the alignment of the brand and issue led consumers to form moral judgments on a brand's advocacy advertisement based on a variety of criteria, including the brand's moral motives, moral responsibility, moral image, moral choice of spokesperson, and moral brand parodies. As shown in Figure 7, we brought the concepts of moral identity, the overarching reference point consumers used to judge advertisements, together with the concept of moral judgments on the alignment between the brand and issue. Connecting these two concepts, ultimately lead to the criteria consumers used to assess the morality of an advocacy advertisement. Based on this conception, we derived the following framework.

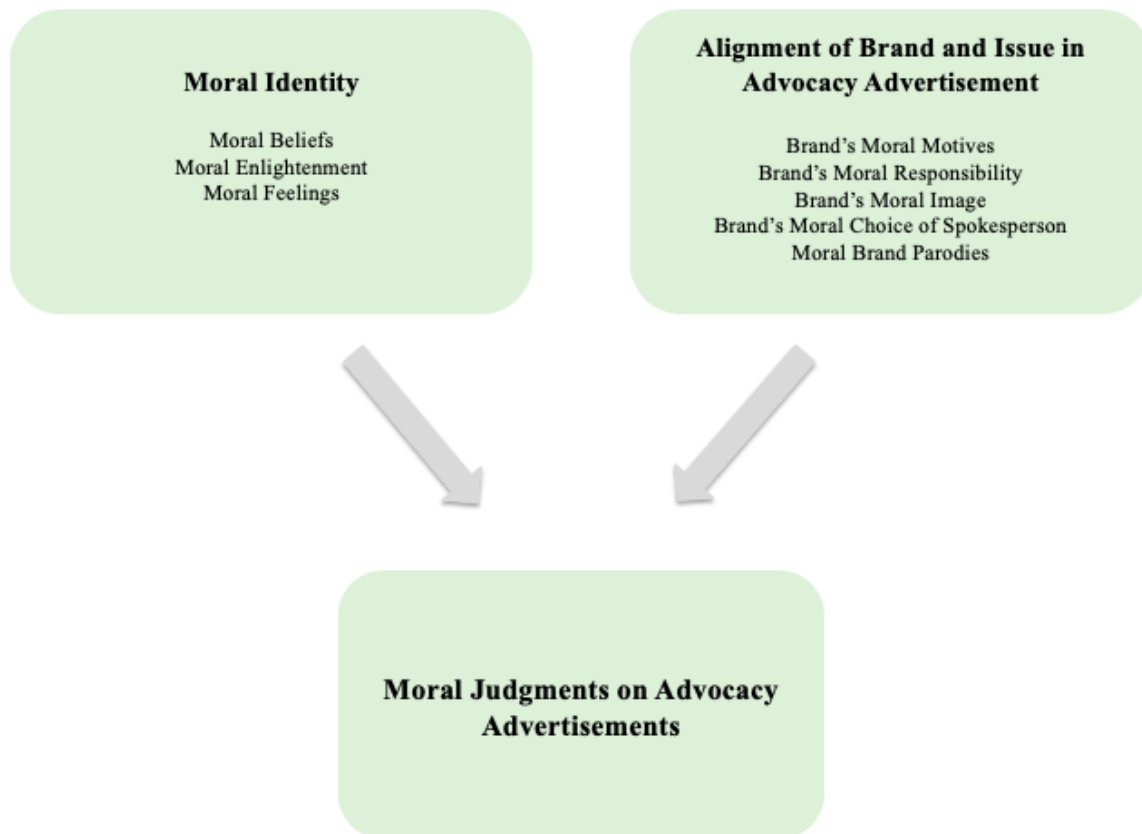


Figure 7: How Consumers Morally Judge Advocacy Advertising (Own Figure, 2019)

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

In the forthcoming sections, we explain the conceptual framework in more detail by positioning our findings in the context of previous literature, either supporting or refuting theories. With this study, we contribute to three relevant literature streams, namely advocacy advertising, advertising-identity, and consumer morality, enhancing the profundity and complexity of these.

The main focus of the present study lied upon the essence of advocacy advertising, which is why a considerable contribution was made in terms of this dimension. Consumers supported the prior notion and definition of advocacy advertising in this study, providing a more current and newer understanding of this phenomenon. Given that most empirical description of campaigns and case studies of advocacy advertisements were conducted in the 80s and 90s, our research poses a current and relevant description of three campaigns from big, international brands. However, the significant contribution of this research lies within the literature stream of consumers' perceptions of advocacy advertising. As thoroughly discussed in the theory chapter, this study highly contributes to Haley's theory (1996) on consumers' perceptions of advocacy advertising. He identified the source of credibility in advocacy advertisements by analysing the consumers' perception of the fit between three components, namely the brand, the issue, and the self.

Drawing upon the correlation of these three crucial factors, we can support vital elements of Haley's study (1996). First, it is important to distinguish that we observed how consumers morally judged an advertisement, whereas Haley's research focused on the credibility of the campaigns. We support his finding that the self, the issue, and the brand are key components of advocacy advertisements. However, we argue that the self is an overarching element that consumers continuously refer to when forming judgments on the brand's advocacy advertisement, hence, being a resource. We contradict with Haley's argument (1996) that the connection of the three factors is a triad, but rather argue that the self, as well as the alignment of the brand and issue, build a profound basis on which consumers form their moral judgments. Thereby, we move to the next crucial distinction of the present study in comparison to Haley (1996). We argue that the goal of advocacy advertising is not to achieve a complete fit between the three components but based on our ontological and epistemological orientation, we believe that is impossible to determine a particular fit between different instances. We argue that consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements and base these judgments of the alignment of the brand and issue as well as on their moral identity. Further, we extend Haley's study (1996) by providing critical evaluation criteria, brands can use to evaluate the release of advocacy advertisements. We are further enhancing the literature stream of advocacy advertising with a relativist and social constructionist point of view, which also broadens the consumer perspective on this type of advertising campaigns.

How consumers morally judge advocacy advertising partly relies on how consumers' moral identity interprets and translates the campaign's message based on their moral beliefs, moral enlightenment, and moral feelings. Consumers relied on their moral interpretations to derive moral meanings from advertisements and to construct their self-concept, which is in line with Elliott & Wattanasuwan (1998), who argued that brands and culture are driven by a constant exchange of meanings, building the self and social identity. Here, advertisements are used as a key resource to establish symbolic meanings and identity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Consumers repeatedly referred to their own moral beliefs, moral enlightenment, and moral feelings in discourses on advocacy advertisements, which supports the findings of various scholars, who argued that the moral identity is the base for moral actions, precisely the formation of moral judgments (Blasi, 1983; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Harter & Monsour, 1992). In our study, we further found that the more consumers were able to identify themselves with the moral beliefs in the message, the more relevant was the advertisement for them. This is supported by various researchers, arguing that the more relevant moral beliefs and values are for the consumers, the more likely are consumers to engage in moral actions, such as moral judgments (Aquino & Reed, 2002).

Further, we identified that consumers rely on their moral enlightenment when forming moral judgments on the campaigns, enhancing the literature stream on moral enlightenment. Consumers morally judged other consumers' political enlightenment in comparison to their own. Consumers felt superior to the moral message and hence argued the advertisement to be more relevant for other consumers, who are less knowledgeable of the issue and the brand. Finally, the present study contributes to the literature stream of moral feelings, which are based on moral beliefs and appeared to play a vital role when consumers morally judged the advocacy

campaigns, which is in line with Pizarro (2000) who argued that emotions are “reliable informers of the moral priorities of an individual” (p. 362). Thereby, our study enhances the conception that moral identity is an essential indicator of the consumers’ moral judgment on advocacy advertising.

Finally, we extend the available literature on consumer morality with key findings on how moral judgments are formed and communicated. As aforementioned, our study shows that consumers judged the morality of a brand’s advocacy advertisements by referring back to their own moral identity. Thus, the present research supports the notion that the moral identity drives moral judgments (Blasi, 1983; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Harter & Monsour, 1992). Further, we developed vital evaluation criteria that consumers applied to judge the advocacy campaigns. Hence, this study contributes to the literature of moral judgments by providing underlying criteria that consumers used to form these opinions. Further, it became popular that there was a distinction between the protagonist, supporting the brand’s moral advocacy message, and the antagonist, discouraging the brand’s efforts and questioning the morality. Therewith, the study supports the research of Luedicke, Thompson and Giesler (2010), arguing for the existence of a supporter and opponent role consumers take on in debates with and about brands.

Further, we combine the concepts of moral judgments and moral authenticity and provide crucial evidence that authenticity and morality are inherently connected concepts. Thereby, we support previous literature arguing that consumers perceive inauthenticity as an immoral act, indicating a clear relation between morality and authenticity (Beverland, Lindgren & Vink, 2008; Beverland, 2005a; Beverland, 2006). Lastly, the present study shows that moral judgments were often expressed through the usage of cynicism towards a brand’s moral authenticity as well as towards other consumers. This supports Bertilsson’s theory (2015), arguing that consumers cynically judge the moral behaviour of the brand and others, referring to cynicism towards the market and cynicism towards the others. As a tool to express this cynical behaviour brand parodies in the form of images with sarcastic and cynical statements were uploaded on the observed platforms by several consumers, pointing towards discrepancies, portraying the brand as an immoral actor. Advocacy advertisements are either praised or blamed by consumers, the latter being in the form of parodies as a *Doppelgänger* Brand Image (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006). Overall, we found interwoven dynamics between the concepts of moral identity, moral judgments, moral authenticity, and cynicism of morality in the context of advocacy advertisements and hence enhance the available literature in all of these streams.

6.3 Managerial Implications

The present study shows that consumers were concerned about various current social and political crises happening in the world and require higher instances to act upon them. Hence, consumers valued brands that acknowledge the fast-changing environment and put effort into making the world a better place. Even though consumers require brands to step up and engage in political debates, it must be an honest attempt with a genuine interest to change something

and not another way to differentiate the brand from competitors. Only if brands are genuinely interested in enforcing social change, consumers perceive it appropriate and legitimate for brands to take a political stance in their advertisements. Previously, companies have engaged in political debates without being aware of how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements and what potential risks could occur. Therefore, it is imperative for brands to understand whether the advocacy campaign resonates with consumers and how they morally judge it. Primarily due to the controversial nature of advocacy messages, it is crucial for brands to understand the elements that ultimately determine the success or failure of advocacy campaigns. Our study suggests that brands must consider a variety of practical implications when releasing an advocacy campaign, engaging in political debates. Brands can apply the previously presented framework to evaluate the success or failure of the potential advocacy advertising campaign as further illustrated in Table 2. Companies must ensure that the brand and the issue align with each other, leaving no space for hypocritical or contradictory behaviour. Thereby, brands need to consider the five criteria that consumers use to form moral judgments on advocacy advertising, namely brand's moral motives, moral responsibility, moral image, moral choice of spokesperson and moral brand parodies. The more morally sound the advocacy advertisement is within the named elements, the more morally authentic and legitimate the advocacy advertising will be understood.

Table 2: Evaluation Criteria of Moral Judgments (Own Table, 2019)

Evaluation Criteria	Positive Judgments	Negative Judgments
Brand's Moral Motives	Genuine/honest intention, Transparency	Egoistic/economic motivation, Hypocritical Behaviour
Brand's Moral Responsibility	Legitimate Moral Position, Expert	Deceptive Moral Position, No Expert
Brand's Moral Image	Consistent Moral Image, Reliable	Inconsistent Moral Image, Unreliable
Brand's Moral Choice of Spokesperson	Authentic alignment with issue	Inauthentic alignment with issue
Moral Brand Parodies	Protagonists	Antagonists

First, the brand's underlying moral motives of the advocacy advertising should be altruistic rather than egoistic, indicating a clear balance of the brand's moral interests and the society's.

It is crucial for brands to combine commercial and cultural meanings and to realise the importance of earning the consumers trust consistently. Companies must show that they are not merely raising awareness through their advertisements, but actually, implement actions enforcing and supporting social change. Consumers could quickly tell the difference between woke washing and a brand's long-term moral involvement in a political issue. Thus, brands must back up their stances with actions and consistency. Second, consumers judged whether it is a brand's moral responsibility to engage in the political debates, implying that a brand must clarify why they are the right actor bringing up this political and polemic discourse. Especially in terms of the brand's hypocritical behaviour, brands must be careful with enforcing political change in one debate, whereas worsening another in a different aspect. Third, the brand's moral image is of importance as brands must choose an issue that truly aligns to the character of the brand for an advocacy advertisement to be morally sound and authentic. If the company intended to change the moral image, consumers appreciated honesty and transparency rather than the covering up of image shifts, eventually leading to condemning images surrounding the brand. Fourth, the choice of the spokesperson who is communicating the issue plays a crucial role and thus must be chosen carefully. The spokesperson must have a clear connection to the brand and issue at hand. Fifth, brand parodies are used by consumers to form moral judgments about advocacy advertisements. Brands must consider the opposing views consumers could possess on the political debate to be prepared for the backlash and sarcastic parodies.

6.4 The Role of Corporations in Contemporary Consumer Culture

This study serves as a posting in a broader debate around the tension between branding, politics, and society. We brought these three actors together and provide a glance at how consumers morally judge advocacy advertisements in contemporary consumer culture. Thereby, we zoom out and put our empirical findings in a broader picture as part of a more significant discussion on how the role of politics and brands are changing. Advertising is a cultural document, comprehending today's world and society. The constant conversation of brands and consumers on the meanings of objects and particularly advertisements enhance the position advertising holds in society. Hence, our study provides critical implications for society and politics as a whole. Advocacy advertising criticizes social standards and lifestyles by enforcing social change in political debates. Moreover, advocacy advertisements have the power to manifest new cultural values in society in which it circulates. It should be carefully considered that advocacy campaigns can change consumers' moral judgments on certain issues and hence appear to advance underlying cultural values. Brands are making use of advocacy advertising in a morally sound way, enabling political movements and debates to gain awareness and importance among society. That way, brands can employ profound meanings in society and particularly in consumers' lives and further remain relevant in contemporary consumer culture. In contrast, an immoral brand advocacy advertisement can diminish the relevance of the political issue by overusing the movement for commercial purposes, eventually leading to consumers becoming annoyed about the topic.

Whereas the present study contributes to the understanding of society, also the political system is affected by our research. As aforementioned, advocacy campaigns frame social norms,

values and ideologies of society, which can eventually lead to changes in the perception of political actors and the system as a whole. Brands can push forward political debates and impact how society is making sense of political issues. Political actors are in the end of the chain, experiencing what brands potentially change in the political enlightenment of consumers. In the present study, consumers highlighted that governments and institutions increasingly fail to solve political issues, which leads to consumers losing trust in the political system. With this loss of trust, brands have increasingly taken on the role as a progressive activist, bringing up political issues and promoting themselves as the solution to the crisis, whereby the government loses control over the political system. Thereby, this study underlines the crucial responsibility brands hold in contemporary consumer culture and politics.

6.5 Research Limitations and Future Research

Finally, we outline our research limitations and provide suggestions on possible future research. The purpose of our study was not to generalize empirical findings, but rather provide a glance at the phenomenon from a descriptive and elusive way. Given that each brand may be morally judged based on different criteria, it is highly recommended for other scholars to collect further empirical material, enhancing the transferability and comprehensiveness of these results. As we chose three case studies, which all are big international corporations, having established a strong brand over decades, it might be challenging to transfer the knowledge generated from this study to smaller and mid-sized companies as well as different industries. Nonetheless, small and mid-sized companies can orient themselves based on the results of this study and should conduct further research to clarify the findings. Especially the consideration of different types of brand categories would be interesting to highlight commonalities and differences in the consumers' moral judgments of advocacy advertisements. Also, the political issue and its degree of controversiality could have impacted the results, which is why research on brands engaging in other political issues would enhance the transferability of the study.

Another limitation lies within the differences between the two chosen data collection methods. It must be acknowledged that virtual observations bring different results than in-person focus groups. Consumers tend to be more polemic on the internet and do not as quickly insult and confront people face to face (Wright, 2018). Possessing this knowledge before the data collection enabled us to stay above this limitation and interpret the findings accordingly. Given the time constraint of this study, we were not able to complete a full netnography study. However, we see great value in this type of research method as it could provide the researchers with in-depth insights on consumers' moral judgments, which is especially apparent in online communications. Additionally, we were not able to conduct a pilot study in that we could test our topic guide due to the time limit. Moreover, the sample of this study, specifically the focus group, was limited to the surrounding people in Lund. We attempted to create a diverse group of people. However, all participants were students, somehow located in Lund, narrowing down the variety of people. It would have been interesting to include other consumers, who may have a different educational background into the focus group to get a more diverse range of perspectives.

Moreover, our study lacks the acknowledgment of cause-effect relationships between consumers' responses, fits, and other relevant factors due to the underlying ontological and epistemological philosophy. We believe that this qualitative study provides a profound basis for a follow-up quantitative study, which can be beneficial, increasing the validation of our findings. Similarly, our study suggests that consumers having the same gender as the spokesperson felt more targeted than the other way around. Moreover, consumers brought up differences in the age that could lead to contrasting moral judgments. Therewith, our study suggests that there is a potential difference in gender and age, providing a clear motivation for scholars to explore differences among consumer characteristics in moral judgments of advocacy advertising, which could eventually enhance the practical applications of this study.

Furthermore, our study could be extended by analysing how meanings are transferred between a brand and the political movement. It would be interesting to explore if a brand is recognized as an integrative component of the movement or whether they are still considered as separate instances. Future researchers can investigate what impact advocacy advertising has on the movement itself and how consumers perception of the issue may alter. Constructing a morally sound advocacy advertisement is complicated and controversial in its nature. Hence, it is crucial to consider all perceptions of society. What we found during our study was that a majority of consumers did not feel targeted by the brands, as minorities were represented in the advertising. Thus, we believe it would be of value to explore if targeted minorities morally judge the advocacy advertising in a different way than the general consumers.

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Appendix

Appendix A Focus Group Guide

Intro

- Welcome - Most of you know us already
- We are currently writing our master thesis on how consumers make sense of advocacy advertising in today's society - brands taking a political stance in their advertisement campaigns
- Happy that you are here to participate - Thank you!

Grounded rules for this focus group e.g.:

- There are no right or wrong answers
- We will tape record the discussion
- We want you to interact with each other, ask questions, comment on each other's experiences/thoughts

Handout and explanation of consent form and research process (Appendix A)

- Maybe it is nice if we do a quick introduction round, where you briefly introduce yourself, such as age, nationality and what you study

We are going to show you three advertisements in total and would like you to just watch and listen to them. Afterwards, you will be asked to share your opinion about the advertisement. We planned approximately a 20-minute discussion per ad.

Nike <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fq2CvmgoO7I&t=5s>

- What do you feel about this advertisement?
- What does this advertisement mean to you personally?
- So do you feel this ad resonates with you?
 - Do you seek any value out of it?
 - Do you think it changes something in your life/ impact on life or yourself?
- Has your perception about the brand changed after having seen this advertisement? If so, how? yess
- Do you perceive it as credible?

Gillette <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koPmuEyP3a0>

- What do you feel about this advertisement?
- What does this advertisement mean to you personally?
 - Do you seek any value out of it?
 - So do you feel this ad resonates with you?
 - Do you think it changes something in your life/ impact on life or yourself?
- Do you perceive it as credible?

- Has your perception about the brand changed after having seen this advertisement? If so, how?

Maybe in general, do you think any advertisement affects you? impacts your life?

Pepsi <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dA5Yq1DLSmQ>

- What do you feel about this advertisement?
- What does this advertisement mean to you personally?
 - Do you seek any value out of it?
- Has your perception about the brand changed after having seen this advertisement? If so, how?
- Do you perceive it as credible?

Summarizing...

- What do you think about brands, such as the three examples we just discussed, taking a political stance in their advertisement? And what does it mean for you if they do so?
- Why do you think it has become a marketing practice?
- Do you think it is risky? What are the pros and cons?

Conclusion

- Of all things, we discussed, what was the most important to you? What do you take out of this discussion?
- Have we missed anything? Do you have any other thoughts you want to share?

Appendix B Evaluation Table of Social Media Platforms

	Nike					Gillette					Pepsi				
Criteria	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E
Facebook	5	1	2	1	1	5	4	5	4	4	1	3	1	1	1
Instagram	5	4	1	5	2	5	4	2	2	5	1	4	2	1	1
YouTube	5	3	4	3	5	5	3	4	5	5	4	3	1	1	4
Twitter	5	3	3	4	5	3	5	2	3	4	2	1	3	2	1

Appendix C Consent Form

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick the appropriate box):

1.	I understand the information about the project.	<input type="radio"/>
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	<input type="radio"/>
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	<input type="radio"/>
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	<input type="radio"/>
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	<input type="radio"/>
6.	If applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, audio, video or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.	<input type="radio"/>
7.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	<input type="radio"/>
8.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	<input type="radio"/>
9.	Select only one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. · I do not want my name used in this project. 	<input type="radio"/>
		<input type="radio"/>
10.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	<input type="radio"/>

Participant:

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Researcher:

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date