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ALL BARK NO BITE?

An explorative case study of BrewDog's Corporate Political Advocacy Campaign

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Our deepest gratitude,

To our supervisor Howard Nothhaft for his extensive knowledge and valuable guidance. We would also like to thank the Institution of Strategic Communication for three enlightening and exciting years, and express our appreciation to our loved ones for always supporting us.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Olivia Dinér', with a large, stylized 'D' at the end.

Olivia Dinér

22th May, 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alice Sävman', with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Alice Sävman

ABSTRACT

In times of political divisiveness, Corporate Political Advocacy (CPA) has emerged as a commonly used communication strategy whereby brands voice support for socio-political issues. Despite its increasing prominence, research of CPA in the field of strategic communication is scarce. Therefore, this qualitative study examines BrewDog, a company inclined to engage in conversations that hold strategic significance, demonstrating a long history of CPA. Renowned as a challenger brand, BrewDog embodies a distinct culture of punk ethos fostered by its entrepreneurial leaders. Given these characteristics, it was no surprise when the company marked its opposition to Qatar and FIFA by launching the *Anti-sponsor of the World F*Cup* campaign. The political stance triggered a significant backlash against BrewDog; despite this, the brand managed to gain market shares. This contradictory outcome motivated the research objectives of analysing along which dimensions BrewDog was criticised and how the brand strategically communicated to counter the backlash. Through a qualitative content analysis and inductive coding, five dimensions of criticism spawned from the analysis: *Motives*, *Congruence*, *Practices*, *Independence* and *Sacrifice*. These represent crucial aspects for achieving authentic CPA and are summarised in the proposed theoretical framework MCPIS, serving as a guiding tool for companies engaging in CPA. Finally, the study concludes that BrewDog's entrepreneurial leadership and punk ethos mitigated the negative effects of the backlash.

Keywords: Corporate Political Advocacy, Authenticity, Woke-washing, Entrepreneurial Leadership, CEO Activism, Challenger Brand, BrewDog

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1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2010, Qatar was awarded the hosting rights to the 2022 FIFA World Cup, becoming the first country in the Middle East ever to do so (Ramsay, 2022). The announcement sparked a massive debate worldwide following numerous accusations of corruption and claims of Qatar purchasing the World Cup. Additionally, concerns regarding Qatar's violations of human rights, particularly those of migrant workers, rapidly emerged. As a result of the controversy, the subsequent years were marked by contentious discussions of Qatar's women's rights, alcohol restrictions, and criminalisation of homosexuality, with the latter becoming the most significant issue in Western media coverage.

A company that decided to join this conversation was the highly controversial brewery BrewDog, by taking a bold stance when launching the *Anti-Sponsor of the World F*Cup* campaign. With the founders' mindset of "*Start a revolution, not a business*" (Watt, 2015, p. 18), there is no surprise that the company engaged in the heated political debate. BrewDog's stand signifies the emerging communication strategy of Corporate Political Advocacy (henceforth CPA), indicating that a new important actor has entered the political arena; corporate business.

1.1 Problematisation

With the year of 2023 being marked by institutional imbalance, businesses are pressured to fill the void left by the government and are correspondingly wading into socio-political issues (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021). This turning point implies that voicing political stances is no longer a question of whether to engage, but how to do so. As a result, the phenomenon of CPA has emerged as a clever communication strategy employed by an increasing number of corporations. CPA entails taking stances on polarised issues and is consequently equipped with high risks. One company with frequent use of CPA is BrewDog. As a challenger brand driven by entrepreneurial leaders, BrewDog has strategically been taking political stances as part of its growth strategy. In their *Anti-sponsor* campaign, the brand voiced a stand against FIFA and Qatar, which triggered a massive backlash towards BrewDog. Despite facing heavy criticism, BrewDog managed to increase profit and gain market shares (Brand Finance, 2022). Given this contradictory outcome, BrewDog represents an interesting case to study.

1.2 Purpose & Research Questions

The present paper aims to extend the literature on CPA by studying a challenger brand with entrepreneurial leaders engaging in this form of activism. This will be done by identifying critical dimensions to consider when taking divisive socio-political stances and illustrating strategic response strategies when facing the communicative challenge of a backlash. In this way, the research offers valuable insights for organisations seeking to navigate today's politicised business market. The problematization and purpose have led to the following research questions:

- Along which dimensions were BrewDog criticised for the CPA campaign?
- How did BrewDog strategically communicate to counter the backlash?

1.3 Relevance for Strategic Communication

CPA is a goal-oriented communication strategy enabling corporations to engage in conversations that hold strategic significance. This accords with Zerfass et al. (2018, p. 493) definition of strategic communication as “[...] *the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals*”. The act of engaging in strategic conversations provides an avenue for organisations to exhibit moral principles and has emerged as a pivotal factor for companies (Hill, 2020; Falkheimer, 2014). The debate concerning FIFA and Qatar represents such strategic significant conversation, which anchors the case of BrewDog in the field of strategic communication. Falkheimer (2014) adds that social, political, and economic developments have contributed to a growing interest in strategic communication, and Zerfass et al. (2018) further emphasise the importance of strategically communicating under conditions of uncertainty, where BrewDog's backlash represents such an unpredictable situation.

2 BACKGROUND

In the following section, the case company of BrewDog is described with the structure of: background, leadership, culture, position and marketing. It ends with a presentation of the *Anti-sponsor* campaign and illustration of the campaign billboards.

2.1 BrewDog

BrewDog is a Scotland-based craft brewery founded in 2007 by the two university friends, James Watt and Martin Dickie (Watt, 2015). Since then, the entrepreneurs have been on a mission to “*revolutionise the beer industry in the UK and completely redefine British beer-drinking culture*” (Watt, 2015, p. 9). What started off as two humans and a dog crafting beer in a garage have given way to a thriving multi-million-dollar enterprise. Only four years after the establishment of BrewDog, the company was placed on Forbes’ inaugural *30 Under 30* list, being described as growing ‘meteoric’ (Stoller, 2020), and thus ranked as UK’s fastest-growing food- and drink brand (Scottish Financial Review, 2019). BrewDog is currently ranked 14th on the global list (Brand Finance, 2022) and is closing the gap to its competitors, moving towards a top-dog position while riding on the wave of craft beer.

The leadership of BrewDog

Behind this journey of a small brewing company lies a distinct leadership style, namely: entrepreneurial leadership. Watt and Dickie are described as two proactive and risk-taking leaders opposing the conventional leadership script in business (Smith, 2018). In James Watt’s biographical business book, *Business For Punks: Break All the Rules* (Watt, 2015), the CEO argues that “*The fast-track to failure is to take no risk at all*” (p. 43), followed by “*Comfort zones are places where average people do mediocre things*” (p. 199). This mindset corresponds with Tarabishy et al. (2002) description of the entrepreneurial leader as self-confident and inclined to operate in ambiguous and uncertain markets. The leaders’ entrepreneurial spirit is further evident as they oppose the gap-in-the-market approach, calling it an “*Outdated fallacy*” (Watt, 2015, p. 21). Instead, BrewDog looked to create its own market, which ties in with the entrepreneurial leader’s tendency to question ruling conventions and established practices (Smith, 2018).

The Culture of BrewDog

The bold and risk-taking entrepreneurial leadership carrying BrewDog has impacted the brand's culture, fostering a punk mentality. Watt (2015) describes, "*We are passionate, we don't give a damn [...] our approach has been anti-authoritarian and non-conformist from the word go*" (p. 8). This expression signals their punk ethos and anti-establishment attitude, which serves as the moral compass permeating the company. Unlike its competitors, BrewDog's culture embraces confrontation and encourages fans to rebel through a loud and proud approach (Hodgson, n.d).

The position of BrewDog

In line with their punk mentality, Watt (2015) argues that BrewDog seeks to reject the status quo, tear down the establishment and challenge the large industry players, and add that "*Business is no longer about over-qualified suited bigwigs in stuffy boardrooms. It is about ordinary people having the guts and the vision to do extraordinary things.*" (p. 249) Along these lines, the company has positioned itself as a challenger brand, primarily targeting the beer market leaders, such as Carlsberg, Heineken and Budweiser (Brand Finance, 2022). This challenger position has set the tone for BrewDog's marketing, demonstrating a long history of CPA, guerilla marketing and high-risk PR stunts. By continuously taking stances for what they believe in, BrewDog argues that they managed to "*shake up a stuffy industry*" (Watt, 2015, p. 102). For instance, BrewDog's launch of what is proclaimed the world's first protest beer signals an evident CPA effort. By provocatively labelling a beer 'Hello, My Name is Vladimir' with a pink label, the company voiced support for the LGBTQ+ community by protesting against the anti-gay rhetoric of Vladimir Putin (BBC News, 2014). In addition, Brewdog's dispatch of fat cats from the air over London aiming to mock the fat cat banker caricature represents another stance (Watt, 2015) and is what Smith (2018) terms as deliberately offensive marketing. BrewDog has repeatedly been criticised for provocative marketing, but the two leaders seem to have no intention of stopping taking political stances of this nature.

2.2 "Anti-Sponsor of the World F*Cup"

In November 2022, BrewDog made headlines with another CPA campaign: *Anti-sponsor of the World F*Cup*. The campaign targeted FIFA and Qatar with the objective to alarm Qatar's violation of human rights. In explaining the campaign, BrewDog underscored the significance of inclusion and human rights in the realm of football but went beyond mere

criticism of the event, as BrewDog pledged to donate a portion of its profits to human rights charities:

“Football is meant to be for everyone. But in Qatar, homosexuality is illegal, flogging is an accepted form of punishment, and it’s OK for 6,500 workers to die building your stadium. That’s why we kicked off. And we’re putting our money where our mouth is, with all the profits from our Lost Lager sold during the tournament going to fight human rights abuse” (BrewDog, 2022).

The campaign, produced by the advertising agency Saatchi&Saatchi, made waves both on the streets of London and online. It utilised eye-catching billboards featuring daring slogans such as “Proud Anti-sponsor of the World F*Cup”, “The Beautiful Shame”, “Eat, Sleep, Bribe, Football”, and “First Russia, then Qatar. Can’t wait for North Korea” (Brewdog, 2022), signalling BrewDog’s political stance against Qatar as host of the greatest football tournament in the world. Although this stance could be perceived as a reflection of the company’s goodwill and commitment to human rights, the campaign faced a substantial backlash involving the questioning of the campaign’s motives, BrewDog’s record of labour allegations and the company’s decision to sell beer in Qatar. The backlash will be accounted for in the analysis.



Appendix A. Campaign billboards

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter comprises a literature review of previous research relating to the emergence of the political corporation, leading to the development of CPA, and ends with the identified gaps in the research field this thesis intends to bridge.

Historically, corporations tended to refrain from publicly exposing political stances, as such actions risked negative repercussions on their business (Korschun & Craig, 2018). However, attitudes have shifted over time, and previous research articulates the recent turn in brand management where companies align with socio-political issues (Key et al., 2021). Key et al. (2021) mark this as a paradigm shift referring to the emergence of the ‘political corporation’, which resulted from the decreased trust in formal political institutions (Edelman, 2022). Given this, businesses are increasingly attributed the role of political actors, leading them to engage in CPA.

The roots of the political corporation emanate from the 1980s, when the corporate social responsibility (henceforth CSR) movement gained momentum, impelling more companies to consider the societal and environmental impact of their practices (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019). Sen et al. (2016) define CSR as “*A firm’s or brand’s commitment to maximise long-term economic, societal, and environmental well-being through business practices, policies, and resources*” (p. 70), n.b. the absence of political responsibilities. Due to the advent of the political corporation, scholars (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021) argue that businesses today are required to address a broader scope of responsibilities: including the political realm. Wettstein and Baur (2016) add that CPA can be perceived as an integral part of a company’s CSR if it meets specific criteria, that is, the stance showing consistency with the company’s values and supporting its long-term strategy while being authentically backed up with actions. Eilert and Nappier Cherup (2020) also situates CPA in the context of CSR but conversely stress that corporate political advocacy is a separate construct worthy of investigation. The distinction between CSR and CPA is further strengthened by Vasquez (2022), highlighting that CPA is considered more goal-focused, controversial, and addresses challenges aiming to alter the status quo. Accordingly, Eilert and Nappier Cherup (2020) argue that corporate activism is more likely to result in negative feedback due to its controversial nature. Weber et al. (2023) add that the socio-political stance is generally disconnected from the firm’s core business and often relates to partisan issues. This contrasts

with the practice of CSR, which instead is low in partisanship and rather focuses on issues involving high societal consensus (Bhagwat et al., 2020).

According to Wettstein and Baur (2016), CPA is a promotional, public communication and involves “*voicing or showing explicit and public support for certain individuals, groups, or ideals and values with the aim of convincing and persuading others to do the same*” (p. 200). Previous research in the field of CPA (Klostermann et al., 2022; Hydock et al., 2019; Weber et al., 2023; Wettstein & Baur, 2016) defines the practice as a form of brand activism in which companies take a public stance on a controversial socio-political issue, and thus departs from the traditional view that corporations should remain neutral (Austin et al., 2019). The choice to engage in CPA is not only driven by a company’s inherent inclination to be perceived as responsible, but also by the public’s increasing pressure on corporations to adopt a political activist role (Hillman et al., 2004). According to Edelman (2022), 58% of consumers today advocate brands based on their expressed socio-political positions and values. Consequently, consumers hold businesses accountable for an extended scope of responsibilities (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021), making businesses increasingly dependent on gaining legitimacy from the public (Salvador & Ikeda, 2018). To conclude, in the vacuum of trust for governmental authorities and the shift of power, corporations seem to be the remaining trusted institutions (Edelman, 2022), resulting in CPA emerging as a crucial communication strategy (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Corporations’ influential role in the political realm has triggered an increasing number of brands applying the strategy of CPA in their marketing (Mirzaei et al., 2022). Academics mark this as a proactive approach (Moorman, 2020) as it creates new opportunities for brands to signal their responsibilities toward social issues while increasing profit and brand awareness (Alhouti et al., 2016). A noticed trend among previous researchers addressing the phenomenon of CPA is a predominant focus on multinational brands. Hoffmann et al. (2020) are among the scholars investigating Nike, one of the pioneers in activism marketing, and its CPA campaign *Dream Crazy*, starring the American football player Colin Kaepernick. In 2016, Kaepernick initiated a widespread controversy by kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality motivated by racial discrimination (Kemp, 2022). By giving Kaepernick a voice, Nike expressed solidarity for a larger cause: racial injustice, while driving profit and receiving publicity. Ciszek and Logan (2018) also explored CPA efforts addressing racial inequality by analysing the backlash Ben & Jerry received when

demonstrating support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Ben & Jerry's act of openly supporting Black Lives Matter garnered significant criticism, and supporters of the counter movement, Blue Lives Matter, called for a boycott. Despite the backlash, the company stood their ground and continued advocating for the stance. Similarly, Trott (2022) examined the backlash Gillette experienced when launching the CPA campaign *The best men can be*. The campaign aimed to expose toxic masculinity and enabled Gillette to align itself with the #MeTooMovement. The company's stance was met with thousands of critical comments, accusing Gillette of playing into the 'feminist Agenda'. Champlin et al. (2019) argue that gender inequality is another social issue that has become popular to advertise, and Trott (2022) highlights the balancing act corporations face when engaging in such topics.

As accounted for in the literature review above, there is a paramount focus on mature companies, as in the cases of Nike, Ben & Jerry and Gillette (Hoffman et al., 2020; Ciszec & Logan, 2017; Trott, 2022). Among these researches, consensus prevailed regarding the need for future research to investigate smaller corporations' involvement in CPA, which is why the present study, analysing a challenger brand, is considered relevant. Scholars further argue that future research can contribute to the field by identifying different ways of decoding CPA (Hoffman et al., 2020; Weber et al., 2023). As the present study employs inductive coding, it advances a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and untangles important aspects when exercising CPA, thus expanding the research field. Moreover, Mirzaei et al. (2022) call for future studies to quantitatively examine the negative reactions arrived through divisive stances to statistically prove its impact on authenticity. On that account, the present paper assists in bridging this gap since a quantitative part is presented in the analysis.

To date, a scarce amount of studies have explored important aspects to consider when applying CPA in real-world advertisements. To fill this void, this study sheds light on a heavily criticised CPA campaign and investigates along which dimensions BrewDog was criticised. In addition, we strive to further add to the growing literature of CPA by examining how three core pillars of a business: leadership, position and culture, impact a brand's ability to counter the strategic communicative challenge of a backlash.

4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The following section provides a tailored theoretical background examining several interlocking concepts of relevance for the case of BrewDog. Initially, CPA is explained including the related concept of Brand-Cause Fit, while also addressing the challenge posed by the dichotomy between Authenticity and Woke-washing. The chapter further delves into two leadership theories of Entrepreneurial Leadership and CEO Activism, and ends with a theoretical understanding of Challenger Brands.

4.1 Corporate Political Advocacy

As corporations today adopt positions on controversial political and social issues, Corporate Political Advocacy has emerged as a strategic communication practice in which brands voice a public stance on a sociopolitical concern (Hydock et al., 2019; Wettstein & Baur, 2016). A variety of terms referring to such activism are used among scholars, including corporate activism, corporate socio-political activism, and corporate political advocacy (Weber et al., 2023). Thus, these terms will be employed interchangeably in the present paper.

With the politicisation of the business environment (Van der Meer & Jonkman, 2021), brands are expected to wade into political issues making CPA a vital strategy to preserve legitimacy among stakeholders and remain competitive in the fragmented marketplace (Lock & Seele, 2018; Moorman, 2020). CPA implies showing explicit support for issues such as abortion, LBTGQ+, racial justice or same-sex marriage. The stance is often disconnected from the firm's core business and rather aims to challenge the status quo and convey the corporation's political values (Weber et al., 2023). Dodd and Supa (2015) further describe this growing practice as goal-focused, with an emphasis on doing good while generating organisational financial outcomes. The communication strategy of CPA opposes conventional business wisdom that recommends corporations to remain neutral on controversial topics (Austin et al., 2019).

On that account, CPA is a balancing act of managing the fine line between corporate activism as an intentional strategy for increasing profits and simultaneously genuinely advocating for societal change (Hill, 2020). Because of enterprises' inherent desire to sell products and enhance brand image, companies are often met with consumer scepticism and scrutiny of the motives underpinning the CPA efforts (Champlin et al., 2019; Holt, 2002). Hill's (2020) study

of the motivations behind companies' decisions to engage in socio-political controversies revealed that strategic commercial purposes drive the underlying rationales in most cases. It was found that the urge for social- and financial capital predominantly spurred businesses' engagement in CPA, despite companies insisting on the opposite, i.e. proclaiming corporate activism as a way for representing moral principles and fostering actual societal changes. Consequently, consumers tend to infer the CPA act as initiated and based on self-oriented reasons, i.e. either as a purely profit-oriented effort or as a marketing ploy to stimulate word-of-mouth (Mirzaei et al., 2022). In turn, these judgments impede the chance of the firm's socio-political activism to be seen as genuine (Alhouti et al., 2016). Clearly, the motivations underpinning CPA campaigns are interwoven with ethical issues, and consumers value the motives of such campaigns determinant for the effectiveness of the campaign (Bloom et al., 2006; Freeman, 2017). By these means, in the best cases, the motives should be based on an interest in society, namely: other-centred (Mirzaei et al., 2022) or values-driven (Austin et al., 2019).

Corporate political advocacy is not only a challenging practice due to consumers' scepticism but also carries significant risks as society today is characterised by political divisiveness (Hydock et al., 2020; Edelman, 2023). When engaging in polarised issues, companies risk alienating certain target groups by uttering support for one side of a partisan issue (Moorman, 2020). The controversial nature of CPA generates bimodal consumer responses, depending on the degree of alignment between the consumer's values and the position adopted by the brand. Neilson (2010) classifies the bimodal reactions into 'buycotters', supporting the firm's stance, and 'boycotters', opposing the stance in protest. In most cases, CPA provokes negative sentiments from boycotters (Dodd & Supa, 2015) when advancing the interests of smaller segments of the population. This intensifies the risks of a backlash (Weber et al., 2023; Park & Jiang, 2020).

4.1.1 Brand-Cause Fit

A related concept in the field of CPA is brand-cause fit, which Lafferty (2007) defines as the degree of alignment between the socio-political cause and the brand. Brand-cause fit is also termed congruence (Joo et al., 2019) and serves as a moderating variable influencing the outcomes- and consumer responses of a CPA effort (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). A perceived discrepancy between the company and the addressed stance is referred to as a low fit, which

risks harming a company's reputation and affecting financial outcomes negatively (Zhang, 2021). In contrast, companies displaying an evident match with the political issue run a higher chance of being perceived as authentic, thus improving the effects of CPA campaigns (Champlin et al., 2019).

Champlin et al. (2019) classify the fit between a brand and a cause in three different ways. Initially, a functional match is referred to as a coherence between a firm's offer and the endorsed cause, for instance, a plant-based company advocating veganism. Secondly, an image match implies a correlation between the brand's core values and its stance. According to Maathuis et al. (2004), image fit is argued to have the most substantial positive impact on corporate reputation. The third type is target audience match, in which the consumer's values are in accordance with the socio-political standpoint. Academics (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021; Bundy et al., 2018) argue that consumers are more inclined to support and respond favourably to the CPA action when a brand and its stakeholders share common values and political positions.

In contrast, scholars (Bloom et al., 2006; Zasuwa, 2017; Yoon et al., 2006) have found that low-fit campaigns might be beneficial in some cases. More specifically, Guzmán and Davis (2017) argue that a poor functional fit, i.e. lack of overlap between core business and cause, is deemed more positive as consumers tend to view the motives behind the CPA as more altruistic, generating credibility. Zasuwa (2017) adds that a too strong fit triggers consumer cynicism, where they suspect the campaign being opportunistic and motivated by commercial gain, which points to the dichotomous debate about the moderating effect of brand-cause fit. Therefore, businesses need to consider the role of brand-cause fit when advocating pro-social messages in their marketing efforts.

4.1.2 Corporate Authenticity

“Authenticity is the benchmark against which all brands are now judged”

- John Grant (2000)

Beverland (2009) refers to Berger (1973) when defining authenticity as “*the manifestation of the search for what is real*” (s. 17) and explains that the term ‘authentic’ stems from the Latin *Authenticus*, meaning genuine. According to Edelman's *Trust Barometer Study* of 2022,

postmodern society is described as an era of distrust. The research reveals that 63% of consumers are convinced of having been lied to by business leaders, followed by 59% that tend to express distrust until they are met with evidence of trustworthiness (Edelman, 2022). Hence, Edelman (2022) stresses the importance of providing credible and fact-based information to break the distrust cycle. For that reason, the concept of authenticity seems to carry even more weight, which has resulted in the authenticity of a brand surpassing the role of quality as a decisive criterion when making purchases (Gilmore & Pine, 2007).

A common note among scholars (Holt, 2002; Morhart et al., 2015; Edelman, 2022; Beverland, 2009) is the vital role of the consumers on the subject of authenticity. As companies depend on the public's perceptions of them, consumers are put in a position of power, enabling them to be the decision-makers and actively judge whether a company is authentic. Consequently, it is crucial for companies to exhibit trustworthy values to avoid consumers suspecting concealed egocentric motives (Holt, 2002). Stakeholders' quest for the genuine has developed as a determining factor for the survival of brands (Morhart et al., 2015), and authenticity is essential for gaining word-of-mouth support (Beverland, 2009). However, being a for-profit business denying any interest in commercial gains to prove genuineness illustrates the contradictory nature of authenticity.

In the context of corporate activism, Mirzaei et al. (2022) specifically mention convincing the public of authenticity as a significant challenge when engaging in CPA. According to Vredenburg et al. (2020), brands undertake authentic CPA when they match their company values and activist message with their practices. Dodd and Supa (2014) agree and conclude that a company is authentic when the socio-political stance is disconnected from the company's bottom line. Another criterion for authentic corporate activism is contended by Moorman (2020), adding that the activist practice has to be executed in a way that connects with the target audience in an authentic manner.

4.1.3 Woke-washing

Woke-washing represents the opposite of authenticity and relates to brands' attempts to give the impression of socio-political consciousness but lacks a basis for actual societal change (Vredenburg et al., 2020). It is a way of misleading consumers by appearing as genuinely opting for societal improvements while only acting for egoistic reasons, serving the

company's reputation and objectives (Austin et al., 2019). In this vein, Vredenburg et al. (2020) stress that CPA efforts risk being judged by consumers as superficial woke-washing initiatives if the message neither corresponds to the values and image of the brand nor is reflected in the practices.

In recent years, the notion of woke-washing has intensified due to the emergence of the "woke consumer" (Mirzaei et al., 2022). As consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of social and political concerns, they tend to make purchase decisions based on companies' standpoints (Amed et al., 2019). In other words, the increased consciousness is reflected in changed consumption habits implying that consumerism today goes beyond the functional value of products or services, and the woke consumers are instead emphasising brands' symbolic values. This represents a shift to identity-based consumption, where brands are used as symbolic means for completing identities and have become important signifiers reflecting buyers' values (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2017). Since symbolic brands facilitate identity expression, individuals today show a higher interest in brands correlating with their identity and those considered ethical (Johnson & Chattaraman, 2021). Therefore, woke-washing has spawned as a commonly used term in the field of CPA.

4.2 Entrepreneurial Leadership

The earliest definition of Entrepreneurial Leadership (henceforth EL) is attributed to Lippitt (1987), who conceptualised the entrepreneurial leader as capable of taking risks, being innovative and having an economic orientation. Smith (2018) further argues that EL is characterised by questioning ruling conventions rather than issuing orders and following established practices, and is marked by proactiveness enhancing business performance (Covin & Slevin, 2002). Additionally, Tarabishy et al. (2002) describe the entrepreneurial leader as self-confident and transformational, unafraid of operating in uncertain markets (McGrath & MacMillan, 2000).

Renko et al. (2015) and Gupta and Singh (2014) present EL as a distinctive leadership style that guides employees' collaborative performance and the business towards achieving organisational goals. EL is a purpose-driven leadership involving goal-oriented communication, i.e. strategic communication (Zerfass et al., 2018). In addition, Greenberg et al. (2013) suggest that entrepreneurial leaders are driven by their commitment to social- and

environmental responsibilities, which signals a departure from businesses' traditional focus on maximising sales and shareholder value, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between business and society. In view of this, entrepreneurial leaders are inclined to engage in the socio-political realm, and an organisation's political stances are often a by-product of the leaders' values (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Another stream of research points to the importance of EL in the dynamic and competitive business environment (Li et al., 2020; McGrath & MacMillan, 2000). Not only does the current business market comprise an environment where corporations are required to adopt the role of political actors (Edelman, 2023), but the market has also shifted from a stable to an unstable climate due to the increase of globalisation and technological advancements (French, 2015). Organisations operating in this uncertain environment must embrace new leadership, as focusing on the known will hinder companies from thriving (Greenberg et al., 2013). According to McGrath and MacMillan (2000), an entrepreneurial mindset is an approach to business that capitalises on the advantages of uncertainty. As identifying and exploiting opportunities, challenging norms and taking risks is at the core of entrepreneurial leadership (Lippitt, 1987; Smith, 2018; Currie et al., 2008), this mindset can contribute to a competitive edge (Greenberg et al., 2013). The strength of the entrepreneurial leader is further confirmed by Ireland et al. (2003) finding that organisations that successfully manage uncertainty tend to outperform those unable to cope with this.

4.2.1 CEO Activism

Given the transformational entrepreneurial leader's desire to induce societal change, it is no surprise that such leaders are inclined to CEO activism. Hambrick and Wowak (2021) contend that CEO activism stems from the personal values of the CEO and define it as "*a business leader's personal and public expression of a stance on some matter of current social or political debate*" (p. 1).

Contrary to the conventional belief that CEOs should refrain from expressing stances on discordant issues (Korschun & Craig, 2018), an increase in the number of CEOs who express their views on such matters is identified. The trend of leader activism in public debates has drawn considerable public attention, resulting in 60% of consumers expecting CEOs to speak publicly about controversial issues (Edelman, 2022). Branicki et al. (2021) propose that CEO

activism holds significant influence due to the leader's high visibility and associated positional and resource-based power.

CEO activism should, however, be distinguished from traditional activism, referring to bottom-up protests by nonstate actors, as the CEO's formal authority puts them in a position to directly prompt change, at least within the context of the organisations they lead (Branicki et al., 2021). Even though CEOs have a greater chance to generate change, CEO activism, similar to CPA, carries inherent risks. According to Hambrick and Wowak (2021), consumers view CEO activism positively only when it is perceived as being driven by values closely linked to the core business of the company. Therefore, the company's leadership constitutes a factor consumers use to validate the candour of corporate activism (Dowling, 2006).

4.3 Challenger Brand

Characterised as being visionary, unconventional, boundary-pushing and maverick (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2009), challenger brands are competing with passion against the market hegemonies (Paharia et al., 2011) by challenging market norms in radical and innovative manners (Haxthausen, 2004).

The term challenger brand was coined initially by Adam Morgan in his book *Eat Big Fish* (Morgan, 2009) and is often referred to as a strategy for positioning the company in a saturated market. The focal point of this strategy is to differentiate the firm by challenging established market wisdom and questioning the status quo. More specifically, a challenger brand is “[...] *trying to carve out a niche for itself in the market, to say that it is doing something different*” (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2009, p. 75), i.e. employing the blue-ocean strategy where companies create new demands and enter unexplored market spaces, untainted by competitors (Kim & Mauborgne, 2004). Furthermore, to differentiate oneself, the challenger brand adopts a counter-culture attitude and communicates provocative narratives with frequent use of wit, humour and shock tactics (Morgan, 2011). Due to their boundary-breaking nature, challenger brands are often referred to as market-driven firms, pushing new ideas to gain sustainable competitive advantage towards existing alternatives (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2009).

As a challenger brand is constructed in relation to another brand and often portrayed against the market leaders (Paharia et al., 2011), they share many similarities with underdog brands, defined as *“a brand with humble resources that competes with passion and determination against competitors that dominate a market”* (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021, p. 85). Both challenger- and underdog brands are generally new entrants into the market and can, therefore, utilise the ‘underdog brand effect’, i.e. gather support from consumers sympathising with the brands being perceived as less privileged and disadvantaged, similar to the David-Goliath story (Paharia et al., 2011). However, Morgan (2009) emphasises one distinction between challenger- and underdog brands: the rate of success, where challenger brands are more apt to succeed.

5 METHODOLOGY

In this section, the research design is explained including the scientific approaches of ontology and epistemology. This is followed by an outline of the methods that have been used to collect, analyse and code the empirical data, and ends with ethical considerations and methodological reflections.

5.1 Research Design

In an explorative manner, a qualitative method is applied to our research as this approach allows us to develop a deeper understanding of a phenomenon in social reality and is appropriate when striving to answer ‘how-questions’ (Silverman, 2017). The qualitative researcher seeks to contribute with knowledge and meaning rather than general descriptions (Salmons, 2016). Accordingly, a qualitative approach corresponds with this study’s objective of providing an in-depth understanding of critical dimensions to consider when undertaking CPA, and exploring how BrewDog strategically communicated to counter the backlash. In qualitative studies, it is vital to reflect upon the philosophical approaches of ontology and epistemology, as the scientific stances assist in explaining how the researchers view the world and relate to knowledge (Silverman, 2017). This research adopts an ontological approach of social constructivism and constructivist epistemology. As social constructivist researchers, we operate from the premise that people construct their own realities and interpret the world in unique manners (Salmons, 2016). Therefore, this research assumes that consumers create meaning and interpret BrewDog’s campaign based on personal perceptions of the social world, but also that BrewDog constructs their responses to express their own view of reality. The constructivist epistemological perspective entails that knowledge is subjective and actively constructed by individuals through social interactions (Silverman, 2017). Consequently, this scientific approach raises the question of whether anyone can be right if everything is subjective? We argue that even though people construct subjective understandings of reality, the interpretations are often based on quick decisions and incomplete information. In terms of BrewDog’s campaign, critics may have expressed opinions without having access to all relevant information. Therefore, while our interpretations may not be objectively true, they are based on a careful and systematic examination of all available data related to the campaign. Furthermore, as researchers, we critically evaluated how our perspectives influenced the research process, allowing us to develop more nuanced and self-aware interpretations, thus strengthening our findings.

5.2 Case Study

A single case study methodology was employed, which according to Yin (2014), is an empirical inquiry that examines a contemporary phenomenon in-depth, hence ties in well with the paper's qualitative design. Case studies are particularly appropriate for explorative studies, as it allows for investigation of key characteristics, meanings, and implications of a complex case in a real-world context.

As shown in the Background Chapter, BrewDog represents an interesting entity to study due to its distinctive entrepreneurial leadership, the company culture of punk ethos, and its position as a challenger brand (Watt, 2015). The preference for analysing the *Anti-sponsor* campaign is due to the heavy criticism it received, enabling us to provide unique insights into which dimensions to consider when facing negative outcomes of a CPA effort. Additionally, since the paper aims to answer how BrewDog strategically communicated to counter the public backlash, a case study was deemed a favourable method due to its proneness for answering 'how-questions' (Yin, 2014). The case study enables us to obtain empirical data from real people in their natural setting, allowing us to make an original contribution to the emerging research field of CPA and open up new directions for future research.

5.3 Data Collection

Twitter was selected as the data collection source as it represents the platform BrewDog most frequently updates and was one of the primary mediums where the campaign was launched. According to Frost (2020), Twitter serves as a catalyst for social change and is a convenient platform for promoting causes and taking stands, i.e. engaging in CPA. As the platform is used by both companies and individuals, it presents an opportunity for businesses to connect with their stakeholders and facilitates two-way communication. Everyone can participate, raise their voice and discuss topical conversations. With Twitter's features of retweeting, commenting and replying to comments, information and standpoints are rapidly disseminated, reaching a broad audience. However, given these attributes, Twitter is also the most prominent public platform on which consumers protest corporate actions (Berman et al., 2019). Consequently, this data collection source offered us rich and easily accessed empirical material and a comprehensive insight into the backlash of the campaign.

5.4 Criterion Sampling

Criterion sampling was deemed appropriate and implies retrieving empirical material based on certain predetermined criteria. This sampling method tallies with qualitative research as it enables the researchers to gather rich data (Bryman, 2018). In this present research, the data from Twitter was derived on three grounds:

1. Initially, a time frame was set. It ranges from the 7th of November 2022, that is, the campaign's launch date, to the 20th of December 2022, when the last post relating to the campaign was detected. This criterion relates to both consumer comments and BrewDog's responses.
2. The second criterion relates to the collection of consumer comments. It entails solely retrieving direct comments, excluding 'comments on comments'. A total of 512 comments on the *Anti-sponsor* Tweet were identified; among these, 216 were direct comments and thus met the criteria.
3. The third criterion relates to the collection of BrewDog's responses. We included direct responses to the *Anti-sponsor* Tweet, as well as new posts from BrewDog (@BrewDog) and the CEO (@BrewDogJames) relating to the campaign. This concluded 24 responses.

5.5 Qualitative Content Analysis

The present thesis employs a qualitative content analysis (henceforth QCA), which involves interpreting textual elements, and is a preferred method for explaining the meaning of a message in the field of strategic communication (Guthrie & Abeysekera, 2006). Drisko and Maschi (2016) suggest that QCA is well-suited for analysing texts beyond the manifest level and enables researchers to explore the implicit meanings of communication. Thus, the method provides insights into the studied phenomenon unattainable through quantitative research. However, it is important to note that while QCA involves interpreting latent meanings, it has a more descriptive focus than other qualitative analysis methods, such as critical theory and discourse analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016).

Moreover, QCA is efficient for systematically sorting and reducing data (Flick, 2014). The method emphasises coding, which ensures a controlled analysis of texts within their contextual element, hence enhancing the validity of the study (Mayring, 2015, cited in Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The process of coding allows for identifying patterns and themes in the data (Drisko & Maschi, 2016), which aligns with our study's objectives. However, QCA is often criticised for lacking statistical evidence. Therefore, to further ensure the research's credibility, we decided to complement it with a quantitative part. This involved counting every comment to the campaign post, enabling us to prove the scope of the backlash in numeric data statistically.

5.6 Inductive Coding

In the present study, an inductive approach to coding is adopted, implying that the codes emerge from the data. Inductive coding is considered beneficial as the codes are derived freely without restrictions from certain theories, which minimises the risk of overlooking critical data. In this way, the data-grounded dimensions are prioritised over the researchers' theories and ideas (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Furthermore, unlike a deductive approach, when existing theoretical frameworks guide data, inductive research implies formulating theories based on the findings (Bryman, 2018).

The process of inductive coding is iterative, described as a cycle of data collection and data analysis, continuing until the point at which no new information or categories are found in the material (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). However, due to its iterative nature and in order to facilitate replication of the study, a clear outline of the process is presented below:

1. *Immersion* in the data
2. *Developing* preliminary coding framework
3. *Reviewing* preliminary coding framework
4. *Establishing* coding framework

Immersion in the data

The initial step of the inductive coding process entails becoming familiar with the data set, which involves developing a holistic overview of the content, noticing key narratives and identifying potential categories (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). Miles and Huberman (1984, cited in Drisko & Maschi, 2016) refer to this first phase as 'immersion' in the data, which is vital

to ensure gathering relevant data to address the research questions. The immersion stage was performed by both researchers, enabling us to elaborate on the data and discuss potential patterns and themes of interest.

Developing preliminary coding framework

The second step entails organising the data into preliminary dimensions, sub-dimensions and codes. The dimensions represent the main themes detected in the data, which are further divided into sub-dimensions, offering more nuanced and tailored descriptions. Finally, the smallest building blocks are the codes, that is, the manifested words expressed explicitly and used for sorting the comments into each sub-dimension. This phase of defining the tentative coding frame was conducted individually, enabling us to compare our results and develop initial dimensions without being influenced by each other, thus ensuring reliability (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The individual coding allowed us to identify areas of agreement, i.e. finding similar dimensions. However, differing dimensions originated as well. These were discussed and reflected on, enabling us to find more patterns resulting in an extended coding framework.

Reviewing preliminary coding framework

Once the data was organised, the empirical material was analysed a second time to evaluate whether the temporary coding frame was relevant and applicable. This step of recoding the data is according to Schreier (2012) a mandatory part of the coding process. We performed this stage together, developed additional sub-dimensions, and adjusted initial dimensions to ensure each comment reflected the associated dimension. This resulted in a modified framework.

Establishing coding framework

As the final step of the inductive coding process, the coding frame was once again tested, resulting in no new information or dimensions being found, which Drisko & Maschi (2016) argue is the ending objective in the iterative process of inductive coding. Hence, consensus was reached, and the coding frame built on data-driven components was confirmed. The coding frame templates are attached in Appendices (Appendix K & Appendix L).

For the first research question: *Along which dimensions were BrewDog criticised for the CPA campaign?* Five key dimensions were detected, each representing a challenge vital for

corporations to consider when engaging in CPA. Therefore, these dimensions serve as a guiding framework for brands expressing socio-political stances:

1. Motives
2. Congruence
3. Practices
4. Independence
5. Sacrifice

As for the second research question: *How did BrewDog strategically communicate to counter the backlash?* Five responses strategies communicated by the company were discovered:

1. CEO Activism
2. Challenging
3. Punk Mentality
4. Transparency
5. Fact-Checking

5.7 Ethical Considerations & Methodological Reflections

Qualitative research is inherently interpretive, raising ethical concerns regarding the analytical reliability of the study (Flick, 2014). As qualitative researchers, our active participation in the research process means that our past experiences, assumptions, and beliefs can shape how the research is conducted. In order to uphold ethical standards and safeguard against personal biases and perspectives, we embraced a reflexive approach. This involved ongoing reflection and critical examination of our interpretations while remaining mindful of the potential influence of our Western perspective. By adopting such practices, we aimed to promote transparency and integrity in our research.

In line with our reflexive approach, it should be noted that our previous knowledge obtained from prior research in the field of CPA influenced us when searching for themes in the empirical data. For this reason, we continuously reflected upon and questioned our interpretations during the coding process. To further improve the reliability of the inductive

study, the initial coding was conducted individually. Additionally, the step-by-step description of the coding process contributes to the study's replicability.

Moreover, as this qualitative research was conducted online, ethical challenges arose regarding privacy and anonymity (Flick, 2014). Utilising social media platforms for marketing research brings forth concerns about consent, and Takats et al. (2022) argue that the degree to which social media data is regarded as public remains unclear. In this paper, the online data was derived without the users' consent, and all usernames were therefore replaced with an X to guarantee anonymity. By excluding the names, we avoid interfering with the public and no personal security is exposed.

Finally, we are aware of the limited potential for generalisability in qualitative research and single case studies, which constrains our research. Due to the limited time frame, the present study exclusively examines a single CPA campaign conducted by one company. Moreover, it is essential to note that our data collection solely relies on Twitter and thus represents a small sample (n=216) of the overall backlash BrewDog experienced across various social media platforms. Against this background, we acknowledge that our findings cannot be universally applied. Instead, this paper lays the foundation for future research and provides opportunities for implementing our proposed framework.

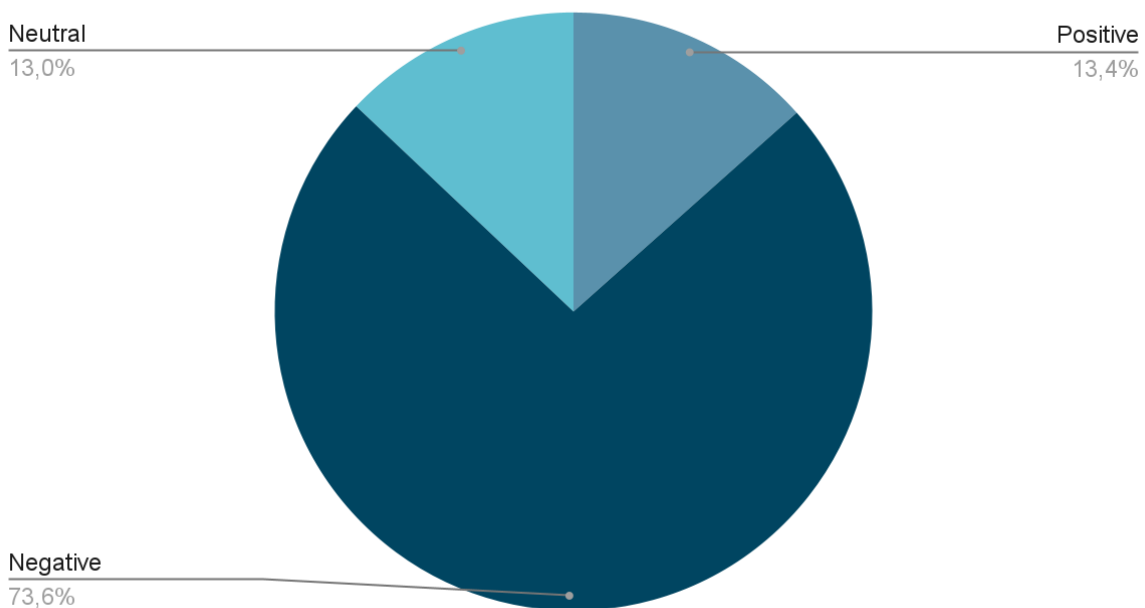
6 ANALYSIS

This chapter reviews the campaign following a structure based on the two research questions. It begins with a quantitative section involving statistics of the backlash. With a basis in our inductive coding, the second part comprises an analysis of consumer comments to outline the dimensions BrewDog was criticised for, ending with examining how the company strategically communicated to counter the backlash, answering the second research question.

6.1 Statistics of the backlash

In line with what Park and Jiang (2020) argue, CPA activities may backfire. This was the case for BrewDog, with their *Anti-sponsor* campaign being overthrown with criticism on social media (Twitter, 2022). In order to illustrate the scope of the backlash, the total number of comments (n=216), divided into categories of *Positive*, *Neutral* and *Negative*, are visualised in percentages below. Positive comments were calculated to 13,4% (n=29), Neutral* 13% (n=28), and Negative 73,6% (n=159).

Consumer comments



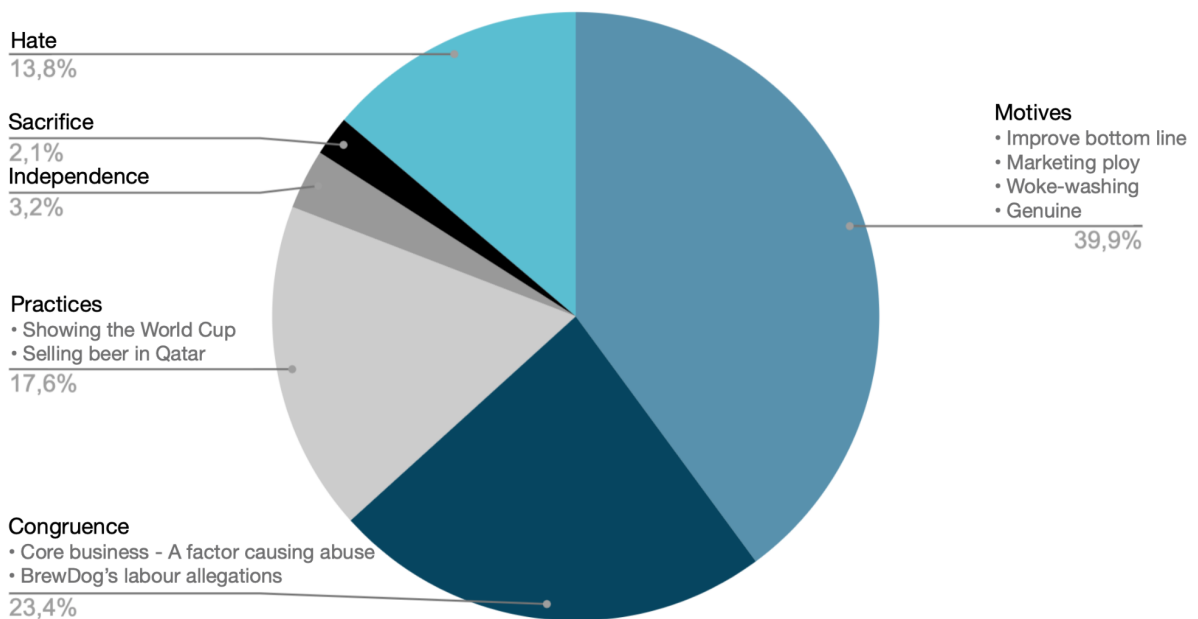
Appendix B. Statistics of consumer comments

*The category of *Neutral* concerns unclear comments expressing non-related content and are excluded from the analysis.

6.2 Along which dimensions were BrewDog criticised?

In order to answer the first research question, the following section comprises the public's reactions to the campaign. It allows for identifying the most frequent accusations explicitly expressed in the comments. The detected dimensions were: *Motives* including the sub-dimensions of: *Improve bottom line*, *Marketing ploy*, *Woke-washing* and *Genuine*. The second was *Congruence*, with the sub-dimensions of: *Core business - A factor causing abuse* and *BrewDog's labour allegations*. *Practices* represents the third dimension and includes *Showing the World Cup* and *Selling beer in Qatar* as sub-dimensions. The final dimensions were *Independence*, *Sacrifice* and *Hate**, with no sub-dimensions. The percentage of each dimension is presented in the pie chart below.

Dimensions



Appendix C. Statistics of dimensions of criticism

*The dimension termed *Hate* includes comments expressing pure cyber hate and is irrelevant for the purpose of this paper.

6.2.1 Motives

An initial dominant dimension derived from the analysis of the backlash was consumers' questioning of the latent motives of the political campaign. *Motives* concern how the public

perceives the intentions of woke brands as profit-seeking or genuine or self-centred versus other-centred (Mirzaei et al., 2022). According to Hill (2020), it is not unusual that the motives of CPA stances are called into question, suspected of being driven by strategic intent or perceived as surface-level posturing. However, if consumers evaluate the motives behind corporate activism initiatives as altruistic and transparent, it can positively influence brand authenticity (Freeman, 2017).

Improve bottom line

The sub-dimension of *Improve bottom line* has been outlined based on the tweets that proclaim increased profit to be the main motive of BrewDog's CPA campaign. The critics perceive the purpose of the stance as self-oriented (Mirzai et al., 2022) and that the motive originated from the company's desire to favour financial results rather than foster substantial societal change.

“Interesting way of saying ‘Hey, come to OUR bar where we will make money from you by showing you the games that we are advocating against’.”

(@X, 2022, November 7)

The statement highlights consumers' scepticism towards the motives behind the *Anti-sponsor* campaign, and signals how they interpret the grounds as profit-driven. According to Champlin et al. (2019), when a for-profit company's marketing is related to socio-political causes, the motives are often questioned because of the business' inherent desire to sell products. This aligns with Dodd and Supa's (2015) definition of cause-related marketing, where companies aim to profit while doing good.

“Cold comfort, @BrewDog. Shame on you for participating at any level in a sporting event held in a nation that imposes the death penalty on people for being #gay or #transgedner. Your tweet RIGHT HERE is YOU trying to profit off that barbaric depravity. SHAME!!!!!!!!!!” (@X, 2022, November 7)

As the consumers doubt a genuine motivation of going woke and rather deem the motives exploitative, BrewDog risks being labelled as inauthentic (Mirzaei et al., 2022). For a company's marketing effort to be perceived as authentic in the context of CPA, the social

stance must be perceived as noncommercial as consumers support companies taking sides on socio-political issues to drive social change beyond mere profit-making (Austin et al., 2019).

Marketing ploy

Another common criticism related to the company's underlying objectives of its corporate activism is the campaign being perceived as a publicity stunt. Hence, the sub-dimension *Marketing ploy* has been outlined based on the tweets arguing the campaign as another PR-tactic from BrewDog.

“It’s a great marketing campaign, not an ideological stand. Great PR. It’s very clever but equally superficial.” (@X, 2022, November 7)

The consumer argues that the campaign does nothing to actually contribute to the cause, but rather draws on human rights to enhance its own brand image. The firm's long history of publicity stunts and use of political positions in marketing could be one reason for the recurring discourse that discerns the campaign as an insincere marketing tactic. Edelman (2022) presents that 56% of brands use societal issues as a marketing ploy to sell more products. This could be another explanation for the challenge of convincing consumers about the CPA effort as a genuine commitment to the cause, as statistics point to the opposite.

Woke-washing

As explained by Vredenburg et al. (2020), CPA is interwoven with the risk of being accused for exploitation of the woke cause, lacking genuine commitment. This is confirmed in the present analysis as we detected comments explicitly referring to the campaign as woke-washing or virtue signalling.

“Omg what in the Wokeirati is this madness, even though I’m teetotal in fully intend to boycott you and your woke drinks.” (@X, 2022, November 7)

Due to the consumers' doubts of the motivations underpinning the campaign, the company was frequently accused of pretending to be woke or virtue signalling, i.e. expressing moral values with the sole purpose of enhancing its social status. As presented in WARC (2019), it is a common risk that the public perceive CPA stances as insincere and accordingly blame the political corporations for woke-washing.

“Siri, show me corporate virtue signalling from hypocrites.”

(@X, 2022, November 7)

Given the advent of the ‘woke consumer’ (Mirzaei et al., 2022), individuals are displaying an increased level of attentiveness and moral consciousness and consequently scrutinise CPA initiatives to ensure authentic motives. However, if we assume that avoiding woke-washing requires actions that are performed purely for the sake of the cause, it becomes evident that for-profit companies are incapable of fulfilling this demand as they, by nature, are motivated by profit. This means woke-washing may be inevitable.

Genuine

A minority of the responses expressed support for the initiative, perceiving the motives of the campaign as genuine. When stakeholders understand a brand’s motivations as altruistic, they will tend to react to the CPA actions more positively (Freeman, 2017) and perceive the stance as authentic. A common note in the supportive comments lifted BrewDog for their morals, agreeing that football should be for everyone. Moreover, the company received praise for speaking up against the contentious World Cup.

“Respect to you and your morals I’ll raise a glass to that 🍷”

(@X, 2022, November 7)

To conclude, scepticism of the motives underpinning the campaign was a common concern. This resulted in *Motives* being the most frequent dimension constituting 39,9% of the total comments. Four subcategories spawned from the analysis: *Improve bottom line*, *Marketing ploy*, *Woke-washing* and *Genuine*. Questioning intentions is a significant hurdle for authentic corporate activism and proves the complex interplay between ethical activism for social change and business objectives. The dimension of *Motives* is therefore perceived as a vital aspect to consider when employing the marketing strategy CPA.

6.2.2 Congruence

Joo et al. (2019) stress the importance of alignment between a firm’s core business- and culture and the socio-political stance, and define it as congruence. Once a company achieves consistency the CPA becomes convincing (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Based on the analysis,

two sub-dimensions of congruence appeared, concerning their core business being a factor causing abuse, and their own record of labour allegations.

Core business - A factor causing abuse

A stroke of criticism was consumers' expression of a clash between the core business of BrewDog, i.e. selling alcoholic beverages, and the cause the company engaged in.

“47% increase in alcohol-related domestic abuse cases on days when the England team wins. Alcohol kills 3 million people every year. 1/3 of suicide deaths have been linked to alcohol. Your business contributes to these deaths and domestic abuse cases. Stop selling alcohol.” (@X, 2022, November 7)

This tweet is aimed directly at BrewDog's actual product offer. Since the consumption of alcohol is strongly associated with domestic violence and aggressiveness (NIAAA, 2021), it becomes problematic for a brewery to join such a conversation. In other words, the comment above points to the paradox of advocating against human violence while selling a product that is a contributing factor to what the company exactly oppose.

“With other booze, men become violent, aggressive and beat up their partners during the football in an orgy of domestic violence. With Brewdog, men become loving, caring, and the epitome of domestic bliss.” (@X, 2022, November 7)

This extract represents another consumer ironically expressing that BrewDog's beer is as responsible for abuse cases as other beer brands. Alhouiti et al. (2016) argue that a company's action is determined as hypocritical when offering a product that is harmful to the cause it promotes and engenders inauthenticity. As BrewDog entered an issue arena lacking direct relevance to the company's core business, the consumers expressed confusion as to why a beer company chose to engage in the topical debate. The subcategory of *Core business - A factor causing abuse* displays the conflict that appears when there is a lack of brand-cause fit and could more specifically be categorised as a lack of a functional match (Champlin et al., 2019).

BrewDog's labour allegations

With regard to BrewDog's history of labour allegations, many comments referred to an open letter signed by a sheer volume of ex-employees flagging toxic working conditions and a culture of fear. The former BrewDog members testified sexual harassment, deceit and abuse, and specifically targeted James Watt for inappropriate behaviour and misuse of power (Daly & Bonnar, 2022).

“Brewdog; The only people with a worse human rights record than Qatar.”

(@X, 2022, November 7)

This implies that BrewDog's activism message lacks congruence with their company culture. When launching the campaign the following statement was uttered: “[...] *we just don't love corruption, abuse and death*” (BrewDog, 2022), and backfired since they are accused of the exact same and hence expressed double standards. The discrepancy between their organisational culture and political stand resulted in them being labelled as paradoxical hypocrisies.

“Was this performative activism put out today to quash the article that just came out proving James Watt paid hackers to break into his own employees' emails when they raised concerns of abusive workplace practices at Brewdog? Any comment @BrewDogJames?” (@X, 2022, November 7)

The stance was further judged as a tactic to shift the blame of their own record of labour accusations, by utilising Qatar as a scapegoat. The extract above accuses the owner James Watt for redirecting the focus from his company's accusations to those of Qatar, as an attempt for mitigating the effect of their own allegations.

The lack of *Congruence* between the company's core business and organisational culture, and the addressed cause was the second most frequent critic of the campaign, constituting 23,4% of the tweets. From the analysis, two sub-dimensions termed: *Core business - A factor causing abuse* and *BrewDog's labour allegations* spawned. Accordingly, *Congruence* represents a second important dimension to consider before engaging in socio-political causes.

6.2.3 Practices

As stated by Vredenburg et al. (2020), one prominent criteria for brand activism to be authentic is by aligning the activism message with corporate practices. As woke activism often is interpreted as mere surface-level posturing, rather than an action fostering social change, such socio-political stances must go beyond communication (Freeman, 2017). Showing inconsistencies between messaging and practice threatens the authenticity of the efforts, and thus affects the brand's legitimacy.

Showing the World Cup

Despite promoting the message of boycotting the World Cup of 2022, BrewDog decided to continue showing the games to attract customers to their pubs. This decision sparked anger among the consumers, emphasising the discrepancy between BrewDog's message and their actual practices. For this reason, being accused for not acting on what they preach represents another evident narrative in the backlash.

“Let's be honest about this. If you show the games then you buy into it. All of it.”
(@X, 2022, November 7)

Selling beer in Qatar

In addition, the gap between the campaign message and corporate action was further apparent when consumers discovered that BrewDog was operating in Qatar by selling their beers through a third-party. The brewery's definite stance against Qatar, expressed as “[...] *two fingers to anyone who thinks a World Cup in Qatar makes sense*” (@BrewDog, 2022), signifies their strong aversion to the host country. Therefore, the company's operations in this particular country received impugning.

“Does that include your beers being sold in Qatar? And do you have any plans to pull beer sales from this nation you detest so much? One last question....”
(@X, 2022, November 7)

Acting in complete opposition to their communicated stance was perceived as a paradox. This harms the perception of the advocacy action, as BrewDog is only showing commitment to start a conversation rather than making an actual change. As a result of boycotting Qatar,

while still selling beer in the country, and by boycotting the world cup, but continuing to show the games in their pubs, *Practices* represents 17,6% of total critics. Not ‘walking the talk’ evidently implies a risk of damaging the company’s legitimacy, causing negative brand associations, which impedes business returns according to Holt (2002). The dimension of *Practices* is decided as a third crucial element to account for when exercising CPA.

6.2.4 Independence

Mirzaei et al. (2022) argue that merely engaging in political or social issues because they are currently prominent can pose a difficulty for companies in their pursuit of authenticity. Joining topical conversations as an attempt to vent ‘wokeness’ is often scrutinised by the audiences. Therefore, Mirzaei et al. (2022) stress the importance of engaging in a stance independent from trendy debates. This category of criticism is termed *Independence*.

“Only took you, what, 12 years to kick off about it? Marketing.”

(@X, 2022, November 7)

As the decision of Qatar as the host country was made in 2010, critics questioned BrewDog’s sudden engagement in a debate that sparked off 12 years ago. Accordingly, BrewDog was accused of not showing interest in the conversation about Qatar until it was trending, i.e. the woke stance lacked context independence. Furthermore, consumers underlined that Qatar’s history of violating human rights extends far beyond World Cup preparations and stressed that the abuses against women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and exploitation of migrant workers are rooted in a long history of repression.

“You know what, sometimes it’s better to just stay quiet and not look at every controversial situation as a change for a bit of cheap attention.”

(@X, 2022, November 7)

As the FIFA conversation was gaining momentum, catching the public’s attention, BrewDog was accused of strategically taking advantage of this pressing social issue to gain free publicity. Alhouti et al. (2016) argue that companies should be cautious about the timing of their non-market initiatives, as consumers may judge it as a publicity stunt or an attempt to gain goodwill. Timing is hence crucial, and in order to be seen as authentic, corporations

should ensure taking stances on political issues independent from ruling conversations. Based on this, the analysis proposes *Independence* as another vital dimension, constituting 3,2% of the total comments.

6.2.5 Sacrifice

In order to be perceived as authentic when advocating pro-social stances, concrete economic sacrifices are required to demonstrate a genuine commitment to the social issue. *Sacrifice* entails the degree to which a company is inclined to forgo profit for the sake of the cause. The most common action is donating, but scholars argue (Mirzaei et al., 2022) that more radical actions are required today to ensure a genuine fight for the cause. For instance, discouraging customers from buying a company's services, like Uber's *If you tolerate racism, Delete Uber* campaign, represents an ideal sacrifice. Although BrewDog partly sacrificed its profit by raising money for charities, we identified comments expressing scepticism about this.

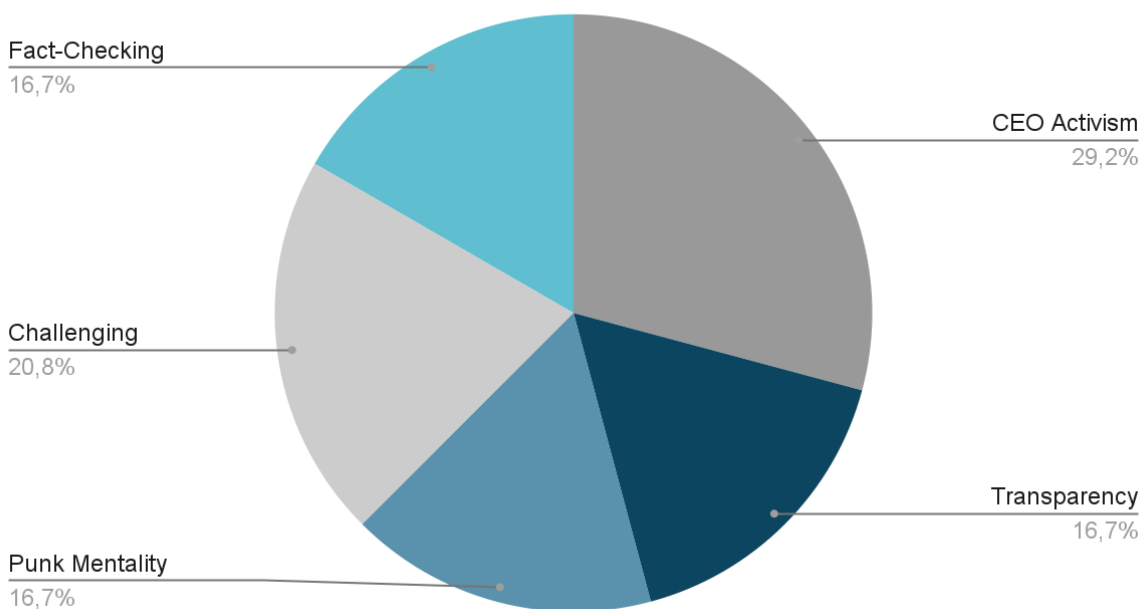
“Wouldn't it be easier to share a link to a reputable charitable company who supports human rights abuse? Buying beer and hoping it finds its way to charity feels as corrupt as the Qatar World Cup.” (@X, 2022, November 7)

The extract above echoes Mirzaei et al. (2022) argument that radical actions are required. Consumers doubted the authenticity of the company's commitment, as the process of donating required purchasing BrewDog's products. Thus, the activism was perceived as superficial, with BrewDog not being willing to sacrifice enough for the sake of the cause. In order to avoid such criticism, BrewDog should have been prepared to sacrifice to a greater extent, e.g. by donating without increasing their own sales. Therefore, *Sacrifice* constitutes the last dimension (2,1%) to consider when practising CPA.

6.3 How did BrewDog strategically communicate to counter the backlash?

The last part of the analysis answers the second research question by examining how BrewDog strategically communicated to counter the backlash. It comprises the responses from BrewDog's Twitter account, @BrewDog, and the CEO's account @BrewDogJames. Five noticeable response strategies were detected, including *CEO Activism*, *Challenging*, *Punk Mentality*, *Transparency*, and *Fact-Checking*, illustrated in the pie chart below. Moreover, it is worth noting that a common element among all response strategies was the use of humour and wit, and these are thus recognised as overall tactics permeating BrewDog's responses.

BrewDog's responses



Appendix D. Statistics of BrewDog's responses

6.3.1 CEO Activism

One prominent finding was James Watt's personal participation in the conversation. By communicating from his own Twitter account, @BrewDogJames, Watt both responded to comments in the campaign thread, as well as posted new Tweets related to the stance. With 29,2% of the responses from the leader, CEO activism was identified as the most frequent response strategy.

“At BrewDog we have always taken a stand for the things that we believe in and that is something we will always continue to do.”

(@BrewDogJames, 2022, November 18)

The response manifests no regrets or intentions of stopping advocating for the cause. This indicates traits of an entrepreneurial leader, showing self-confidence and strength in managing unstable contexts (McGrath & MacMillan, 2000). Despite heavy criticism, the CEO doubles down by passionately reminding the public of the core message of the campaign, which reflects a bold personality and resonates with Greenberg et al. (2013) statement saying that entrepreneurial leaders are driven by their commitment to social responsibilities.

“Why? Same reason as before. We’re pro watching football. We’re pro drinking beer. We’re pro watching great football while drinking great beer. But we’re anti corruption. And we’re anti human rights abuse. Not that complicated, really.”

(@BrewDogJames, 2022, November 10)

Articulating the CPA stance of BrewDog from his personal account can be viewed as an attempt to convince the audience about his passion for the cause and to guarantee that the political advocacy campaign is more than a marketing ploy. Moreover, as consumers consider leadership a factor in determining the sincerity of corporate activism (Vredenburg et al., 2020), it might be considered strategic for a CEO to participate in the conversation to a high extent. Apparently, this was an intentional move from Watt as he shows awareness: “*As a captain, a founder, a leader, you absolutely have to be where the action is*” (Watt, 2015, p. 37). Due to the leader’s position of power, CEO activism is a clever response strategy enabling Watt to speak up with authority.

6.3.2 Challenging

The second most common theme of responses was characterised by a challenging attitude where BrewDog differentiated itself by opposing FIFA and other multinational corporations. This form of strategic communication ties in with Paharia et al. (2011) description of a challenger brand’s inclination to question market hegemony. Hence, this response strategy signals their position as a challenger brand with a frequency of 20,8%.

“The brands on the left paid billions to sponsor a corrupt World Cup in a despotic state. The brand on the right is raising money for human rights causes in Qatar. Just saying”



Appendix E. Response from @BrewDog (2022, November 11)

BrewDog’s response echoes Morgan’s (2009) remark that challenger brands differentiate themselves by provoking larger mainstream brands. By positioning themselves as anti-sponsors while denouncing large corporations such as Adidas and McDonald’s, they mark their divergence from other companies. In this way, BrewDog is portrayed as progressive and brave compared to other brands merely following the stream. Hence, the position offers BrewDog a competitive edge. Using a counter-hegemonic narrative to oppose the dominant market leaders signals BrewDog’s confidence in adhering to the challenger approach. This reflects a clever differentiation strategy, which enhances the image of BrewDog as brave and intensifies the campaign message.

**NO FREE SPEECH
NO RAINBOW FLAGS
AND NOW NO BEER
WHAT A PARTY**

**PROUD
ANTISPONSOR
OF THE
WORLD CUP**



**FYI, THE Q IN
LGBTQ+ DOES NOT
STAND FOR QATAR**

**PROUD
ANTISPONSOR
OF THE
WORLD CUP**



Appendix F, G & H. Responses from @BrewDog (2022, November 18, November 22 & November 9)

The use of sarcasm is another characteristic of a challenger brand (Morgan, 2011) and was a recurring theme in the company's responses. As the pictures above show, BrewDog openly mocked Qatar by ironically emphasising the country's restricted LGBTQ+ rights and lack of freedom of speech. In addition, placing the world cup trophy next to their beer, stating that both can be bought, is another attempt to challenge the international organisation FIFA.

6.3.3 Punk Mentality

BrewDog's distinct company culture based on the punk manifesto was another salient theme detected in the responses. In his book, Watt (2015) stated, "*To hell with opinions, conventions and consequences*" (p. 122), witnessing the company's careless attitude to criticism. Their *Punk Mentality* was noticed in 16,7% of the total responses.

To do list

Monday 7 November

- Publish World Cup Lost Lager charity donation announcement
- Watch Twitter explode
- Continue watching Twitter explode

Tuesday 8 November

- Is Twitter still exploding?

Appendix I. Response from @BrewDog (2022, November 7)

The post indicates that BrewDog was already aware of the risks of expressing the stance and was, for that reason, prepared for a strong reaction. Their expression of ‘continue watching Twitter explode’ signals a nonchalant attitude, which is similar to the ‘I don’t give a damn approach’, a trademark within the punk subculture (Watt, 2015). Thus, this response is an indication of BrewDog’s company culture punk ethos, which seems to be an intentional tactic with reference to Watt’s (2015, p. 122) belief: “*The real skill is making sure your [...] company’s DNA is woven deep into the core of any controversy you may cause*”. BrewDog’s reactions to the backlash deviate from the response strategies of other companies facing hate storms, such as apologies and expressions of concern. This contrasting action is a manifestation of non-conformity, which according to Hodgson (n.d), constitutes another characteristic of the punk mentality.

“And a bit of the usual Twitter hate is the price we have to pay for massively raising awareness of the continued human rights abuses in Qatar and the obvious corruption of FIFA, then so be it” (@BrewDog, 2022, November 7)

Their expression of ‘a bit of the usual Twitter hate’ further signals BrewDog’s careless attitude, indicating that the social media hate did not bother them. In line with Watt’s (2015, p. 40) view, “*Haters have an important role to play as they help to define your mission and your brand to others*”, the leaders seem to embrace the confrontation. They further argue that the Twitter hate was worth it for the cause, which could be seen as an attempt to convince the audience of a genuine political stance. Not only do these responses denote the punk ethos of BrewDog, but the attitude also corresponds with the mindset of an entrepreneurial leader. Making such a bold statement requires courage and the desire to challenge praxis. Not agreeing, nor admitting, and generally appearing as ‘anti’, both accord with the controversial nature of punk ethos and EL.

6.3.4 Transparency

Another theme that emerged among the responses was the company’s ability to communicate transparently, which involved them answering questions honestly, revealing both positive and negative reactions. By doing so, they managed to use the criticism to their advantage. For instance, a week after the campaign was launched, BrewDog published a video under the caption:

“Brave? Groundbreaking? Hypocritical?”

A sneak peek of what the fine folk of Tooting Broadway made of our Qatar World Cup Anti-Sponsorship message.” (@BrewDog, 2022, November 16)

In the video, Britts are interviewed about their opinion of the campaign and asked whether they perceived it as authentic. The answers were mixed, ranging from opinions of the campaign as groundbreaking to some judging BrewDog as hypocritical, while others experienced it as a marketing ploy. The video represents BrewDog’s bold attitude, acknowledging the criticism with no intention of concealing the hatred. Instead, it highlights how BrewDog rather managed to benefit from the backlash, as the video created word-of-mouth, thus reaching a broader audience in a cost-efficient way. Regardless of whether people perceived the campaign as authentic, the video was a strategic move as it allowed them to take control of the narrative and the backlash.

“UPDATE: so, our Anti-Sponsoring of the World F*Cup, that caused a BIT of noise? It raised £111,153 for human rights charities. (The donations will be in our fully audited annual report, but we’ll respect the charities’ policies of no public association with alcohol brands)” (@BrewDog, 2022, December 20)

The extract above represents another transparent response, with BrewDog announcing the exact amount of £111,153 donated to charities. In this way, the company was able to prove its actual contribution to the cause and quash the rumours of the campaign being a marketing ploy. Additionally, this could be interpreted as an attempt to address the dimension of criticism regarding *Sacrifice. Transparency* as a response strategy accounts for 16,7%.

6.3.5 Fact-Checking

A last response strategy discovered when analysing BrewDogs communication was the use of facts to validate their stance, i.e. *Fact-Checking*. Despite facing a major backlash, the brand sustained their standpoint by referring to external sources reaffirming the poor conditions in Qatar.

“Yesterday a Qatari official described homosexuality as “damage of the mind” and stated “they have to accept our rules here.” Incorrect. As Anti-sponsors, we want to

point out that FIFA doesn't own football & Qatar doesn't own love or human behaviour.” (@BrewDogJames, 2022, November 9).

In this tweet, BrewDog alludes to an article from BBC news, where a Qatar ambassador describes homosexuality as something harmful and unacceptable (BBC News, 2022). The use of BBC as a secondary source to bolster their stance is a strategic move owing to the reliability of the reference. Fact-checking serves as a strategic communication tactic when defending a message, and could potentially increase the brand's legitimacy.

“Anti-media and pro-corruption. Your 2022 World Cup hosts.”

(@BrewDog, 2022, November 16)

Another fact-checking response was BrewDog referring to the Danish news channel Tv2nyhederne, linking a reportage of a Danish news reporter being threatened while broadcasting live from Doha (Twitter, 2022). By sharing this video, BrewDog could once again reinforce their disagreement with the world cup being held in Qatar. The Danish news illustrates how the state wrongfully handles foreign media, proving the prevailing threat to freedom of speech and censorship in Qatar. In conclusion, *Fact-Checking* is a strategic response tactic utilised by BrewDog to the extent of 16,7% and is particularly valuable in light of the prevailing distrust in modern society (Edelman, 2022).

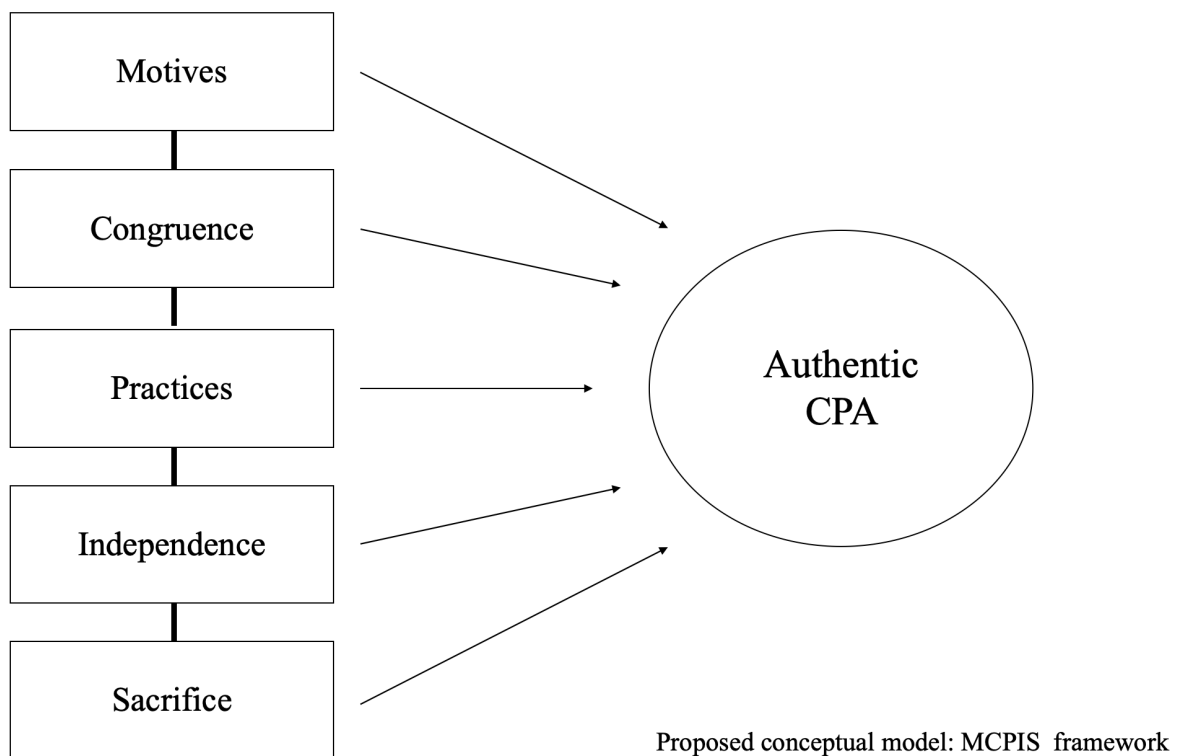
7 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The following section discusses the findings spawned from the analysis and presents the study's proposed theoretical framework MCPIS. The chapter continues with reasoning about how BrewDog managed to mitigate the effects of the backlash and concludes with a discussion about the company's future.

This paper aimed to extend the research on CPA by conducting a case study of a challenger brand with an entrepreneurial leadership facing a backlash when taking a political stance. Through a qualitative content analysis, we sought to elucidate along which dimensions the company was criticised and how the leaders strategically communicated to counter the backlash. Accordingly, the BrewDog case contributes to the research field of strategic communication. The study serves as a tangible example of how a company can strategically engage in socio-political issues, thereby enhancing the understanding of the strategic communication dynamics in contemporary contexts. Hence, the present paper contributes to the further maturing of the discipline, particularly as cases like ours are rarely theorised in strategic communication.

A key determinant of the success of a CPA campaign is the extent to which it comes across as authentic. As visualised in Chapter 6, BrewDog faced substantial criticism, and the analysis reveals five central dimensions of consumer reactions. The most frequent criticism targeted BrewDog's underlying *Motives*, with consumers arguing the stance as a strategy to improve its financial standing and generate publicity rather than genuine advocacy for social justice. Consequently, BrewDog was accused of woke-washing. The second dimension of critique relates to the lack of *Congruence* between BrewDog's core business and the political stance, as well as the misalignment between company culture and the stance. Consumers perceived the CPA campaign as inauthentic, given BrewDog's lack of functional match and history of poor working conditions. The third stream, the *Practices* dimension, pertains to the importance of 'practising what you preach' to be perceived as authentic. The fact that BrewDog decided to show games and sell beer in Qatar contradicted their stance and resulted in strong reactions. *Independence* relates to the timing of the stance, that is, joining the debate when FIFA faced significant attention, i.e. following bandwagon behaviour. Finally, *Sacrifice* represents the last dimension of criticism and implies not sacrificing enough of its financial gain.

The above-discovered streams of criticism witness that the critique was not related to the message of the actual stance, i.e. opposing FIFA and Qatar, but rather because of BrewDog’s low brand-cause fit. As there is a prevailing consensus in Western society about Qatar’s violation of human rights, taking such a stand is arguably equipped with low risks. This indicates that Brewdog did not experience the backlash due to polarised opinions but predominantly due to insincere motives, incongruence and message-practice gap. Given these challenges, this study summarises the five dimensions into one framework, termed MCPIS (Motives, Congruence, Practices, Independence, Sacrifice). The MCPIS framework offers a comprehensive understanding of the authentication process when voicing socio-political stances and illustrates consumer responses to charged campaigns. The proposed framework thus serves as a guiding tool for companies engaging in CPA, intended to minimise the risks of a backlash.



Appendix J. MCPIS framework

Despite being heavily criticised along the MCPIS dimensions, BrewDog grew and steadily increased its profits (Brand Finance, 2022). Evidently, there are lessons to be learned from BrewDog, making the company’s strategic responses an interesting case in the field of strategic communication. Based on the analysis, two prominent attributes of BrewDog were

concluded to assist them in the communicative challenge of countering the backlash: their leadership and market position.

Because of the two leaders' self-confidence, they rapidly responded to the criticism showing no intention of changing position. In view of the entrepreneurial leaders' proneness to take advantage of uncertainty, they utilised the backlash to their advantage, perceiving it as an opportunity to stimulate free publicity. Hence, we suggest that BrewDog's risk-oriented leadership style is well suited when employing the communication strategy of CPA, as it requires bold and proactive leaders to take divisive stances. Moreover, as the modern business environment is marked with risk and uncertainty, the appropriateness of the entrepreneurial mindset is strengthened. Corporate neutrality has become a subject of criticism, and remaining ambivalent on controversial issues is more of a mistake than an asset (Vredenburg et al., 2020). This both proves the relevance of CPA and articulates the need for progressive leaders in a fast-paced corporate market. In turn, this allows us to confirm the entrepreneurial leadership style as one determining factor mitigating the effects of the criticised CPA campaign. On another note, marketers argue that as a long-term consequence of the prevailing instability in the world, it is expected that consumers will display a growing preference for the known, safe and stable. This shift in consumer behaviours is anticipated to bring about new operational paradigms for corporations, which may need to acclimate to the evolving demands. Therefore, it raises concerns about whether BrewDog's risk-taking and progressive leadership will correlate with the future business market emphasising safety and stability.

Another plausible explanation as to why CPA is a beneficial strategy for BrewDog could be its position as a challenger brand. The position ties in well with the strategy of CPA, given challenger brands' inclination to question the status quo and desire to foster change. This implies that such brands are somewhat expected to take political stances. In addition, consumers tend to ascribe challenger brands to a favourable position where controversial and boundary-breaking activities are accepted to a larger extent, similar to 'the underdog effect'. Therefore, we argue that their market position represents the second feature that facilitated BrewDog's process of countering critique, as they were able to refer to their inherent nature of non-conformity. However, as Brewdog ascends to the top dog position, they are facing new challenges. According to Haxthausen (2004), mature corporations tend to be more sensitive to public opinion, heightening the risk associated with corporate political advocacy.

As Brewdog departs from its underdog position, questions arise about whether it can rely on the challenger position and the ‘underdog effect’ as a future safeguard when encountering backlashes.

One plausible scenario is that BrewDog will keep communicating the challenger- and underdog narrative in spite of their new position. This strategy is employed by many companies, including the multinational enterprise Apple, with the CEO constantly referring to its humble beginnings (Watt, 2015). Brewdog could, similarly, utilise the underdog rhetorics by underlining their modest beginning of two friends and a dog brewing beer in a garage. Beyond employing the underdog narrative, their avowed company culture of Punk ethos might serve as another asset to take advantage of. As the punk mentality shows similarities with the mindset of a challenger brand, BrewDog might be able to maintain its anti-establishment attitude by replacing its former position with the position of punks. This gives them the mandate to proceed with radical marketing and CPA, as their punk position justifies their bold actions. Similar to how Oatly is ascribed the ‘activist brand’, BrewDog turns into the ‘punk brand’ and can consequently continue taking polarised stances, regardless of reaching the top dog position.

Over the last 16 years, BrewDog has frequently executed CPA campaigns as part of its growth strategy, giving rise to its ‘meteoric journey’. What sets BrewDog apart from its rivals is its maverick persona and ‘business for punks’ manifesto. While it may be tempting for brands to emulate competitors, deviating from the norm seems more beneficial in today’s saturated market, as shown in the case of BrewDog. Therefore, we advise business managers to gather their coworkers for an after-work, enjoy a Punk IPA, and ask themselves: *What would the punks do?*

8 FURTHER RESEARCH

While this study focuses on external audiences, we suggest future research to centre on internal groups such as employees and other stakeholders of partners and shareholders. With the growing emphasis on internal strategic communication and empowerment of employees, i.e. the inverted pyramid (Heide & Svingstedt, 2022), studying a CPA backlash from an internal perspective would hence generate fruitful findings. Applying an internal viewpoint also reflects how the leadership and culture impact the internal environment and illustrates how the leaders strategically communicate in such critical situations.

In addition, this paper provides a short-term analysis of the effects of a CPA event, focusing on reactions during a specific time frame of approximately two months. In this essence, further research is encouraged to consider the long-term effects of CPA backlashes to evaluate whether negative responses risk harming a brand's image and financial results in the long run.

We performed a singular case study and are aware of its limitations in generalising the findings. Therefore, another interesting way of addressing the phenomenon of CPA could be done through a multiple case study, comparing several cases of socio-political activism. For instance, a comparison of BrewDog's campaigns to further display the impact of entrepreneurial leaders and a challenger position when exercising CPA would be highly interesting. Finally, studying multiple CPA cases also offers an opportunity for employing our proposed framework of MCPIS to test its applicability and investigate whether it has to be modified or extended. This would enable us to verify the framework as a guiding tool for business managers engaging in CPA.

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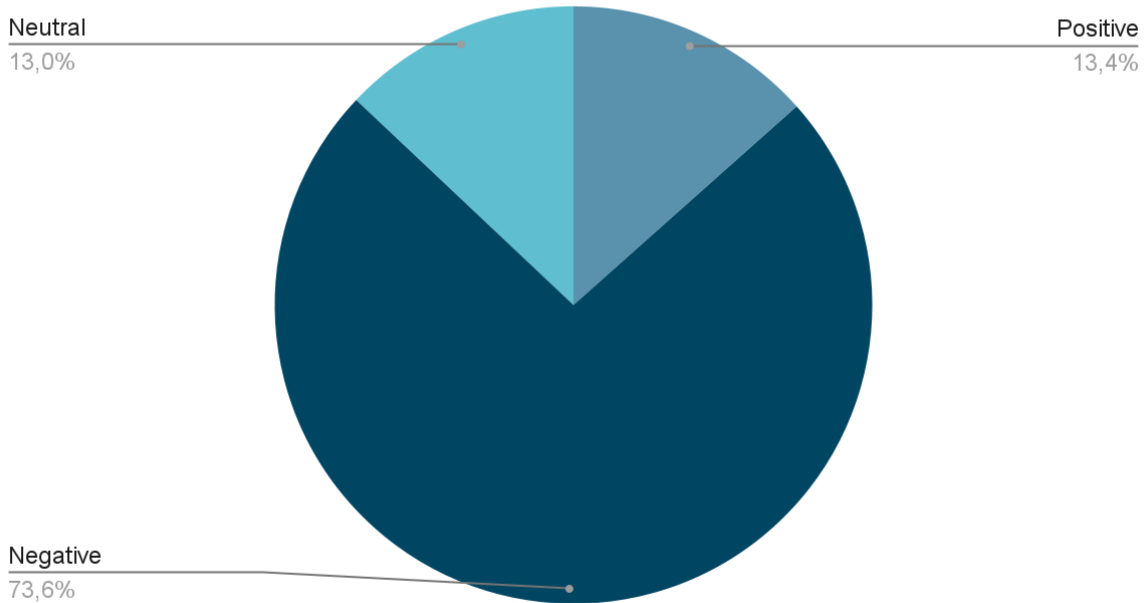
APPENDICES

Appendix A. Campaign billboards



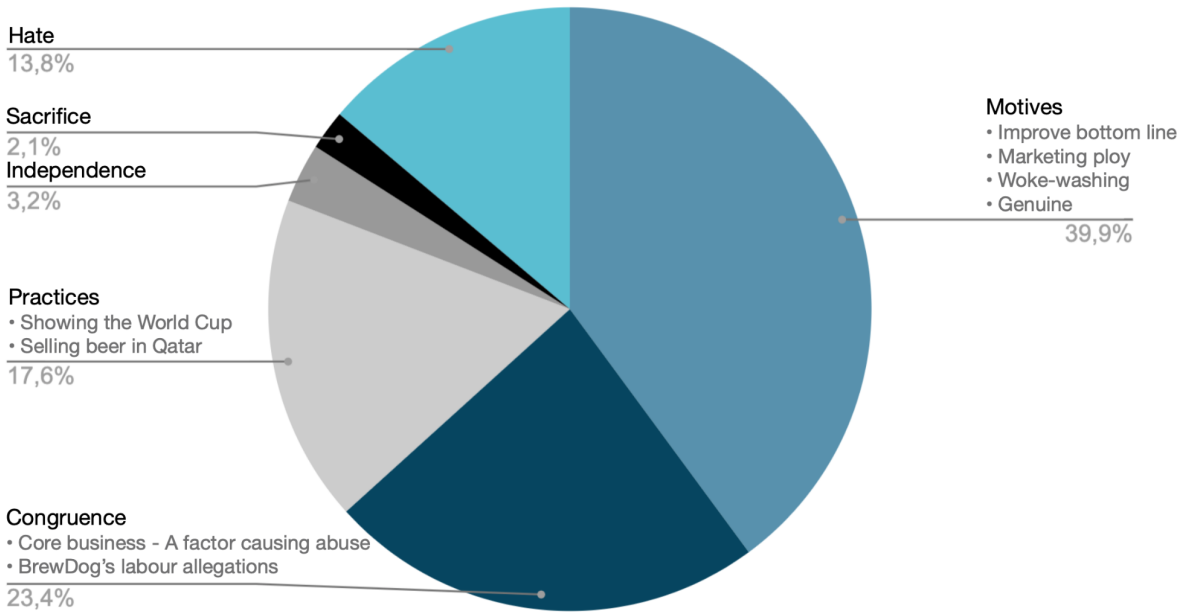
Appendix B. Statistics of consumer comments

Consumer comments



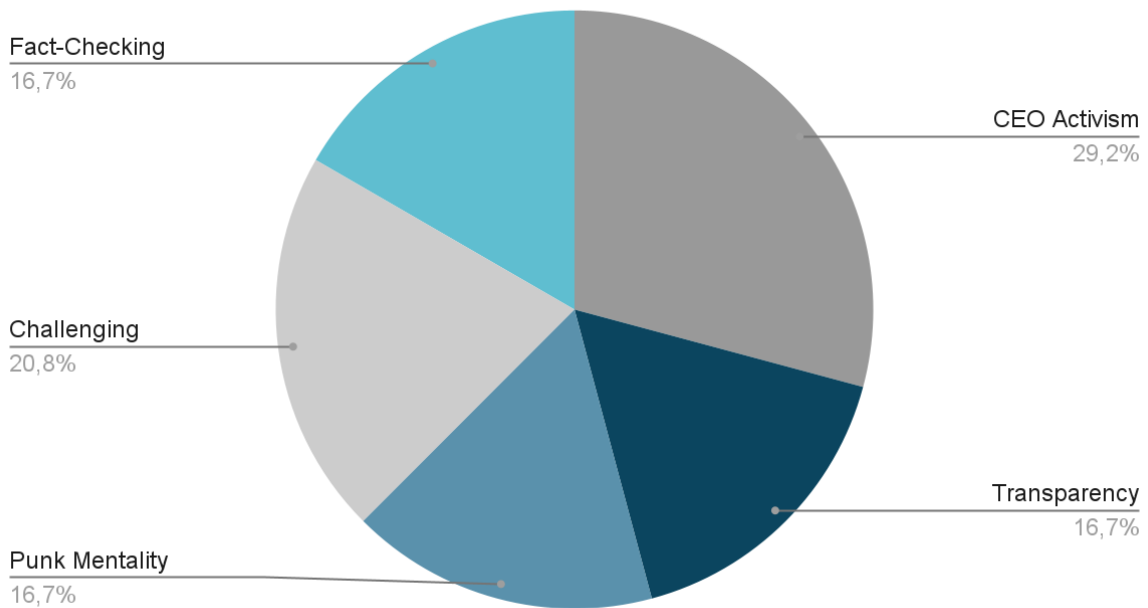
Appendix C. Statistics of dimensions of criticism

Dimensions



Appendix D. Statistics of BrewDog's responses

BrewDog's responses



Appendix E. Response from @BrewDog (2022, November 11)



Appendix F. Response from @BrewDog (2022, November 9)

**NO FREE SPEECH
NO RAINBOW FLAGS
AND NOW NO BEER
WHAT A PARTY**

**PROUD
ANTI SPONSOR
OF THE
WORLD CUP**



Appendix G. Response from @BrewDog (2022, November 22)



Appendix H. Response from @BrewDog (2022, November 7)

**FYI, THE Q IN
LGBTQ+ DOES NOT
STAND FOR QATAR**

**PROUD
ANTI-SPONSOR
OF THE
WORLD CUP**



Appendix I. Response from @BrewDog (2022, November 7)

To do list

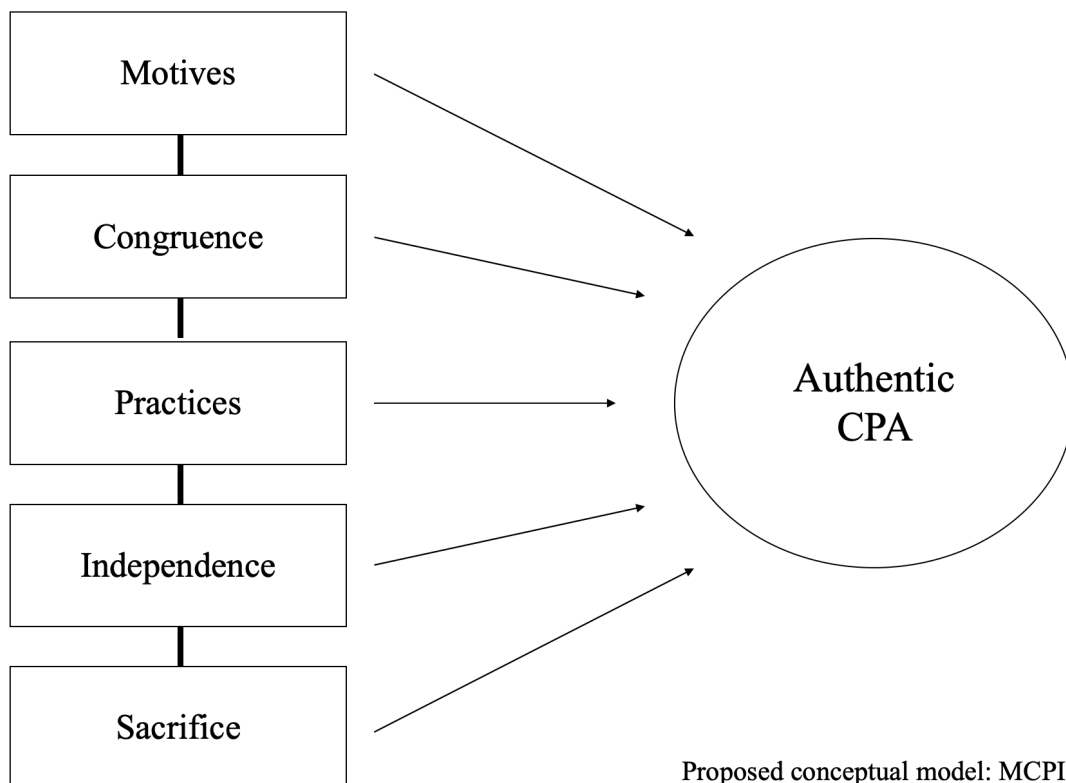
Monday 7 November

- ✓ Publish World Cup Lost Lager charity donation announcement
- ✓ Watch Twitter explode
- ✓ Continue watching Twitter explode

Tuesday 8 November

- Is Twitter still exploding?

Appendix J. MCPIS framework



Appendix K. Coding frames consumer responses

Dimension: Motives		
Sub-dimension:	Codes:	Sample comments:
Improve bottom line	Profit, commercial gain, make money, turnover	“[...] Your tweet RIGHT HERE is YOU trying to profit off that barbaric depravity. SHAME!!!!!!”
Marketing ploy	Marketing tactic, PR, superficial marketing, publicity stunt	“It’s a great marketing campaign, not an ideological stand. Great PR. It’s very clever but equally superficial.”
Woke-washing	Virtue signalling, woke drinks, woke-washing, woke	“Omg what in the Wokeirati is this madness, even though I’m teetotal in fully intend to boycott you and your woke drinks.”
Genuine	Respect, support, great morals, thumbs up	“Respect to you and your morals I’ll raise a glass to that 🍷”

Dimension: Congruence		
Sub-dimension:	Codes:	Sample comments:
Core business - A factor causing abuse	Alcohol-related, domestic violence, abuse cases, suicide, death	“[...] Your business contributes to these deaths and domestic abuse cases. Stop selling alcohol.”
BrewDog’s labour allegations	Open letter, sexual harassment, culture of fear, staff, work-place conditions, human rights record, bullying	“Brewdog; The only people with a worse human rights record than Qatar.”

Dimension: Practices		
Sub-dimension:	Codes:	Sample comments:
Showing the World Cup	Pubs, show the games, matches, broadcasting	“Let’s be honest about this. If you show the games then you buy into it. All of it.”
Selling beer in Qatar	Third-party, buy, beer sales	“Does that include your beers being sold in Qatar? And do you have any plans to pull beer sales from this nation you detest so much? [...]”

Dimension: Independence		
Sub-dimension:	Codes:	Sample comment:
–	Bandwagon, cheap attention, topical conversation, timing	“You know what, sometimes it’s better to just stay quiet and not look at every controversial situation as a change for a bit of cheap attention.”

Dimension: Sacrifice		
Sub-dimension:	Codes:	Sample comment:
–	Donate, charity, NGO	“Wouldn’t it be easier to share a link to a reputable charitable company who supports human rights abuse? Buying beer and hoping it finds its way to charity feels as corrupt as the Qatar World Cup.”

Appendix L. Coding frame BrewDog's responses

	Response strategies:	Descriptions:	Sample responses:
Humour & Wit	CEO Activism	Responses from @BrewDogJames account.	“Why? Same reason as before [...] we’re anti corruption. And we’re anti human rights abuse. Not that complicated, really.” @BrewDogJames
	Challenging	Responses opposing large corporations	“The brands on the left paid billions to sponsor a corrupt World Cup in a despotic state. The brand on the right is raising money for human rights causes in Qatar. Just saying”
	Punk Mentality	Responses indicating an “I don’t give a damn approach” and expressing nonchalant attitude and non-conformity.	“And a bit of the usual Twitter hate is the price we have to pay for massively raising awareness of the continued human rights abuses in Qatar and the obvious corruption of FIFA, then so be it”
	Transparency	Responses acknowledging the criticism and evidence of actual donation.	“UPDATE: so, our Anti-Sponsoring of the World F*Cup, that caused a BIT of noise? It raised £111,153 for human rights charities [...]”
	Fact-Checking	Responses that backs up the stance with external sources.	“Yesterday a Qatari official described homosexuality as “damage of the mind” (BBC News) [...] As Anti-sponsors, we want to point out that FIFA doesn’t own football & Qatar doesn’t own love or human behaviour.”