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The Emotional Side of Strategic Communication:
A Narrative Analysis of Brand Activist Campaigns and the Young
Public's Emotional Response

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Abstract

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This thesis analyzes how the young public feels about communication efforts that seek to emotionally appeal to them, by investigating the example of brand activist campaigns. By applying narrative theory, the study examines how these campaigns are structured to evoke emotions and how the young public emotionally responds to them. This way, the thesis has a holistic approach to the emotional side of strategic communication by examining both the strategic and receiving side of brand communication. The empirical material was collected from three activist campaigns and four focus group discussions with international students enrolled at Lund University. Through a qualitative narrative analysis of the activist campaigns, findings demonstrated that they use similar storytelling techniques to strategically communicate the campaign narratives, to evoke feelings such as inspiration and encouragement. From the receiving side, the young public's emotions were revealed once they started to discuss the campaigns. By doing so, a broader range of emotions were evoked and conflicted with one another. Further findings demonstrate that the most typical emotions evoked by the brand activist campaigns were skepticism, hopefulness, and relatability. The study shows that emotions arise when the public discusses brand activist campaigns, which is crucial for the improvement of communication efforts and for the understanding of how to strategically communicate messages.

Keyword: Emotions, Brand Communication, Storytelling, Brand Activism, Public

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1. Introduction

Emotions play a significant role in shaping thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors. Understanding this fundamental aspect of human nature is essential for effective communication strategies. However, emotions are a neglected dimension of strategic communication and their significance is demonstrated by the incorporation of emotional appeals in communication efforts. Communication that evokes emotions can create strong relationships with the public, as well as stay present in their social networks, life stories, and memories. These results have been observed by both researchers and practitioners within the fields of communication (Thompson et al., 2006). Understanding how emotions can influence communication can greatly enhance the effectiveness of communication strategies. This is because the power of emotionally appealing messages ultimately influences the public's feelings toward a brand (Gobé, 2010). However, to date, the field of strategic communication lacks research considering the emotional appeal in brand communication. Particularly, how commercial messages appeal to stakeholders, how it stimulates emotions, and how it can develop beneficial relationships with the public. The internal and organizational focus of strategic communication has overshadowed this external point of view and as Zerfass and Dühring (2012) state, research in strategic communication should not only limit itself to the examination of organizational structures and internal power dynamics. Against this, brand communication is an area that benefits from further development. The neglect of emotions in strategic communication can lead to overlooking potential success factors in external communication efforts, such as crafting commercial messages and developing campaigns. As emotional experiences influence people, it is critical for organizations to understand how to appeal to the public's emotions since their organizational success may rely on their stakeholder's support. It is often considered irrational to involve emotions in communications, but on the contrary, it is a part of being rational to consider the emotions of external stakeholders (Yeomans, 2007).

Enhancing the focus on external communication, such as branding strategies, and specifically exploring the emotional connection between the public and brands can enrich the field of strategic communication. Against this, the current view on the public's emotional response to brands' attempts to reach them on an emotional level is insufficient. Current litera-

ture is based on quantitative research which is not considering the social and cultural understanding of the public's emotional interpretations of brands' communication efforts. In addition, emotions and their impact on brands' communication strategies have so far received little attention from researchers within strategic communication. Rather than studying how the public feels about communication efforts, research has focused on how the public perceives such efforts. In addition, most research on the subject of emotions investigates them from a psychological or a quantitative perspective. Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2014) suggest that investigating the influence of communication on the public sphere can help organizations effectively reach and engage with the public, which is, among other things, a goal of strategic communication. This can be done by investigating how the public emotionally reacts to communication efforts.

One way for brands to evoke emotions among the public is to utilize brand activism in their brand communication. Because of this, this thesis uses brand activism as an example to explore the emotional side of strategic communication. Brands have become increasingly integrated with the public's cultural values, using socio-political issues as resources for commercial messages (Aronczyk, 2013). By engaging in activism brands do not only connect with the public on a higher level than the product, but also on a deeper emotional level. Brands actively shape political agendas by encouraging the public to participate in demonstrations, for example, the environmentally cautious brand Patagonia. There are several reasons why it is beneficial for Patagonia, as well as other brands, to engage in such activities. The strategy of brand activism and engaging in social causes is valuable for brands and organizations to strengthen emotional bonds and a way to differentiate themselves from other brands in a highly competitive market (Kotler & Sarkar, 2021; Tsiotsou, 2010). As a communication strategy, brand activism means strengthening the external view of the company by demonstrating that the brand is committed to making a positive impact on a societal level. Brand activism takes into account the interest not only of the public but of political agendas as well (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). However, while organizations and brands are pursuing these strategies, the risk of causes being interpreted as less legitimate by the public has also increased. Utilizing brand activism as a communication strategy may be a way for brands to take advantage of socio-political matters but to avoid being questioned in terms of authenticity, such as allegations of greenwashing, it is crucial to communicate these actions appropriately.

A well-known example of brand activism is the case of Nike and the former NFL player Colin Kaepernick's standpoint against racism, shortly after he kneeled during a game's national anthem in protest at racial injustice. The campaign supported Kaepernick and illus-

trated how Nike too, took a stand for the cause. Despite the controversy the campaign sparked, people showed their support and appreciation towards Nike following the campaign (The Guardian, 2019). This campaign is just one example of how brand activism and its emotional approach toward the public generated positive feedback from multiple stakeholders.

1.1 Aim and research questions

This thesis aims to explore how the young public feels about communication efforts that seek to emotionally appeal to them, by investigating the example of brand activist campaigns. By doing so, this thesis examines both the strategic side as well as the receiving side of communication. This holistic approach contributes to the development of the field of strategic communication with a deeper understanding of how commercial messages can unveil emotions in contemporary communication campaigns. In order to fulfill the aim of this study, the following research questions will be analyzed:

1. How are the narratives strategically communicated in activist branding campaigns in order to evoke emotions?
2. What emotions are evoked among the young public in relation to brand activist campaigns?
3. How do these emotions arise when the young public discusses brand activist campaigns?

To answer these research questions, this thesis investigates brand communication, as a form of strategic communication, and how activist campaign narratives that seek to emotionally appeal to the young public are constructed. Subsequently, it investigates how the young public discusses their emotions when exposed to those campaigns. Research in strategic communication plays a crucial role in enlightening and influencing organizations in relation to "[...] public expectations, concerns, interests, and needs" (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012, p. 291). Hence, identifying the public's emotional investment in brands is a continuous essential activity for organizations to pursue. To understand how the public feels about certain communication initiatives, we acquired their viewpoint of what kinds of emotions they experienced, but also why those emotions occurred. Because of this, brand activism serves as a great example to utilize for a study as it intentionally seeks to cause emotional responses in the public.

1.2 Disposition

The following chapter presents previous research and elaborates on the research gap in the current literature. Subsequently, relevant theories for the study are presented in chapter three. The fourth chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the research method used in the thesis. The following two chapters detail the analyses of the findings, followed by the presentation and discussion of the results. Lastly, implications, limitations, and further research are presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Emotions and strategic communication

Previous literature on strategic communication has mostly been limited in the study of emotions and feelings; the focus has largely been on questions that can be quantitatively analyzed. Researchers within strategic communication typically treat emotions as psychological states of mind and usually examine them through surveys. Exemplified in the quantitative study by Jin et al. (2017), which used a survey to identify communication actions to effectively connect people emotionally with messages, with significant attention given to various social media platforms. Jin et al. (2017) report that one of the key success factors when engaging with stakeholders on social media is to understand their emotions when consuming content and how organizations can increase their brand visibility and foster stronger stakeholder relationships to achieve their communication goals. In their quantitative study, it is highlighted how emotions have a crucial role in motivating people to actively partake in social media and that different emotions have different capacities to drive engagement, depending on the type of context. The findings resulted in the categorization of emotions into positive, negative, self-focused, and other-focused emotions. For example, positive emotions appeared to be more efficient in driving engagement with entertaining or humorous content, while negative emotions were optimal when driving engagement with controversial or politically charged content. Driving engagement with content related to personal achievement or status was most effective among people with self-focused emotions, and content concerning socio-political and charitable causes by other-focused emotions such as empathy and sympathy. However, the study also found that emotions can be influenced by a range of factors, including which social media platform the content was consumed on and the content itself. This is because emotions are non-static and depend on how people are influenced by social norms and expectations around them. Jin et al. (2017) also emphasized the need for future research on emotions within strategic communication and that researchers should investigate the effectiveness of using different emotional appeals to target specific stakeholder groups. They also suggest that such research should take into account how emotional responses to social media content may vary across different cultures and contexts. Lastly, they recommend that future research

should explore how emotions can influence stakeholder perceptions of organizations and their messages. More specifically, to understand how emotions shape stakeholder attitudes and behaviors toward organizations and how organizations can leverage emotional appeals to influence these attitudes in a positive way (Jin et al., 2017).

There has also been research on emotions in relation to crisis communication, specifically on how different emotions experienced by the public during crises impact their coping behaviors (Jin et al., 2016). This quantitative study also uses a survey as method and categorizes emotions into three groups: scared, outraged, and anxious. The paper proposes that these emotions, demographics, and levels of involvement can predict public coping behaviors. Jin et al. (2016) argue that emotions play a crucial role in shaping how the public receives and responds to messages in strategic communication. Therefore, it is essential to keep researching this area to deepen the understanding of the emotional responses of stakeholders. This is essential for organizations in order to effectively engage with the public. The authors also highlight how emotions can influence how stakeholders perceive an organization, its messages, and its goals. They can also impact how stakeholders behave and respond to communication, such as whether they take action or not. By studying emotions in strategic communication, organizations can better understand how to appeal to stakeholders' emotions to encourage positive responses (Jin et al., 2016).

The definition of strategic communication has evolved since it first emerged, and scholars have debated its definition. Early on, it was defined as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” by Holtzhausen and Hallahan et al. (2007, p.3). This also implies that people will be engaged in deliberate communication practice on behalf of organizations, causes, and social movements (Hallahan et al., 2007). Later, Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2014) advocated for a more comprehensive definition of strategic communication as “the practice of deliberate and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach set goals” (Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2014, p.4). As a result of this evolution, strategic communication focuses on a holistic understanding and on considering various factors such as audience diversity and the overall impact of messages on the organization and its stakeholders. In addition, it emphasizes combining multiple perspectives and methods to create effective and meaningful communication strategies (Hallahan et al., 2007). Against this, emotions and the emotional side of communication is essential to explore within strategic communication, as it adds to the understanding of stakeholders’ interests and needs. The identified gap is the lack of examining the perspective of how the public feels about brands' efforts to appeal to them

emotionally. This study hence takes a unique approach in looking at emotions in a different way, where the focus is on how people discuss their emotions through a qualitative approach.

2.2 Brand activism as an emotional strategy

Generally, emotions have been the focus of extensive research and inquiry for centuries. Shirmer (2015) defines them as conscious or unconscious mental states evoked by events that are appraised as relevant to one's needs and that motivate behaviors to fulfill these needs.

In recent years, the study of emotions has gained significant interest from fields outside psychology and neuroscience, such as the social sciences, where researchers now recognize the positive impact of emotions on decision-making processes. This has evolved the study of emotions from a largely ignored topic to a popular multidisciplinary endeavor (Schirmer, 2015).

Branding is a fundamental form of strategic communication (Zhang et al., 2014). It has been defined as “a way of shaping what the product or organization says and does, in order to change how people think, feel, and act in a way that creates commercial, and sometimes also social value” (Jones, 2017, p.23). Understanding the complexities of branding and the various perspectives from which it can be viewed is crucial for effectively shaping a brand's identity and value. Branding is a common way to appeal to the public's emotions, and with the younger generation being recognized as more purpose-driven and drawn to brands with a clear vision, this has led to a shift in how brands communicate their purpose. As a result, brands are making more effort to incorporate their purpose into their marketing and branding strategies (Hsu, 2017). Branding strategies that aim to emotionally appeal to the public can create strong emotional links and relationships between brands and their audiences, hence being a more sustainable competitive advantage than traditional branding strategies (Thompson et al., 2006). To connect with the young public, brands need to consider a long-term plan which aligns with their values and resonates with them. To remain relevant, a brand should also maintain a level of transparency, honesty, and consistency in their communication, in order to establish trust with stakeholders (Hsu, 2017). With the evolution of a more conscious public, brands have evolved from engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and cause-related marketing and involving brand activism in their strategy.

The concept of brand activism refers to a brand's efforts that promote social, political, economic, or environmental reforms that resonate with a progressive audience (Pöyry & Laaksonen, 2022). It can be either progressive or regressive, with the former aiming to create

change for larger problems in society and the latter focused on self-promotion over the well-being of stakeholders and the environment. Recent developments in brand activism have mainly focused on socio-political activism, brand-political activism, and authentic brand activism. To exemplify, Key et al. (2021) state that authentic brand activism is best suited for brand activism strategies as it relies on consistency between the brand's previous actions, values, and credibility among the public. Brand activism can be manifested in several ways, such as publicly expressing a stance on a social or a political issue, advocating for the cause through lobbying efforts, contributing financial resources to support a particular cause, or integrating messaging about a cause into their marketing and communication (Shivakanth Shetty et al., 2019). As a result, brand activism can strengthen the emotional connection between the brand and the public when successfully executed. It has also been reported that engaging in brand activism and taking a stance on socio-political issues has become a trend among brands' strategies. This is because brand activism can give rise to more memorable and authentic messages, as it appeals to the public's emotions (Key et al., 2021).

Although CSR initiatives get more frequent for organizations to engage in, strategic communication practitioners have concluded that only supporting a socio-political cause is usually not enough. An organization's support of a cause needs to be perceived as authentic and legitimate, in order not to be perceived as a company that merely uses CSR for self-serving and economic profit (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019). A shift in society has put pressure on corporations to take a stand on socio-political issues. According to Aronczyk (2013), this shift has caused more brands to take part in activism, with resistance and protest as marketable commodities. However, it is also stated that with this comes a blurred line between brands that are genuine and brands that are using this new tactic of CSR and adopting activism as a branding technique (Aronczyk 2013). By taking a stance on socio-political issues, corporations acknowledge that they may potentially distance themselves from a portion of their customer base, which can be a debatable process within organizations (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Key et al., 2021). If a brand's supported cause is not aligned with the audience's values, the risk of boycotting or selecting a different brand increases (Shivakanth Shetty et al., 2019). Studies in, for example, public policy and marketing in recent years have rather focused on assessing the authenticity of brands' activism efforts than the emotional responses, and the findings have shed light on the actions required for a brand to be viewed as genuine in its activism efforts. To be seen as authentic, it needs to be emotionally convincing (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Studies on brand activism are limited within the field of strategic communication, and further research on activism-as-marketing and on the audiences it is designed to reach has been encouraged by researchers like Aronczyk (2013). This is also argued by Key et al. (2021), who points out that organizations can use their brand to promote socio-political causes and leverage their resources to drive meaningful progress and impact communities. In addition, it is argued that researchers need to study brand activism further as it is a key strategy for evolving brands' relationships with the public. By analyzing the strategies and techniques used by brands to engage their audience and promote their values, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of external stakeholders' emotions and preferences, as well as identify emerging trends and opportunities. Lastly, Key et al. (2021) highlight that these insights ultimately can help brands to create campaigns and initiatives that resonate with their audience and build stronger relationships over time.

2.3 Brand-cause fit

Brand-cause fit is a relevant aspect for organizations in relation to the public's emotions, as it is a key factor that influences how the public feels about the brand (Key et al., 2021). This means that brand communication efforts that involve activism are influenced by the emotions of the audience. Fournier et al. (2021) highlight the trend of brands that are trying to connect with their audience through socio-political issues such as gender, climate, diversity, the #Me-Too movement, and more. The link between a company's cause of support and its products or brand is often referred to as the brand-cause fit. Generally, literature has defined a fit between a brand and a cause as the relevance between the two. If they fit, there is a level of consistency between the cause and the brand schemas, which refers to the mental frameworks or associations that people have about a brand and the cause it supports. (Dagyte-Kavoliune et al., 2020). Fournier et al. (2021) give an account of how brands should resonate when selecting a socio-political cause in terms of the cause's attractiveness. Six factors should be considered: currency, endurance, polarization, tonality, resonance, and resistance. Currency refers to whether the issue is on the cultural agenda and discussed by the public. Regarding endurance, brands should ask themselves if the cause is likely to persist over time or risks being a trend that might fade. Polarization refers to if the topic stirs up mixed emotions from opponents and proponents, while tonality is how the socio-political issue generally is being approached, positively or negatively. Lastly, resonance is how the cause most likely will be reacted to by the public, and resistance is the consideration for any type of backlash.

Previous literature presents several views on how the best fit is achieved. One viewpoint posits that an organization's values must align with those supporting the cause. A second suggests that a brand's target audience should be the same audience who would support the cause in question (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019). Fournier et al. (2021) report on the power a socio-political stance can add to a brand but highlight the importance of weighing in three key factors while selecting a cause: brand heritage, brand baggage, and authenticity. First, the cause should align with the history of the brand and its core values. Second, there should not be any past event or part of the brand's history that might misalign with the cause and eventually result in a damaged brand image. Third, the brand's engagement in brand activism must be genuine and credible (Fournier et al., 2021). For an organization to be considered authentic, it must prove itself through its actions, as good intentions are not enough to gain stakeholders' trust (Coombs et al., 2012). One way of portraying an organization's brand as more authentic is to implement monetary contributions to the cause as a response to the public's demand for more authentic brand communications (Champlin & Li, 2020).

It is further emphasized that organizations should align their actions with their core values and demonstrate consistency in their behavior and communication to gain trust and support from their stakeholders. (Coombs et al., 2012). Key et al. (2021) discuss brand-cause fit in relation to authentic brand activism and highlight how both of these are essential starting points in an ethical perusal of brand-driven change. Any discrepancies between the activism and the brand-cause fit could be perceived as insincere and unethical. Therefore, it is highlighted how crucial it is for brands to align their identity with the chosen socio-political issue to support. Champlin (et al. 2019) reports on how this alignment can occur in three ways: through a functional match, an image match, or a target audience match. A functional match is when the product's function aligns with the cause, while image match refers to when the brand's personality aligns with the cause's features. The third, target audience match, is when the existing customer base overlaps with the people most likely to support the cause. Previous studies have also demonstrated how the public can feel a higher level of skepticism toward a brand, leading to incongruity if the supported cause does not align with the brand's values (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019). This is also reported by Mirzaei et al. (2022), who highlight the public's negative perceptions of the brand when the fit between the brand and cause is weak. This can lead to inauthenticity, or woke-washing, which can mislead the public and be harmful to the brand (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

In recent years, several companies have supported the social movement for gender equality and women's empowerment. Abitbol and Sternadori (2019) state that one of the most

noticeable expressions in this cultural shift is femvertising. Femvertising is a term used to describe campaigns that aim to, apart from selling a product or service, also empower and promote gender equality and women's rights. It is a strategic way of expressing the company's support for girls and women (Skey, 2015). Today, femvertising is a common communication strategy widely used in countries all over the world (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019). The increased engagement for a better representation of women in branding is a major factor that has contributed to the rise of femvertising. Not only does it entail a higher recognition of how campaigns portray products aimed at women, but also the portrayal of gender stereotypes in media as a whole (Varghese & Kumar, 2020). Despite the relatively large number of brands that support the cause of gender equality, the topic is still limited in research, especially on how the target audience feels about such communication strategies (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2016; Drake, 2017; Kapoor & Munjal, 2019). However, both positive and negative effects of femvertising have been identified. Femvertising has been shown to increase positive attitudes and associations towards a brand, particularly among women and millennials. Although, it has also raised concerns about the perceived authenticity of brands using femvertising, suggesting that it may be more of a marketing gimmick than a genuine attempt to promote feminist values. There is also a debate over its origins and consequences, with some seeing it as a manifestation of movement marketing and others arguing that it reinforces gender stereotypes (Varghese & Kumar, 2020).

Another popular cause for brands to advocate for is environmental responsibility. Research has shown that the public tends to respond positively to sustainable products and has expressed a willingness to commit to green products. On the other hand, the public is often skeptical about organizations' claims of environmentally friendly efforts (Koo & Loken, 2021). Stakeholders have become increasingly wary of companies that advertise their environmental strategies and performances. This skepticism is more prevalent among younger people. For brands to effectively communicate environmental initiatives, they need to consider their approach to the topic carefully to ensure that people do not see the efforts as greenwashing (Torelli et al., 2019).

2.4 Research gap

In this literature review, a research gap has been found and highlighted. This gap includes the lack of research on how the public feel and reasons for communication efforts from a qualitative perspective. It shows how research so far only have examined the public's perceptions, as

well as emotions in relation to other areas of strategic communication than branding, such as crisis communication and social media. It also becomes apparent that most research concludes that brands and their selected cause of support need to be highly aligned and consistent. This is closely tied to the focus on consumer perceptions and how the encoding of communication should be as aligned as possible with the intended message. However, this linear and instrumental view of branding and brand-cause fit has been criticized from the cultural perspective, as there are other ways of understanding branding, which is presented in the following chapter of theory. Against this, this thesis moves away from the conventional way of viewing branding and how it is perceived in different contexts to instead focus on the cultural perspective and how the public feels and discusses their emotions in relation to communication efforts such as brand activism. Furthermore, when exploring branding strategies, it is evident that there are well-established traditions of using quantitative and more measurable approaches to achieve organizational success. Storytelling and creative language skills, on the other hand, are sometimes recognized as sporadic or specialized functions, rather than being a fundamental skill set that all business professionals should strive to develop. According to Herskovitz and Crystal (2010), this perception is unfortunate, as storytelling is a valuable tool that can be practiced and improved like any other skill.

3. Theory

3.1 Emotional and cultural branding

This thesis utilizes the cultural perspective on branding. Two types of branding have emerged from this perspective: cultural branding and emotional branding. As these branding strategies have evolved from CCT, this perspective allows us to address the previously presented research gap. Branding strategies departing from CCT view the market as a myth market, not a product market. This is essential for understanding how brands compete with cultural products that perform myths rather than concrete products solely promoted through characteristics and functionality (Holt, 2004).

The shaping of the public's emotions toward brands can often be influenced by communication efforts (Pinto et al., 2022). Language and discourses can be used in various ways to shape the values and attributes associated with a brand. This includes not only the traditional strategies of naming and describing qualities of a brand but also the use of interpersonal language features such as tone and reader position. These strategies can be used to shape stronger relationships with stakeholders (Lischinsky, 2017). People have the ability to develop connections with brands similar to relationships with other people, where the brand acts as a partner that helps them reach their personal goals (Fournier, 1998; Thompson et al., 2006). Emotional branding is an emerging field within the brand management paradigm. It is built upon a consumer-centric approach to developing a deeper bond between the public and brands. The concept of emotional branding arose as a response to the benefit-focused approach to traditional branding (Rossiter & Bellman, 2012). The authors define it as “[...] the consumer's attachment of a strong, specific, usage-relevant emotion—such as Bonding, Companionship, or Love—to the brand” (Rossiter & Bellman, 2012, p. 292). Fournier (1998) highlights that these deep emotional connections only occur when a brand is part of the public's life and incorporated into peoples' identity creation. However, critics of traditional branding argue that establishing a clear list of benefits of a brand in the minds of the public is not the best way to go. This can easily be replicated and therefore be insufficient, as it usually is based on technology and visual aspects such as product design (Thompson et al., 2006). In addition, traditional branding strategies which rely on direct benefit appeals are less likely to

distinguish the brand in today's saturated and hyper-competitive environment of advertisements and media. As more and more brands compete for the public's attention and loyalty, it is increasingly crucial for brands to find novel and innovative paths beyond the traditional ones, to stand out and stay relevant (Thompson et al., 2006).

The philosophy behind emotional branding is focused on the postmodern view that brand meanings are no longer solely controlled by the organization's brand management. Rather, brands' values and meanings are cocreated by audiences through constant interaction, so-called shared brand ownership. This can be exemplified by communities of Harley-Davidson and Apple users. The people and owners of shared brand communities tend to unintentionally promote the brand to other groups of people. They are also more likely to share personal stories that involve the brand in a positive way. An additional argument used by tenets of emotional branding is the increased skepticism toward traditional marketing practices (Gobé, 2010). From an emotional branding point of view, certain risks may come to hurt the brand if the strategy is not properly managed. The risk and backlash that Thompson et al. (2006) refer to is the effect and development of the *doppelgänger* brand image. To exemplify, a *doppelgänger* brand image can be a satirical narrative aiming to highlight the ethical issues a brand may be facing or the product the brand is promoting. If such brand images continue to spread over time, it can lead to increased criticism towards, and eventually damage, the brand. In addition, the generated meanings and value of the *doppelgänger* brand image may start to compete with the original one.

Alongside the model of emotional branding, cultural branding is an additional strategy for brands to employ to emotionally appeal to the public (Holt, 2004). Cultural branding, which also is part of CCT, requires the brand to identify the most suitable market for myths as a first step in the branding process. Myths are compelling stories and narratives which are developed to evoke audiences' emotional connections with brands and establish a sense of tradition, heritage, and symbolism that consumers can relate to and be inspired by when encountering the brand (Holt, 2004). However, this can be a difficult task since cultures of society, and hence the market, are not static. Therefore, there will always be cultural disruptions influencing the potential target group. Today's most iconic brands have become sensitive to such cultural disruptions to navigate this landscape. What makes them iconic and successful is their ability to navigate cultural disruptions by encoding the new trends in the myth market and strategizing on the new target (Holt, 2004).

Today, some of the most used branding models are a combination of mixed strategies, for example, both emotional and cultural branding. Unlike emotional branding, which posi-

tions the brand as an emotional partner to the public, cultural branding departs from the idea of performing myths. In other words, cultural branding is a way for companies to portray a lifestyle that is culturally relevant to their audience. As the world is increasingly getting more globalized, brands need to meet the demands of an increasingly culturally diverse public (Torelli, 2013). As Holt (2004) maps out the differences between emotional and cultural branding, it is highlighted how cultural branding stands out as a powerful strategy that advocates both for a different and demanding ideology. This ideology aims to mobilize the public towards interaction and social movements. The myths offered in these movements are adding fuel to the brand's newly created myths rather than the old and mainstream ones. The model of cultural branding differs from traditional branding in the sense that it involves cultural knowledge. This type of knowledge focuses on the level of societal changes rather than on changes on the individual level. The cultural knowledge leading to a successful cultural branding strategy can be split into four different aspects (Holt, 2004). First, is the knowledge regarding social and societal categories, such as gender, class, and ethnicity. Second, by having this knowledge, the brand can be viewed as a historical player in society. Third, cultural knowledge allows the creators behind the brand to view the public in a holistic way. Understanding what gives the public meaning in life is more advantageous than simply viewing them as customers benefiting from product categories. Lastly, cultural knowledge involves a deeper investigation of mass cultural texts, such as movies, shows, and other types of entertainment. This is to understand how such texts contribute to the construction of cultural values, beliefs, and identities among the public. By viewing mass culture not only as a consumer demand, cultural branding also seeks to understand the importance of representing cultural identity and meaning. However, despite the positive outcomes the model of cultural branding can bring, organizations often tend to strategize their branding based on the most profitable consumer group, which usually is not dedicated followers of the created myth around the brand (Holt, 2004).

3.2 Brand myths as stories

As emotions are evoked by myths, brands can emotionally appeal to the public by constructing compelling narratives. Because of this, there has been an increasing interest in storytelling as a technique for creating and communicating a brand's identity and key messages (Ala-Korttesmaa et al., 2022; Fog et al., 2010). The study of narrative and stories is referred to as narratology. Storytelling generally involves choosing which characters and events to include, which details to emphasize, and which to ignore. Narratology and its ancient and modern theorists have provided valuable tools for understanding and describing the operations and phenomena associated with storytelling. These tools have enabled the storytellers to create a compelling narrative despite the impossibility of telling a complete and perfect story (Liveley, 2019). The core concept of a narrative lies in its retrospective aspect, meaning that narratives always entail reflecting on a current moment and interpreting events as components of a bigger picture (Freeman, 2015). Narratives are seen as social products produced by people in specific social, historical, and cultural contexts. They are interpretive devices used to represent oneself to oneself and others. Overall, the narrative approach highlights the importance of narrative as a tool for interpreting and ordering one's life experiences (Mildorf, 2019). Narrative theory can only describe the narrative aspects of a text and not all of its characteristics. There is not a specific group of texts that can be universally considered a "narrative", as the relevance of narrative characteristics may vary depending on the text.

Furthermore, stories can initiate action, elaborate on values, share knowledge, and guide the public toward the future (Mouton et al., 2018). Through the products and brands which the public chooses, they signal their beliefs and lifestyle to the world. The public expresses themselves through brands, and therefore, brands can take the role of helping them communicate who they are and what they believe in (Fog et al., 2010). Storytelling as a branding strategy has the power to highlight and develop the brand's desired character or personality, which is increasingly important as the public is more likely to connect with brands that they think have a present and compelling character (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010). To maintain the public's loyalty, today's organizations must create relevant messaging differentiating them from others. Because of that storytelling can be implemented and used in multiple ways in organizations, it serves as a critical asset when refining branding efforts. Research has also illustrated that trust and positive feelings among the public increase when storytelling and narrative techniques of high quality are developed and implemented.

From a strategic communication perspective, this makes storytelling a relevant and significant communication technique. It further allows organizations to develop a framework of guidelines on who and what the brand is, more so than just the products it is selling. In other words, it aids in creating a holistic image of the brand that includes its values, mission, and personality (Weber & Grauer, 2019). Furthermore, verisimilitude is a common element in storytelling that refers to the likelihood of story events actually occurring. The authenticity of a story is an essential factor that enables listeners to trust and engage with the plot. The degree of verisimilitude can also impact how closely the story resembles real-life experiences (Van Laer et al., 2014). This is demonstrated in Dessart and Pitardi's (2019) study, which suggests that the more realistic a story appears to viewers, the more they react to it emotionally. This is because a realistic story triggers reflections about the potential effectiveness of advertising in conveying important messages, which positively impacts the viewers' emotions. It also leads to actions such as sharing the content with others and recommending it to peers. Therefore, storytelling plays an important role in influencing people's emotions and the spread of word-of-mouth. Additionally, it reveals how viewers directly endorse the branded content by showing support for it (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019).

Advertising is a common type of communication that often involves narrative structures and storytelling. To enhance the entertainment value of a campaign and appeal to the audience's emotions, commercial messages in advertising can advantageously be built upon narrative sequences and storytelling techniques that may or may not be directly related to the product or service (Freitas, 2010). Holt (2002) referred to this phenomenon in relation to authenticity as consumers view the distance between the commercial profit motive and the messaging as an indicator of authenticity. According to Holt, this awareness leads to the public's recognition of brands as contributors to culture.

Due to time constraints in capturing the public's attention, commercial messages as narratives often rely on basic features, such as gesturing and facial expressions, to convey the sequence of events in a condensed and engaging way. These narrative techniques are often elliptical, meaning that they leave gaps for the viewer to fill in using their own understanding and prior knowledge. By relying on the viewer's own schema which is their mental frameworks for interpreting information, effective and engaging narratives that resonate with the viewer and encourage them to engage with the brand or product being advertised can be created (Freitas, 2010). The optimal result occurs when the communication effectively emphasizes the significance of the product through a creative medium that diminishes the receiver's skepticism (Heath et al., 2018). However, according to Weber and Grauers (2019), when it

comes to influencing the public's feelings through messaging, there is a higher risk of negative emotions when the narrative is too fragmented and in shorter sequences. As a result, more extensive narratives tend to be considered more favorable in shaping the public's attitudes and feelings toward a brand. While storytelling can have positive outcomes, some critics argue that advertising campaigns that rely on narratives may lack transparency and honesty about their underlying intentions. Instead, they may employ a range of tactics concerning manipulation and persuasion (Weber & Grauer, 2019).

3.3 Consumer culture theory

Emotions are considered crucial for developing a deeper understanding of consumer communications (Richins, 1997). In relation to consumer communication, emotions are defined as “[...] the set of emotional responses elicited specifically during product usage or consumption experience” (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991, p.85). As this thesis departs from CCT (Consumer culture theory), the results will also contribute to cultural research within the field of strategic communication. CCT explores the culture of consumption and the cultural ways of expressing emotions in the public sphere. It is an umbrella term for multiple socio-cultural disciplines within market research and consumer behavior. Generally, CCT refers to multiple perspectives highlighting the relationships between consumers, the market, and cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Additionally, CCT seeks to examine how consumers interpret commercial messages. These messages can be crafted by brands and used in advertising, but it can also be how messages are interpreted in other public contexts, such as in retail settings. How these messages and portrayals of brands are encoded and transformed into symbolic meanings is essential in CCT, as it depicts how they become part of consumers' identities and, ultimately, consumers' lifestyle goals. A key concept of CCT is to shed light on issues related to consumption by individuals and groups. Consumption in this context is characterized as the possession, use, and disposal of products, services, knowledge, visuals, and experiences. CCT can beneficially be applied to communication studies, which brings together the relationship between communication, culture, and consumers. As consumers are essential stakeholders for many organizations, strategic communication can benefit from studying consumers or the public in relation to branding in an emotional context. CCT provides a different view of strategic communication, and how to reach set goals in communication efforts (Holt, 2004). In contemporary consumer culture, it is realized that the public is not a passive audience but rather an active participant in interpreting and internalizing the messages that organi-

zations communicate. The public incorporates these messages into their sense of identity, underscoring the importance of organizations tailoring their communications to resonate with their intended audience's values, identity and culture. By doing so, organizations can establish strong connections with their customers, leading to the formation of brand communities. This highlights the crucial role of strategic communication and branding in today's culture (Heath et al., 2018).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research paradigm

Qualitative research is characterized by its focus on exploring and comprehending how individuals interpret their experiences, construct their realities, and assign significance to their encounters. In other words, it seeks to understand the subjective perspectives of participants rather than gathering objective data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The possibilities given to researchers when applying qualitative methods to research are plenty, where each perspective, technique, and style of presentation differs depending on which route the scholar decides on (Prasad, 2017). However, knowledge of techniques and methods is only enough if the researcher has developed an understanding of the paradigm she is working within. A paradigm is the common collection of ontological and epistemological assumptions that brings together researchers and provides them with guidelines for their research (Prasad, 2017). This study departs from the interpretive paradigm, which is based on the idea that humans' interpretations serve as the foundation for understanding the social world (Tracey, 2020). Accessing the dimension of how people feel allows for a nuanced and contextually rich understanding of emotional experiences, including their cultural and social context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Researchers commonly use social construction as the interpretive paradigm builds upon the concept that nothing exists, but rather a reality and knowledge are created and maintained through communication, interaction, and practice (Tracey, 2020). As this paper seeks to investigate how brands strategically communicate socio-political causes to appeal to the public's emotions, the interpretive approach, according to Tracey (2020), would be to gain as much insight as possible from multiple points of view and multiple people.

In our case, the participants are exposed to campaigns that seek to create certain emotional responses. However, as researchers, we cannot for sure know if the participants truly feel the way they express how they feel. Because of this, it is important to highlight how the applied perspective allows us to interpret their feelings. When analyzing the transcripts, they open for interpreting the emotions that arise in the conversation between the participants (Riessman, 2008). In addition, this approach allows us to gain a holistic understanding of how the public interprets and discusses their emotions toward brands through the example of brand

activism. By viewing the public's interpretations and emotions as socially constructed through their language and way of interacting with each other, we can view their constructions as texts, which can further be interpreted and analyzed by us. Social constructionism encourages a critical eye toward what is already taken for granted and challenges assumptions. As this study is conducted in 2023, when organizations and brands still struggle to keep up with the fast-paced environment, it is important to keep questioning already maintained strategies and tactics from brands' sides. Moving forward, it is important to note that when referring to the "public", the focus will specifically pertain to the younger public. Therefore, the term does not encompass the entirety of the general public but rather represents a group of selected participants in the study.

4.2 Research strategy

As narratives are a way of evoking emotions, this thesis will analyze the empirical material with narratology, as well as consider the narrative structures in activist campaigns. To be able to understand how emotions arise and why they occur demands a holistic approach by looking at how the narrative is structured and how it is interpreted by the public. In order to investigate the intersection between the strategic side and the receiving side, the research strategy is based on two different qualitative methods for collecting empirical material: document study and focus groups. By doing this, we are able to achieve a holistic picture of the emotional side of strategic communication. The narratological tools will allow us to unveil the emotions and reasoning of the emotions in the focus group discussions, as well as in the campaign narratives in the document study. Document study is particularly useful in qualitative studies investigating cases, such as campaigns, and is often implemented as a complement to other methods (Morgan, 2022). In addition, focus groups have also proven to be an excellent method to use in conjunction with other ways of collecting empirical material (Tracy, 2020). As this study investigates three different campaigns from three different brands, a document study of each campaign is necessary in order for us to gain a complete understanding of each campaign before moving forward with the focus groups. By conducting a document study prior to the focus groups, this study will gain a deeper understanding of the empirical material, which later will be collected from the participants. The document study will provide an understanding of the campaign's narratives without the influence of the focus group participants (Morgan, 2022).

4.3 Collecting empirical material

By utilizing focus groups, this paper can shed light on the public's interpretation of how brands bring out emotions through brand activism. Focus groups are valuable for several reasons. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), the primary goal of a focus group is to gather rich empirical material in a social setting where participants can reflect on their views in light of others without any obligation for agreement or disagreement among participants. Other reasons include producing unique insights through group interaction, exploring emotional experiences, accessing how people speak to each other in real life, serving as a mini-interaction laboratory, and observing how ideas emerge through conversation. Moreover, this method of assessing empirical material provides this study with insights that uniquely happen within group interactions. This is further referred to as the group effect, which can generate self-disclosure that tends to remain hidden in one-on-one interviews (Tracy, 2020). It has been reported that some focus group participants experience this as making it easier to share viewpoints in a group. In addition, when people meet in groups their ability and likeliness to express and share emotions that contradict the norms prevailing in the dominant culture also increase (Wibeck, 2010). As we aim to understand how the public feels about a brand's efforts to provoke emotions, focus groups are an ideal method to collect empirical material for this study. Our purpose was to observe how people naturally discuss communication actions among themselves. To achieve this, we utilized the method to collect empirical material that was the closest to simulating real-life situations, allowing us to gain insights that might have been missed through other methods. As individuals' feelings and interpretations are often shaped by their discussions with others, we sought to capture these interactions as an integral part of how participants discuss their emotions toward the activist campaigns.

Regarding the study's additional method to collect empirical material, the document study is a versatile method in order to explore social and cultural trends as well as analyze different types of media regarding certain issues. It can further provide insights into which ways social phenomena are understood by people. In addition, it is also emphasized to consider the context in which the documents are produced and used, and that sampling criteria should be developed before selecting the documents (Bryman, 2016).

4.3.1 Sampling: focus group interviews

Regarding interviews, it is essential to ensure that the empirical material is comprehensive enough to support a meaningful and significant analysis (Tracy, 2020). To acquire a saturated amount of material, four focus groups with four participants in each were assembled. Saturation refers to the state when information gathered from the groups starts to repeat itself and is no longer providing the study with new insights (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Krueger and Casey (2015) report that one focus group should preferably not consist of more than ten or less than five participants. However, smaller focus groups consisting of four to six participants are becoming increasingly popular among scholars. This is because of the less complex recruitment process, as well as the hosting of the focus groups. Furthermore, the aim and purpose of the study also serve as an indicator of the ideal size of the focus groups. In this study, where we want to gain insight and understanding of people's experiences and emotions, smaller and more in-depth focus groups were considered as the most preferable group setting, hence the chosen number of four groups. As Krueger and Casey (2015) point out, the groups should also be planned to provide the participants with an environment where they share a similar degree of knowledge and experience in relation to the topic of discussion. This is because we as researchers, want the participants to feel as comfortable as possible in voicing their arguments and comments with the other group members. Against this, the selection of focus group participants for this study was conducted through purposive sampling. This way, we avoided power imbalances and ensured that no obvious social hierarchy was present.

Ideally, focus groups should be characterized by homogeneity and variation (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Given that the younger generations of millennials and generation z will be a vital stakeholder group by 2025, it is essential for brands to establish a meaningful connection between both their own and the audience's values, as well as the supported cause (Sachdev et al., 2021). This is because these generations are more informed and conscious regarding their consumption than others and seek emotional connections (Sachdev et al., 2021). As this paper investigates how brands evoke emotions and use emotional branding techniques, the aim was to form groups with the ability to articulate their emotions and speculate about why certain emotions appear. Because of this, we purposefully contacted international students from Lund University to form four groups. While these participants share a common educational setting, they also come from diverse backgrounds in terms of culture and experiences. This diversity can contribute to an enriching discussion. The age of the participants ranged from 20-28 years old. This age group could further provide us with empirical material from a highly relevant

audience, which reportedly pays more attention to brands' social responsibility and activism than older generations (Hsu, 2017).

Mixing genders in focus groups can, under certain conditions, be unfortunate. Men tend to voice their opinions with more authority and speak more often than women, especially in contexts where the topic of discussion may be interpreted differently by the genders (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In this study, where two of the three campaigns addressed gender-related topics, this was considered when forming the focus groups. Because we wanted to observe a discussion with culturally diverse people and see to which extent having mixed genders affected the conversation, the first focus group was mixed. We also had to acknowledge that both of us doing this study are women, so dividing the focus groups up by gender completely would not be possible for us, as at least one of us would have to be present.

A potential risk with focus groups is that when people participating in research projects are asked about issues they do not know much about, they tend to avoid admitting to this. Instead of admitting their lack of knowledge, they try to provide the researcher with an answer they believe they find satisfactory. These scenarios can be avoided if the researcher is aware of such tendencies and therefore actively can observe and notice these kinds of answers (Krueger & Casey, 2015). With this in mind, we clarified at the beginning of each focus group that we were not studying people's knowledge of a subject, but instead how they interpreted and interpreted the campaigns and, therefore, there was no such thing as right or wrong answers. Furthermore, there was no detectable gender difference in how much people spoke, nor did it seem to affect the atmosphere in a negative way. Rather, it generated a meaningful conversation on the topic when different opinions arose within the group. However, we were carefully observing the process if a group was hijacked by a person or a specific gender, in case we would have to dismiss him or her and change to focus groups divided by gender.

The first focus group was held on March 16th, the following two groups on March 23rd, and the last group on March 24th. All of them were conducted in person. In order to optimize the environment for the participants to feel comfortable sharing their emotions and opinions, each session was introduced with easygoing questions to start a conversation. After this, each group was shown the first campaign, followed by us giving them questions to discuss. The questionnaire guide (appendix 1) we made and followed was structured into two parts. The first part addressed how the participants felt, liked or disliked the video, while the last part addressed the narrative structures. Each part started with some of the less demanding questions to progressively get more advanced. When developing the questionnaire guide, we

used exclusively open-ended questions because we were not seeking factual information. We aimed to encourage emotional discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

4.3.2 Sampling: document study

As this paper aims to explore how the young public feels about communication efforts that seek to emotionally appeal to them by investigating the example of brand activism, three different advertising campaigns that fit the parameters of this paper's research goal were selected. To be able to answer the research questions, each campaign was selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling refers to "[...] choosing a meaningful sample that fits the parameters of the project's research questions and goals" (Tracy, 2020, p. 102). Following Tracey's (2020) tool for developing a sampling plan and the fact that most researchers should strive toward a purposeful sample, our research questions guided and determined which type of documents to be analyzed. The research question which will mainly be answered through the document study is: How are the narratives strategically communicated in activist branding campaigns to evoke emotions? In order to gain as much insightful material from the campaigns to answer this question, the campaigns were selected based on their relevance and "the expectations about their information content" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). Against this, the selection of the cases was information-oriented (Flyvberg, 2006). The following criteria determined the selection:

1. A socio-political issue is addressed in the campaign.
2. The campaign and/or socio-political issue has generated polarization, thus causing emotional responses.
3. The campaigns will be produced and launched no later than 2019.
4. The campaign is in English.

The main criteria when sampling campaigns was to select those with an additional dimension of message more than to sell a product or a service by addressing a socio-political issue that generated polarization. Therefore, the focus group participants will have different opinions and emotions about the campaigns. In addition, each selected campaign was produced no later than 2019. By analyzing recent campaigns, the empirical material and the results of this study add to the accuracy and relevance of the paper. All campaigns were retrieved from each brand's personal Youtube channel. Establishing and following criteria for evaluating the cam-

paings when sampling adds to the study's validity and minimizes selection bias (Yin, 2009). Because these considerations enhance the depth of analysis, reflect the current advertising campaign landscape, ensure source credibility, and minimize potential biases, ultimately strengthening the research's overall strength.

However, a frequent critique of purposeful sampling is the possibility of an unrepresentative sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Because of this, it is essential to highlight that the campaigns should align with the paper's aim and therefore do not represent the full range of brand activist campaigns. Rather, a few campaigns are selected in order to seek an understanding of how narratives are constructed to generate emotional responses. This is also an additional argument for the purposeful sampling method.

The document study was conducted on the 13th and 14th of March. The campaign videos were transcribed and inserted into a coding table where the narrative analysis, including Greimas's model, was later applied. The following selected campaigns below are all examples of campaigns that received media attention during the time they were launched. This is an indicator that the campaigns are information-rich and that they provoke reactions and mixed emotional reactions from multiple stakeholders.

Patagonia – Buy Less, Demand More

Patagonia is an activist brand that seeks to sell not only outdoor clothing but also the idea of social and environmental change, not specifically regarding the fashion industry but more so the global movement for a better environment. Because of this, Patagonia is encouraging its customers to converse about such matters (Patagonia, 2023). The selected advertisement campaign was published for Black Friday and Cyber Monday in 2020. Those days are notorious for retailers to have special promotions, discounts, and sales online and in stores. They are known as the biggest shopping days of the year in the US but have now become an international concept (Probasco, 2022). *Buy Less, Demand More* is an international campaign highlighting the clothing industry's footprints on the climate. The campaign is an example of an activist statement that created emotional reactions from the public and therefore fits this study well.

Billie – Movember

Billie was founded in 2016 (Billie, 2023) and was the first razor and shaving product brand that targeted women and showcased visual body hair in their commercials. Despite Billie's relatively late entry into the razor market, they got worldwide attention when they launched

their first campaign Project Body Hair displaying women's body hair (Barr, 2019). Billie's approach to selling razors was unique, as it also took on a feminist perspective and challenged social norms, which generated mixed emotional reactions from the public. Movember is a charity event and social movement during November, where traditionally, men have grown out their mustaches to raise awareness for men's health. This includes supporting charities for prostate cancer, testicular cancer, mental illnesses, and suicide prevention (Movember, 2023). In November 2019, Billie released their own Movember campaign, where they encouraged women to embrace their mustaches and join the Billie team in support of the cause. Billie matched all contributions made up to \$50,000 (Creative Works, 2019). By addressing and normalizing facial hair among women, Billie's campaign took an active social stand for a more significant cause than just their products.

Gillette – The Best a Man Can Be

Gillette is one of the most dominant brands on the market of men's razors and shaving products (Statista, 2022). Leading up to the Super Bowl in 2019, Gillette uploaded an advertisement that was a part of the campaign The Best a Man Can Be (Tiffany, 2019). Super Bowl is one of the most-watched annual TV events in the US, where over 100 million people tune in and watch the commercials (Adgate, 2021). Traditionally, Gillette's marketing communications have shed a positive light on men and men's well-being, such as with the recognized slogan Gillette: The Best a Man Can Get. However, the new campaign by Gillette rather focused on addressing the negative behavior and departed from the social movement of #Me-Too (Dan, 2019). As a part of this campaign, Gillette promised to commit to the cause of connecting young men with positive role models. However, this campaign is also an example that generated polarization and mixed feelings. According to Gillette, they back the creation of educational programs and materials that promote good health, emotional intimacy, and nonviolent behavior among young men (Gillette, 2023). The campaign is an additional example of how a brand chooses an activist and socially responsible path as a further dimension of just selling their products.

4.4 Analysis of empirical material

As this study employs the narratives of campaigns, it is essential to outline the theory of narratology (Bal, 2017). The author emphasizes the importance of using working definitions to study narrative, to test and check the consistency against analyses and interpretations. The social science disciplines have developed their methodological tools for analyzing narratives, including thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, and visual analysis. A collection of texts can be demarcated in which the narrative characteristics are dominant and therefore considered relevant. In practice, researchers must make choices based on intuition and careful reading of the text and pay attention to the reader's response. The relevant theoretical elements will be those that trigger the researcher's interest in the first place. Interpretation is involved every step of the way, and a systematic theory helps make interpretation arguable. The point is not to achieve objectivity or certainty but to make interpretations discussable. Interpretation is subjective and susceptible to cultural constraints.

The understanding of narrative analysis as a tool solely compatible with literary studies is no longer accurate as it has entered all fields within the human and social sciences. An increasing number of scholars have turned to narrative since stories reveal the truth about human experiences, and hence the overarching goal is to investigate personal narratives of experiences (Riessman, 2008). Cultural constraints define each reader as a cultural being and make the process of interpretation of more general interest. This turns narrative analysis into an activity of cultural analysis, as the subjectivity in the analysis is a more significant cultural issue (Bal, 2017). When conducting a narrative analysis, the aim is to understand how people talk about some issues, which in this case is the selected campaigns, and how the narrated story unfolds (Tracey, 2020). In addition, it has been reported that when researchers take a narrative approach, focus groups serve as a rich source of narrative material, especially for studies that examine how participants co-construct understandings and meanings (Lyndon, 2017). Wibeck (2010) illustrates how focus groups beneficially can be analyzed with narrative analysis and exemplify this with a focus group discussing a topic with polarized opinions. Even if the short sequences of arguments and expressed opinions in the discussion is not necessarily shaped as a fictional and traditional story, they will still reveal how the participants interpreted and felt about the topic. Furthermore, from a narrative perspective, focus group discussions can reveal to the researcher how the participants feel through their strategies to support or restrain another person's argument or opinion (Wibeck, 2010).

When applying this type of analysis to transcripts, it is essential to remember that narratives are co-constructed, relational, and dialogic and that it is crucial to analyze individual responses rather than collaborative ones. Even if this study’s empirical material derives from focus groups and not interviews, the analysis will consider each participant’s individual answers as much as conclusions from the entire group (Tracey, 2020). Moreover, analyzing the material generated from the focus groups provides insight into how certain narratives and stories are experienced from multiple perspectives, which adds to the richness and amount of data. Regarding the document study, the narrative approach helps to understand how the brands have constructed the narrative in their campaigns. For the document study, Tracey’s (2020) questions for narrative analysis were used as inspiration (appendix 2).

The actantial model is a tool utilized by researchers to sort out the various components of a narrative and to understand its structure. Initially, the model is based on Vladimir Propp’s investigation of Russian folk tales. Propp influenced narratology by examining the structures of narratives. Simultaneously, he added to the knowledge of what constitutes a story and how its components are interconnected. The results of Propp’s work became the foundation of how most narratives are structured, and these findings were later the basis on which Greimas developed the actantial model (Greimas, 1987; Gripsrud, 2011). An actant is not synonymous with actors as an actant does not necessarily have to be a person. Actants can be of both abstract and non-abstract characters, such as persons, things, and concepts (Greimas, 1987). According to Greimas (1987), the number of actants in the model can be limited to six. These are arranged in pairs and interconnected via three semantical axes: the axis of communication, the axis of desire, and the axis of conflict. See Figure 1 below.

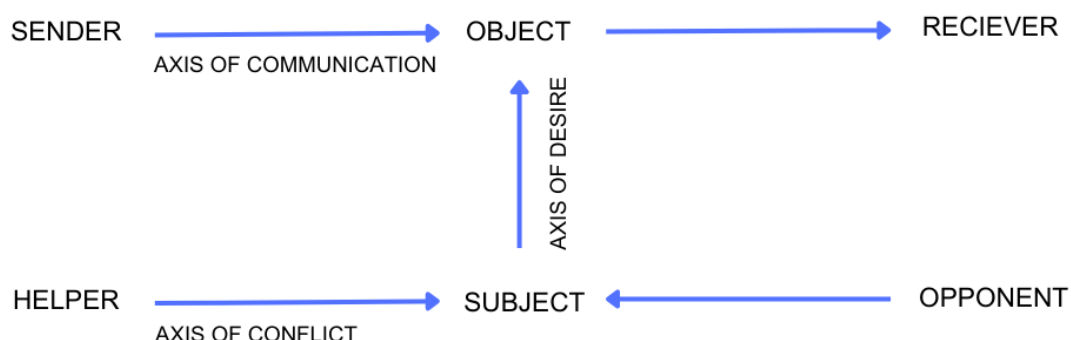


Figure 1. Greimas’s Actantial Model (Translated from Gripsrud, 2011, p. 255)

The *subject* and *object* constitute the *axis of desire*, where the subject's aim is to achieve its object. In order for the subject to achieve its object, the *sender* and *receiver* become relevant. The sender and receiver make up the *axis of communication*. In this axis, the sender requests the subject to acquire the object, meanwhile, the receiver is also favored by this action. As the actions unfold, the *helper* will interfere with the subject to help it obtain the object. Simultaneously, there will be an *opponent* who will attempt to stop the subject from attaining the object (Greimas, 1987; Chandler, 2017). The axis where the helper and opponent come forward is called the *axis of conflict*. The development of a narrative and a storyline is generated through the different axes in Greimas's model, and it is through these axes that the plot and story are created (Chandler, 2017). Furthermore, according to the actantial model, a narrative can have multiple interpretations from different perspectives. This means that multiple models can be developed from one narrative. Additionally, an actant can have multiple functions and positions within a narrated story, as well as fulfilling multiple roles. Because of this, they are not limited to just one position. These variations are essential for the development of the narrative (Greimas, 1987). The actantial model was used to identify the characters, the plot, and potential conflicts in the stories told by the brands. After compiling the transcripts from the focus group sessions, they were also analyzed this way.

4.5 Quality criteria

The trustworthiness criteria for qualitative research refers to the traditional knowledge of credibility. By implementing actions that have the potential to shed light on a contradicting interpretation of the empirical material, the researchers can ensure that the study accurately captures and represents the studied phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Schwandt et al., 2007). Regarding reliability, the initial meaning refers to the extent the study's findings can be replicated if the same research was to be conducted again and is a term more suitable for quantitative research. However, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argue that other terms, such as trustworthiness and rigour, are more appropriate for qualitative research. It is essential to consider how trustworthiness derives from the perspective which the present study departs from, and the underlying assumptions of the chosen paradigm. This paper uses the interpretive paradigm, in which underlying assumptions include the thought of reality as not objective or fixed but socially constructed (Prasad, 2017). Because this study does not aim to offer a broad generalization of the investigated area, the results cannot be replicated in new attempts of the study.

To achieve trustworthiness when conducting the focus groups, both authors of this paper were present. While one focused on monitoring the discussion, the other took notes and focused on follow-up questions if the discussion needed additional substance. While carefully listening to the arguments of the participants, the notes could be summarized at the end of the session to ensure that we had gotten the correct interpretations and viewpoints from the participants. Unlike quantitative studies, focus groups and qualitative research, in general, allow researchers to ask participants for elaboration and clarification and hence seek further verification of the data, which adds to the trustworthiness (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

4.6 Ethical reflections

The trustworthiness criteria include the importance of ethically conducting the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, it was ensured that the participants in this study were fully informed about the purpose of this study, and they were given an informed consent form to sign (appendix 4). This form was designed to outline the rights of the participants and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were asked to carefully read the form before signing to ensure that they understood the information provided and, by free will, participated in the study. This type of consent form is an important tool in the effort to conduct research ethically. It serves as a means of ensuring that researchers respect the anonymity and rights of participants while also making a commitment to fulfilling their promises. All participants were also given pseudo names in the study to ensure that the participants cannot be traced back to the study and what they discussed in the focus groups (appendix 5).

5. Analysis of emotional strategies

The subsequent section presents the narrative analysis of Patagonia’s, Billie’s, and Gillette’s campaigns. In order to answer the research question of how the narratives strategically are communicated in activist branding campaigns in order to evoke emotions, coding tables were used to highlight narrative instances, which later could be applied to the actantial model. Each section of this chapter is dedicated to each brand’s campaign and is introduced with the coding table, followed by the application of relevant theory.

5.1 Patagonia: The anti-hero story

Buy Less, Demand More	Narrative event
<p>Narrator says “No longer can we assume the earth’s resources are limitless. <u>We wrote this in our first catalog in 1972</u> [vintage clip of a man climbing a mountain, and a person opening an old Patagonia catalog].</p> <p><u>Nearly 50 years later, it has only gotten worse. Today, the clothing industry contributes up to 10% of the pollution driving the climate crisis</u> [clips of damaged nature, plants being sprayed with pesticides, and clouds of emissions from industry buildings].</p> <p><u>For as long as we’ve been in business, we’ve seen quality as an environmental issue</u> [grainy black and white images of how Patagonia clothes are being made in factories]. That’s why we build clothes to endure, so you don’t need to buy new as often [clip of a man sawing in wood, a woman climbing a mountain, and several outdoor sports such as mountain biking, surfing, fishing, and skiing]. We make gear with recycled materials [industrial spinning machines creating dark blue thread]. We grow food and fiber the way nature intended [clip of an old man placed on a field in the sunlight, clip of fields with plants, and bison running on fields].</p> <p>We promote safe and fair labor conditions for workers [clip of workers in a factory wearing facemasks]. <u>There are some things you can do, too. When you want something new, ask yourself, do I really need it? Look for one product you can use in multiple ways</u> [clips of people, both men and women, doing outdoor</p>	<p>Patagonia is placing themselves as the sender and initiator of the story.</p> <p>The sender is pointing out the opponent and enemy as the clothing industry.</p> <p>The receiver is the environment.</p> <p>Patagonia is sending the consumer, hero, on a journey to fulfill</p>

<p>sports]. <u>Repair what you wear out, and pass things down</u> [clip of a woman sewing on a garment, a girl's used Patagonia jacket being tossed on the floor, and two children being pulled in a snow sled by a grownup].</p>	<p>the purpose, the object. Climax of the plot.</p>
<p>Demand recycled [zoomed-in clips of sports and garment materials], demand fair trade [zoomed-in clip on a woman that is biking and garment material], demand organic [zoomed-in clip of cotton from a farm and mountain climbing]. <u>Buy less, demand more</u> [clip depicting the same mountain as Patagonia's logotype]".</p>	<p>Patagonia is giving advice on how to preserve the environment.</p>
	<p>The ultimate object of the journey is introduced.</p>

As seen below, the coding table was used to complete the following actantial model.

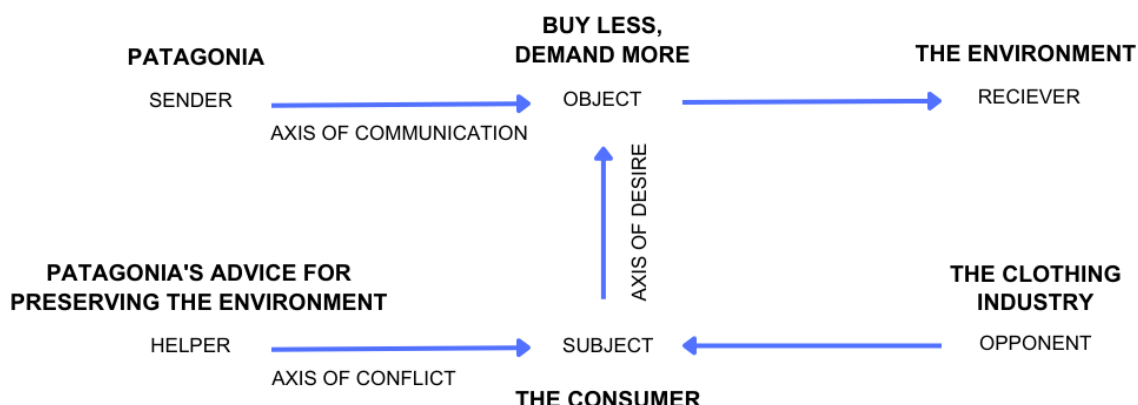


Figure 2. Patagonia's campaign narrative transferred to Greimas's actantial model.

The sender of the campaign is Patagonia, who also provides the subject with helpful tools to reach the goal. These tools are presented in the video, and the goal of the helper is to make sure that the subject, the consumer, implements a more sustainable consuming behavior. The receiver who will benefit from this project is in the narrative illustrated as the sacred planet and the environment in general. The opponent of the subject's project, which will lose if the subject succeeds, is what the story depicts as the clothing industry, excluding Patagonia.

As the narrator of Patagonia's story is female, the brand is therefore embodied as a woman. Patagonia's narrative centers around three aspects: their own fight for a better envi-

ronment, the clothing industry's negative impact on it, and how the public need to start taking action. The setting of the story departs from how Patagonia has been a fighter for this cause for a few decades already and that it is crucial for more people to join this fight in order for the world to repair itself in regard to the effects of climate change. This way, Patagonia is making a point that can evoke frustration in the audience by blaming them for their neglect of the problem. While depicting visuals of how the clothing industry negatively impacts the planet, the female narrator progressively leads the viewer on how to reconsider consumption behaviors. The change in the setting of the story is supported by the change of visuals, and while shots of green and healthy nature run by, the viewer is encouraged to only support clothing brands that are taking the same kind of actions as Patagonia does. Because of this, Patagonia is illustrated as a great example of a clothing brand to buy from since they already are doing the necessary actions that clothing brands need to start implementing. However, this is something for the viewer to decide, as the narrator is not explicitly encouraging the viewer to buy from Patagonia. Rather, it is encouraged to buy fewer clothes in general and to reuse what is already bought. This way, Patagonia steps aside from taking the role of the subject of the story. Instead, Patagonia is helping the public to make rational choices in terms of consumption and to demand improved conditions and responsibility from other clothing brands. By already doing what the subject, the hero of the story, does, Patagonia is positioning themselves as an anti-hero when encouraging the subject to be the hero.

After evoking frustration, Patagonia offers the viewer their help to guide and inspire the viewer. Patagonia is highlighting how it is the audience that must act, since, according to them, no other brands in the clothing industry do, and because of this the opponent of the story, therefore, becomes all the other brands in the clothing industry that do not take part in the fight for a better climate. By utilizing the storytelling technique of shifting focus from Patagonia's own products they are increasing the chances of capturing the attention of the audience (Freitas, 2010). The event of the narrative unfolds in a way where the beginning starts with the problem, followed by the introduction of the solution to that problem. The problem presented is the effects of climate change, and the clothing industry is one of the main contributors to this. The solution to this problem is to change the way the public consumes. The solution, according to Patagonia, is to either buy from a conscious brand, like themselves, or to not buy at all. An observed narrative silence and an unmentioned aspect is the fact that Patagonia is still part of the clothing industry. By mentioning the negative effects of Patagonia's manufacturing, the intended narrative would fail. Instead, Patagonia focuses on the positive

procedures they have implemented, which rejects the thought of Patagonia as part of the damaging clothing industry.

As the narrator of the story refers to herself as part of Patagonia, the audience is constituted by the public. The relationship between the narrator and the audience becomes especially clear when Patagonia's actions for a better climate are described and when the public is encouraged to participate. This depiction illustrates the relationship between Patagonia and the public in a way that positions Patagonia as the superior part of that relationship. Moreover, by urging the public to join the fight and demand better conditions, the story told in the campaign seeks to evoke emotions of shared responsibility and a call to action. This way, Patagonia is positioned as the leader in the movement towards not only more sustainable behavior but also the environment in general. The story allows the relationship between Patagonia and the public to become a friendly and supporting one rather than emphasizing the power difference between the two parts.

The primary purpose of the story in the campaign is to persuade the public of Patagonia's fight for the climate and to alert them of the negative consequences of their consuming behaviors. It further seeks to enhance feelings of inspiration to decrease consumption behaviors in general, which does not eliminate the option of buying consciously produced clothes elsewhere than from Patagonia. By illustrating this, the helper highlights Patagonia as humble, and unlike conventional clothing commercials, Patagonia leaves the choice to the public. This depiction of humbleness and responsibility from Patagonia's side can positively intersect with many cultures and worldviews of the public, and hence work as a suitable theme for Patagonia to communicate in their storytelling. With their storytelling, Patagonia signals both a lifestyle and their beliefs. By doing so, the public which shares these values and interests is given the opportunity to express themselves and that they care about the environment (Fog et al., 2010). Tying the audience's lifestyle to the action of saving the planet, is also a way to make the viewers feel good about themselves. As the fight for a better environment and defeating climate change are narratives not entirely new to the public, it can be argued that Patagonia's angle to this issue needed a new plot to stand out. Because of this new plot, to stop overconsumption, the story takes an anti-consumerist approach and challenges the traditional way of advertising by encouraging the public to buy less. This way, Patagonia distinguishes itself from many other clothing brands, which is good for business (Thompson et al., 2006). Firstly, it does not seem that Patagonia only cares about its business value and sales, but more so the environment. Secondly, it may attract people who might already be highly involved in the fight against climate change as a brand that truly takes a stance for this specific cause.

Lastly, these two outcomes essentially lead the story to position Patagonia as a thought leader, hence an anti-hero, in the discourse of climate activism.

It becomes apparent that Patagonia is structuring its narrative based on a conflict, a myth, rather than basing it on a product market (Holt, 2004). The myth that Patagonia presents is that they have been fighting for the environment for centuries, and how deeply this cause is connected to both the public and Patagonia’s products. The product becomes more than a garment, it also represents fighting for the environment. In addition, traditional branding strategies which rely on straightforward benefit appeals are less likely to distinguish the brand in today’s saturated environment of advertisements and corporate messages. As more and more brands are competing against each other, it is continuously important for brands to find other paths than the traditional ones (Thompson et al., 2006).

5.2 Billie: The story of acceptance

Movember	Narrative event
<p>Funky music is playing. A group of women are lined up and are all looking in the same direction. Synced one by one, they face the camera. In a zoomed-in frame, one woman is looking at a mirror, then turns to the camera and says “Our hair”. Two other women with mustaches say “has a very important”. A fourth woman, also with a mustache, says “announcement to make”. A fifth woman with a mustache says “women have mustaches too”, as the camera gives a zoomed-in shot of her mouth and mustache.</p> <p>The music intensifies and the group of women are standing together, looking into the camera. While reflecting themselves in a mirror a woman says “The world may not know this because we go through a lot to hide them”.</p> <p>A woman is standing behind a curtain, hiding most of her face and closing the curtain completely. A woman is wearing a towel around her body and head. Someone says <u>“We have been hiding them all our lives”</u>. The frame depicts the face of the woman in the towel again, who is now waxing her upper lip to the dismay of another woman.</p> <p>The next woman is waiting for a timer, with hair removal cream on her upper lip. The next frame shows a woman's upper lip which is getting lasered, followed by a woman plucking the hair from her upper lip in a rear-view mirror of a car. Another one is shaving her upper lip with Billie’s razor.</p>	<p>As the women are facing the camera, they are talking to the viewer which then becomes the subject. These women are also the helpers, they stand with the cause.</p> <p>The opponent is the conventional beauty standards for women.</p>

<p>A woman is laying on a sofa while writing, she looks up at the camera and says “But news flash”. The music pauses. The next frame is a woman with a mustache who is putting on lipstick, and the woman on the sofa comes back and says “We got them”. The music starts again.</p>	<p>Climax of the plot.</p>
<p>A narrator says “So this Movember, we are growing them out and joining in, because a stash is a stash, is a stash, and we should not let our perfectly good ones go to waste”. The frame cuts to a woman and a man both with mustaches, two women with mustaches, and one woman touching her mustache. Yellow text appears on the screen that reads “Add your mo to our team (We’re matching contributions) Happy Movember. Standing all together, the women are looking at the camera.</p>	<p>The sender is portrayed as Billie, who is giving the subject its object. The Movember movement becomes the receiver.</p>

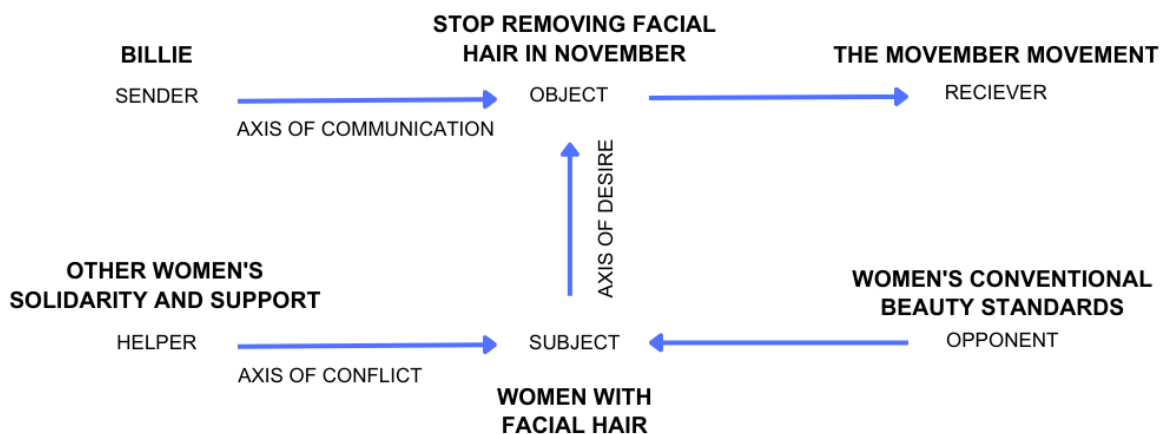


Figure 3. Billie’s campaign narrative transferred to Greimas’s actantial model.

The sender in the Movember campaign is Billie. The subject of the story is women with facial hair. It is these women that Billie is trying to inspire to stop removing facial hair in November in order to support the Movember movement. This leads to the Movember movement being the receiver of this story. The helper of the story, which serves to assist the women to embrace their facial hair, is other women too. These women are portrayed in the video, showing solidarity and support for not removing facial hair. The opponent of the story is society's conventional beauty standards for women. The narrative departs from the cause of *Movember*, which concerns supporting men’s mental and physical health, during the month of November. The conditions of the production of the video are present as the story takes place in a studio with pink walls as the background visuals for all scenes. According to Weber and Grauer (2019), negative feelings toward the brand can occur when the message is conveyed in short

sequences and fragmented segments. When an important message is being communicated an extensive narrative is often favored (Weber & Grauer, 2019). As Billie's campaign is relatively short, below 50 seconds, their opportunity to explain all aspects of body hair acceptance was limited. Therefore, they most likely chose to focus only on one aspect of body hair acceptance in the narrative.

The characters are made up of the seven women starring in the campaign. All the characters could be seen as one united character, namely the character Billie. This is because they together make up the narration and speak to the viewer with the same message, which essentially is to encourage women to grow out their visible facial hair, such as mustaches. By portraying a diverse group of women who proudly display their facial hair, the campaign encourages women to embrace their natural appearance. Sending out this message with a group of women, Billie can evoke a feeling of companionship and support in the audience. This can further lead to feelings of acceptance of one's body hair. The storyline in the video is first introduced by Billie's announcement that women also have mustaches. This is followed by how the characters in the video depict multiple ways of how they can remove their facial hair, such as through waxing, shaving, and laser. This depiction shows how Billie is aware of the universal struggle that many girls and women are going through both historically and currently. By showing this, Billie creates a feeling of relatability in the viewer.

The plot twist of the story occurs when Billie encourages women to stop removing their facial hair in November, as their mustaches work just as well as men's for supporting and raising awareness for the cause. Therefore, the message is that women can take a break from hiding their mustaches in November, and for the other eleven months of the year, Billie's razors can be the tools women use to shave their facial hair. This is a way for Billie to make the public feel that they are a razor brand to rely on. By structuring the narrative around a plot that initially departs from a feminist perspective on the debate of women's versus men's socially accepted grooming behaviors, Billie takes a clear stance on the feminist side. The viewers who also share these feelings and thoughts about social norms and body hair, this plot can intensify feelings of frustration towards this issue.

A narrative silence observed in the story is the absence of details regarding the cause which the campaign essentially is supporting. Movember as a cause for men's health is not explained and the benefits of supporting Billie in this cause, are also not mentioned. This strategic gap is rather filled with the motivation and intended purpose of Billie's brand in general. They do challenge traditional gender roles and taboos surrounding women's body hair, which leads to women feeling more accepted and represented in the media. Mixing the two causes of

men's health issues and women's body hair is intended to further the development of gender equality and encourage action and awareness for both causes. This highlights the cultural knowledge Billie has added to the storytelling, which is how they aim to represent cultural identity and give meaning to the public rather than to fulfill a consumer demand (Holt, 2004). Since the message and focus of the story are about gender equality and challenging societal norms, the support for Movember also serves to strengthen this message by encouraging and accepting women who want to take action and stand with this traditionally male-focused cause.

The narrative does challenge societal norms which have the possibility to spark conversations about beauty standards and gender roles. This way, Billie's true motive behind the narrative shines through. As it becomes apparent what Billie mainly is supporting through their storytelling, it can be argued that they are emotionally connecting to the audiences who have had these conversations and that Billie is the supporting friend in those people's lives and identity-creation (Fournier, 1998). Being the helper, Billie supports the subject to reach the goal of not obeying social norms (Thompson et al., 2006). This support consists of evoking emotions such as inspiration to accept body hair, as well as frustration towards why it should not be removed in the first place. It also positions Billie as a fighter for this issue, leading to an enhanced positive image of Billie's brand.

An example of a repeated story that has been told by razor companies is the traditional commercial aimed at women, where a woman's hairless body is shaved. The public has been exposed to these commercials for years, and as a result, these types of images have become normalized and are rather expected to be seen by such brands. However, the Movember campaign is an exception to this norm. Billie is evoking the feeling of amusement by adding comedic elements to the narrative. The narrator uses terms and a language style that implies sarcasm, by satirizing traditional and historical razor campaigns. What also adds to this comedic tone is the funky background music and scheme of colors. This can be an additional way of distinguishing themselves from other razor brands that are more toned-down.

By retelling a story that is taken for granted in a new way, Billie's narrative is structured to create feelings of inspiration, encouragement, and enjoyment as it demonstrates a shift in consumer culture as well as challenging the traditional way of advertising. Successful brands need to be able to navigate the culture they are a part of (Holt, 2004). The narrative in the campaign points out the atypical approach Billie uses to navigate the culture they are a part of. Against the theory of storytelling (Weber & Grauer, 2019), brands should aim to communicate a holistic brand image by incorporating values, mission, and brand personality

in the narrative. Therefore, it can be argued that Billie is purposefully skewing their commercial message away from Movember in order to communicate their values of female empowerment.

5.3 Gillette: The story of accountability

The Best a Man Can Be	Narrative event
<p>Violin music. [Men are looking at themselves in mirrors. On the radio, a reporter talks about the <u>#MeToo movement, sexual harassment and masculinity</u>]. The narrator says “<u>Is this the best a man can get?</u>” The music gets more intense.</p> <p>[An older Gillette advertisement where a woman kisses a man on the cheek]. [Teenage boys burst through the screen where the ad was shown. The boys run through a living room where a mother is consoling a son, and messages of online bullying appear around them].</p> <p>The narrator says “We can't hide from it; it's been going on far too long”. [TV displaying a cartoon of men whistling at a woman. Three teenage boys are watching TV. The TV channel switches to a sitcom where a man is grabbing a maid's behind. It switches again and depicts a music video with people in swimwear, a man flexing his muscles while making aggressive faces and women are smiling and dancing]. [An audience of people are laughing at the sitcom where a male actor mimics that he is biting the maid].</p> <p>[A conference room in a skyscraper is full of men and one woman. A man leans to the woman, touches her shoulder and says “What I actually think she's trying to say is...”]</p> <p>Narrator says “Making the same old excuses”. [Two young boys are fighting in a backyard. While barbecuing, a group of men is watching them fight and say “Boys will be boys”. Also while barbecuing, a line of infinite men says “Boys will be boys, will be boys, will be boys”].</p> <p>Narrator says “But something finally changed”. [News anchor is reporting news of allegations of sexual assault and sexual harassment. The frame zooms out, and multiple screens of different news clips show news casters all talking about sexual harassment allegations].</p> <p>[The sitcom audience that previously was laughing sitting in silence] Narrator says “And there will be no going back”. [Man looks at himself in the mirror]. Narrator says “Because we believe, we</p>	<p>Narrative event</p> <p>The #The MeToo movement introduces the story.</p> <p>Men are positioned as the subject to take on the journey to the object.</p> <p>The opponent is depicted as toxic masculinity.</p> <p>Gender equality is depicted as the receiver.</p> <p>Climax of the plot.</p>

<p>believe in the best in men”.</p> <p>[At a press conference Terry Crews says “<u>Men need to hold other men accountable</u>”]. [At a pool, a young man says “Smile sweetie” to a young woman, but another young man steps in and says “Come on”, questioning the other man’s actions with his hand gestures].</p> <p>Narrator says “Just say the right thing, to act the right way”.</p> <p>[<u>A woman is walking down the street, a man starts to follow her, but his male friend says “Bro! Not cool, not cool”.</u>]</p> <p>Narrator says “Some already are in ways big and small”. [A group of boys is running down a street, and a father is holding his young son’s hand].</p> <p>[<u>Videos of men shaking hands and making up, and a father doing positive affirmations with his daughter</u>]. [A man from the barbeque interrupts a fight between the boys at the backyard and says “This is not how we treat each other”].</p> <p>[<u>At the street where a father is holding his son’s hand, he interrupts a group of teenage boys fighting and asks one of them if everything is okay. His son is watching</u>].</p> <p>Narrator says “But some is not enough, because the boys watching today will be the men of tomorrow”. [Young boys are looking into the camera]. Narrator says “The best a man can get”.</p>	<p>The object is introduced.</p> <p>The helper is other men who support gender equality.</p> <p>Example of helper.</p> <p>Example of helper.</p>
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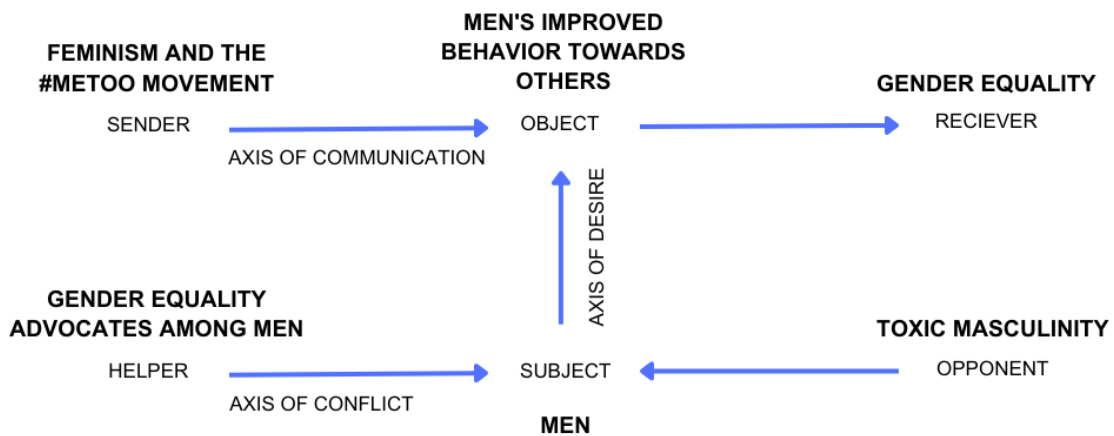


Figure 4. Gillette’s campaign narrative transferred to Greimas’s actantial model.

The sender of the campaign is the recent development in gender equality generated by feminism and the #MeToo movement, which further sends the subject to the object of improving their behavior towards others. This is done by providing the men with advice and tools to reach that object. The tools are presented in the campaign, and the goal of the helper is to ensure that the subject joins them as advocates for gender equality. The receiver is gender equality, which will evolve if more men join that fight. The opponent is portrayed as toxic masculinity, which will continue to thrive if the subject does not reach the goal of the object.

The campaign takes place in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, where society has started to question certain behaviors among men. This is mirrored in the narrative, and Gillette uses its platform to address the issue of toxic masculinity by portraying negative behaviors such as bullying, sexism, and harassment. Referring to these societal issues evokes feelings of frustration among the audience as the unpleasant reality of these issues is brought to their attention. The campaign features a male narrator telling the story with multiple clips of events that unfold in society. The narrative follows the progression of gender equality through recent history by first depicting the decades of mistreatment of women by men. The many examples given in the narrative about the harm of toxic masculinity can enhance the feeling of frustration among the viewers. Then, the plot twist of the #MeToo movement is introduced and the fight for gender equality begins. The narrative continues to depict men correcting inappropriate behavior among other men, and the changed mindset is that men should be role models for the next generations. The context of the campaign enables a narrative that challenges traditional gender roles and promotes social progress. It discourages stories that perpetuate harmful behavior or reinforces harmful stereotypes. The development of the narrative can inspire the audience, the viewer will feel encouraged and motivated to step up and take action. The story also reveals the conditions of its production by positioning Gillette as part of the problem and as a hopeful agent of change for the future. Gillette positioned itself within the culture that they are now standing up against. By navigating their way through the present culture that came after the #MeToo movement, their new strategy now involves activist campaigns and Gillette developed a narrative around this cultural shift. Which is a vital success factor for a brand to last (Holt, 2004).

The main characters are a diverse group of men, including adults, teenagers, and children. Each character brings their perspective to the story. Women are also characters in the story, but they are mainly present to shed light on how men treat them. Initially, when the narrative portrays the toxic masculinity behavior of men, the women are depicted as the los-

ers. However, then the narrative shifts to shed light on the fact that the men who mistreat others are the actual losers of the story. As the story unfolds, it shows the impact of toxic behavior on both men and women and how it creates a bad cycle of experiences. The dimension of the narrative can foster feelings of empowerment for women as their role in the culture has shifted. Later in the story, the men who step up to correct other men and their toxic behavior, and the young boys who will be the men of the future, become the winners of the story. The campaign encourages men to reflect on their actions and make positive changes. Against this evolving culture and mindset, Gillette portrays these men as embodying positive changes, which has the potential to inspire other men and show them the actions that men have been wanting to make themselves (Holt, 2004; Torelli, 2013). The narrative emphasizes the actions the audience can implement to be a part of the social change, leaving them feeling motivated and inspired. However, the story does not acknowledge the potential resistance and pushback that men may face when trying to dismantle toxic masculinity.

The intended audience for this campaign is primarily men, and the framing of the story ultimately affects the relationship between men and women, as it challenges men to reflect on their actions and encourages them to improve their behavior. Additionally, the storytelling also focuses on the relationships between men. It underscores that men should hold each other accountable for their actions towards women.

The narrative appears to have multiple intended motivations and purposes. One such motivation is the company's desire to be socially responsible and decrease the possibility of a negative reputation. As a "masculine" brand, Gillette may feel that it has historically contributed to toxic masculinity and wants to communicate its progression to reach a younger audience. The narrative seems to intersect with broader cultural and societal issues around gender, power, and relationships. By challenging traditional notions of masculinity and calling for greater accountability, Gillette portrays itself as a brand that wants to spark conversations and promote positive change. In light of this, it can be argued that Gillette's narrative is structured on the basis of Holt's (2004) cultural knowledge. The narrative positions Gillette as a brand with a high level of knowledge regarding gender equality and the implications of the #MeToo movement. Gillette is not referring to the public and receiver as customers, but rather as key players in the solution to the portrayed problem. This holistic viewpoint can be seen as one way for Gillette to create a stronger connection with the public (Holt, 2004).

Some stories are (re)told so often that they become taken for granted and accepted as fact. This is exemplified in the narrative where Gillette portrays a group of men agreeing to and repeating that "boys will be boys". As this mindset has been deeply rooted in many cul-

tures around the world, it can be challenging for the public to oppose this as it may be part of their cultural mindset. Shedding light on this harmful and deep-rooted cultural belief will have an emotional effect on the audience, as people will have a prior association with that saying. Depending on that, the audience will experience different emotions, and they might feel persuaded, frustrated, defensive, inspired, or even angry. To address this cultural mindset, Gillette is utilizing storytelling in order to change and shape the public's discussions and beliefs with this inspirational story (Fog et al., 2010). As the narrative ends, Gillette states how the boys of today will be the men of tomorrow, which seeks to evoke the emotions of both guilt and responsibility in the viewer. Emotional and cultural branding theorists have expressed that a brand can assist the public in reaching their personal goals (Fournier, 1998; Thompson et al., 2006). Therefore, Gillette's efforts to place its values and beliefs on the issue at hand can assist the public that wants to make a positive change for this cause.

5.4 Summary

To summarize these activist campaigns, a pattern emerges in their strategies for creating emotional responses in their audience. While each campaign is unique, they aim to inspire the audience to participate in the socio-political cause the narrative revolves around. They seek to create feelings of encouragement and inspiration by shedding light on how the public can support the cause and how the public can make a difference. Furthermore, they also aim to create frustration surrounding the issues, as they all have historical and cultural significance. The feeling of frustration is evoked by how the narrative portrays how the issue has evolved historically or lacks progress. In addition, the brand activist campaigns seek to raise emotions of relatability by structuring their narratives around issues familiar to their audience and which they have encountered frequently in their lives.

6. The emotional responses from the public

6.1 The retold narratives

The following section presents a narrative analysis of the focus group conversations for Patagonia's, Billie's, and Gillette's activist campaigns. To answer the questions of what emotions are evoked among the young public in relation to brand activist campaigns, and how these emotions arise when the young public discusses the campaigns, the analysis applies narrative concepts to the empirical material in order to reveal a pattern of reactions and emotions from the public. In addition, relevant theories and literature is applied throughout the analysis.

6.1.1 *The achievable tale of environmentalism*

The empirical material indicated that the public's emotions toward Patagonia's narrative pointed in two directions. Both of these interpretations differed from the identified intended narrative, based on the analysis in chapter 5. In the model down below, it is demonstrated how the participants rather saw the subject of the story as Patagonia and not themselves. For example, Lovisa reflected upon this: "They are meeting a human issue. That is much bigger than themselves. They are not the reason behind the environmental issues. So, they are doing something, they are doing all they can." A similar statement regarding Patagonia's own role was made by Charles: "It was very desolate and critical in the beginning. And then they are like, we are here to save the day". Here, Charles refers to Patagonia as the subject of the story and this sentiment was common throughout the discussion. It is also evident that they are feeling optimistic about the progress and view Patagonia as someone who is fighting for the issue of climate change. When talking about Patagonia's message of the campaign Lovisa said: "I think it works for these types of companies, because even when they promote consuming less, they do still promote this type of better consuming that appeals to a lot of people more than like the fast fashion industry". While Patagonia is admired by the participants for their initiative, the participants positioned themselves as the opponent of the story. Here is one example of how Madison resonated: "I feel like they didn't say it, but also, just based on what the ad is,

they're saying, if you don't do this you're also the villain". Many of the participants agreed and as a result, the sender and receiver both were seen as something bigger than themselves. The feeling of guilt is prevalent with the participants as the narrative made them look inward and at their consumption habits. Here is what Madison said about this topic:

I think they definitely have a mother earth idea going on. Which they really want to portray. Which is powerful. And I think it is quite emotional, especially with the connotations of climate change. But it is a very emotional character for that to be portrayed to people.

Madison seemed to agree with the opinion that the cause is important as she says that mother earth is a "very emotional character" and that Patagonia communicates it in a powerful way. Her emotions are influenced by the narrative and she feels strongly about the topic of environmentalism. As mentioned in previous studies, brand activism needs to be executed in an honest and transparent way (Vredenburg et al., 2020). As the young public is becoming more conscious (Sachdev et al., 2021), it becomes apparent that Patagonia's narrative aligns with these demands. As a result, the narrative structure presented in the campaign led to the participants' interpretation of Patagonia as a subject they admire. As theorists have claimed, positioning the brand as a friend that can enable the public to reach its goals is beneficial for brands (Fournier, 1998; Thompson et al., 2006), which becomes evident in this case.

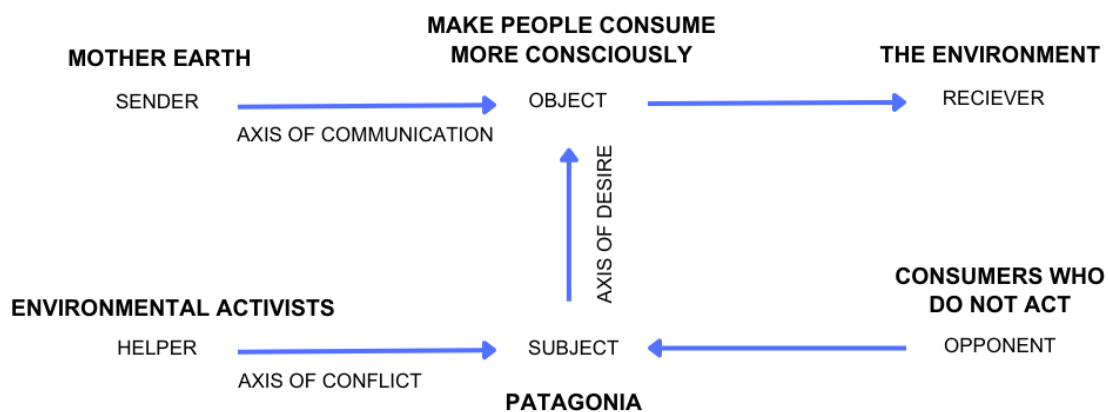


Figure 5. First version of the young public's retold narrative of Buy Less, Demand More transferred to Greimas's actantial model.

For the second version of the public's construction of Patagonia's narrative, the participants positioned themselves as consumers, and as the subject. Eddy describes his view of the sub-

ject of the story: “They said there was a problem and the hero may be the consumer itself, they said that the consumer can solve the problem”. Many participants agreed with this sentiment and felt that Patagonia was sending them on a mission, therefore the feelings of being inspired and responsible were present in the young public. This view puts the consumer as the subject of the narrative and Patagonia as the sender. Moreover, the object for the participants was to purchase Patagonia’s products rather than consume consciously. Nor was it to buy less and demand more, which were the objects of both the identified intended narrative and the narrative constructed by the focus group discussion. Instead, these participants saw the receiver of the narrative as the future generations of people rather than the environment. When discussing what the participants liked about the campaign, Madison mentioned: “It is kind of a lifestyle that they are portraying as well, it is the lifestyle of nature and Patagonia”. Madison's sentiment about this desired lifestyle Patagonia exhibited in the narrative was agreed upon by other participants, and they seemed to identify and feel connected to this lifestyle. For example, Amanda said: “Yeah, she was an outdoors person, similar age as me. I related to that”. Participants seemed to be drawn to the lifestyle depicted in the narrative, which confirms Fog et al. (2010) idea that people like to present their own lifestyle through what they buy as a way to communicate who they are. Therefore, the responses indicate that the participants found the helper of the narrative to be a desired and appealing lifestyle, which would encourage people to purchase from Patagonia. Compared to the helper in the identified intended narrative as well as the other actantial model, it can be argued that the narrative in the campaign has left space for interpretations from the public and that it is reflected in these different accounts of how the narrative appears to be communicated. Freitas (2010) has found that in advertising campaigns there is not much time to explain every detail of the narrative and therefore the story leaves gaps for the viewer to fill in with their prior knowledge of the world. Madison expressed who she thought was the opponent of this narrative:

There was that bit when they just zoom into a kind of hill and then you go over the hill and it is like this terrain, a factory and all that stuff. That's definitely the bad character, like the construction, and industrialization that occurs alongside nature and is kind of destroying it.

This opinion was shared with other participants as well and they highlighted the contrast between the desirable lifestyle, the industrialization, and the undesirable aspects of destruction, which left them feeling conflicted. For example, Ella said: “It feels like they (Patagonia) are

the opposite of the fast fashion industry”. This view of the opponent was slightly different from the other two models. In the identified intended narrative the clothing industry was seen as the opponent and in the narrative from the other participants’ actantial model they saw the public that does not consume consciously as the opponent. As a result, the narrative presented by Patagonia has been interpreted in different ways. However, the main message still comes effectively across as the initiative to care for the environment.

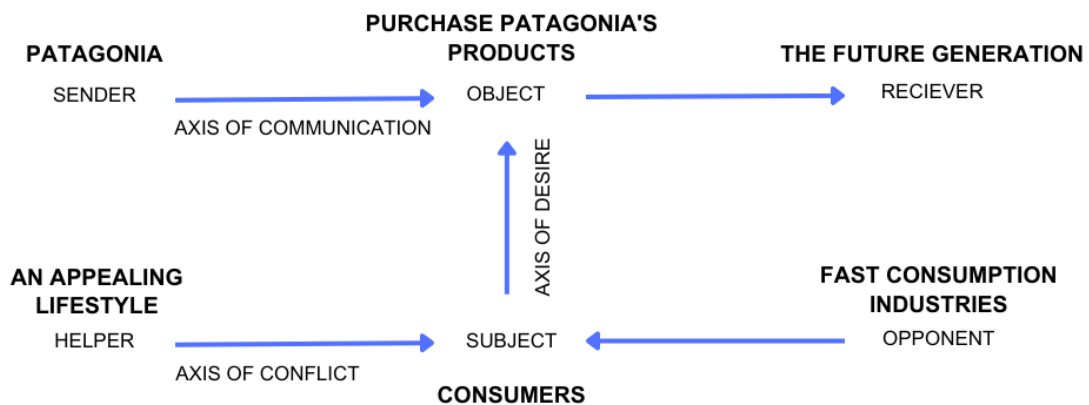


Figure 6. Second version of the young public’s retold narrative of *Buy Less, Demand More* transferred to Greimas’s actantial model.

6.1.2 The hairy situation of a side-tracked story

The responses in the empirical material revealed how the participants interpreted the receiver of Billie’s narrative as feminism and as a campaign dedicated to supporting women’s rights and gender equality rather than the cause of Movember. This receiver was viewed as something positive, as feminism was supported by most participants. The participants' sentiment was that Billie was the sender of the narrative. When the participants were asked to discuss the opponent of the story, Kaitlyn said: “Maybe the patriarchy”, and John agreed: “Yeah, the social norm”. Lovisa added how she supported the campaign but how she thought it might upset others: “I think some might not appreciate these types of campaigns because they want to be girly girls, or they do not want to be associated with body hair”, which was followed up with Ella saying: “I think for the older target groups, if my mom would have seen this she would be like, what the fuck” as well as “the older groups that are a bit more conservative, I

do not think they would have been, oh, this is so good". Therefore, the empirical material demonstrates how the participants interpreted the opponent in the narrative as men and women with older and more traditional values. Their feelings were therefore evoked when they explained their interpretation of the opponent, but also when demonstrating how they did not agree with the opponent's arguments. Another take on this was made by Madison:

I think it is the women of the video, more as a concept, like body hair is the main character, in my opinion. So I think the conceptual villain is the patriarchy that is creating that dominant mindset of removing all your body hair completely, strip everything away.

While mapping out the potential opponents of the story, the object of the narrative was also discussed. Josy expressed how she felt that the narrative wanted her to feel frustrated and rebellious: "I think it's more radical. We are not going to take your shit anymore. It's very much taking action, we own ourselves. We own who we are, own our body hair. Very positive and like, I am a radical". Josy talked about women as a group and that this is a socio-political cause that many women can partake in, therefore, it can be interpreted that young women are the subject of the narrative. This was supported by Madison: "I feel like our generation of women. Especially younger, like the gen z generation". The narrative made the participants feel as if they were the target audience, and that Billie was sending them and the rest of the younger generation on a journey to become more confident. This was appreciated, and especially in relation to how they felt for the narrative's helper, Madison articulated the power of peers: "You never see women with mustaches. And here it's like 50 of them in a minute, which is quite powerful, I think". This sentiment suggests that the helper is another woman with mustaches. However, the participants felt that Billie's campaign was focused on female empowerment and gender equality, and not on supporting the Movember movement. This resulted in mixed emotions, and the fact that Billie skewed the message of engaging in Movember, was causing confusion. For example, Ella expressed her opinion on how Billie could have improved the storytelling to match the initial message of encouraging the public to donate to Movember:

But I think it would have been better if they had, like, started with women. And then maybe in the end, they could have like fifty-fifty. Like, we are all in this together. But now it is all women and then it is one man. I think that sends out a bit of a weird message because they had like this, women empowerment, in the whole video with the message, and then he comes in. You know, what is he doing there?

Ella says that the sudden man in the narrative feels odd. This can be interpreted as if Billie is dedicating the narrative to female empowerment, they should not bother to incorporate a man just for the sake of it. The participants' feelings toward the campaign's structure were based on the observed skewness of the object between the intended narrative and the narrative that the participants retold.

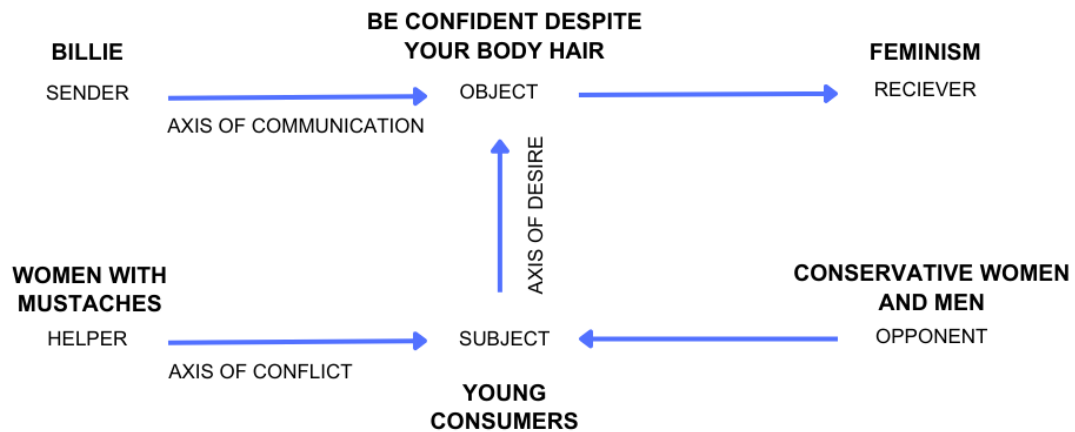


Figure 7. The young public's retold narrative of Movember transferred to Greimas's actantial model.

6.1.2 The rewritten story of masculinity

The focus group conversation on the narrative of Gillette's campaign, the Best a Man Can Be produced a similar narrative as in the identified intended narrative. Ella pointed out the bad and good characters of the campaign in this way: "The bad being the ones who have the behaviors being questioned and the good ones, the ones that are willing to change" and Ethan said: "I mean, it is all about men I think. I think men are also portrayed as the villain, potentially the hero in this". The retelling of the narrative among the participants seemed to place men as the subject, but also as the opponent. However, participants expressed how the emotion of guilt was central to any possible opponent and that the men who opposed the narrative's goals would be those who were guilty of mistreating others. In contrast, the identified intended narrative had men as the subject of the narrative and toxic masculinity as opponents. Ella gives an account for this here:

It was very masculine in the beginning. It was a girl kissing a man on the cheek. And at first, I actually associated that with Gillette, like oh, that was the first course they had. But they were

like oh, kids or you guys, fight a lot. And the older generation is just watching and no one is making a difference.

This shows how Ella felt positively surprised by how Gillette's narrative displayed their progression. Hanna adds to that and highlights how she feels that Gillette is bold by doing this:

They're not afraid to show how it used to be. I feel like so many companies nowadays are just showing the positive or whatever, but this actually shows the problematic behavior that once was. They're not afraid to enlighten the problem. They're like, yeah, this is an actual problem. This is how it used to look, but we can do better.

These conversations point at how Gillette is the sender as they point out the object for the subject. The participants found that the object of the narrative was to lead by example and hold other men accountable. This is similar to the identified intended narrative, which was to improve men's behavior toward each other. Therefore, the participants felt appreciative of Gillette's decision to point out this problem. Ella also mentions the object and the helper in the narrative: "I think the #MeToo thing came and like, we have to change. And then you have to do this and then you have to make the younger generation understand as well that we have to change". This points to #MeToo being the extra push men need to get to the object of leading by example and holding other men accountable. She also talks about the younger generations and that they are a part of the change. According to Holt (2004), one of the aspects of cultural knowledge for a brand is knowledge of societal issues, such as gender. For a brand, this awareness can make them a historical participant in society. As discussed in the focus group, there has been a shift in how Gillette has approached the topic of masculinity historically. As Ella pointed out with feelings of relief, "Gillette has gone from depicting women kissing men's cheeks to instead making a societal difference regarding gender roles". The participants focused more on women being the receiver of the narrative than the identified intended narrative, which found the sender to be the broader gender equality. Kaitlyn said:

I think maybe it is because women feel the negative parts of masculinity more than men do. So when we see this, we get hopeful that maybe this is a change. Whilst men don't see the issue as much as women do.

Furthermore, Stacy also made a similar observation and said: "I think women are more affected by this than men because we are more affected by men's violence". Therefore, the receiver of the narrative was interpreted as a woman, as the participants expressed how women would

be positively affected by this campaign. The female participants felt acknowledged in the narrative as they were anticipating the positive effects that the narrative exemplified.

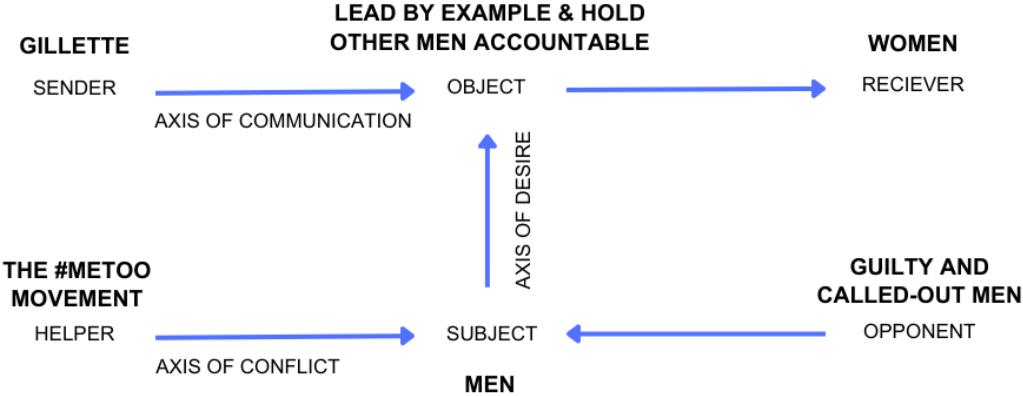


Figure 8. The young public’s retold narrative of *The Best A Man Can Be* transferred to Greimas’s actantial model.

6.2 Skepticism

Based on the empirical material, Billie’s campaign appeared to trigger an atmosphere where the participant’s made several statements that occasionally contradicted each other. The result became a restrained discussion, where participants seemed to discipline themselves from voicing their emotions. Initially, the conversations departed from how they believed the campaigns would be emotionally received from others and not in terms of themselves. For example, Amanda gave an account for her response like this: “I do like the messaging and I think it, um, I just, I like, I don't know, I like the feminism they do, but I don't know if it's enough to make me buy from them yet”. It is interpreted by the participants to be a feminist campaign with body positivity as a focus, nevertheless, Kaitlyn was not sure how well the message fitted with the product Billie sells: “I always think it's weird when razor brands have body hair positivity through ads because they, like, they make their money on razors. I think it's good, but I also think it's kind of weird”. The presence of feminism in the campaign was clearly noted by the participants, and the consensus was that it was an approach no one desired to oppose. For example, any possible critics and people that would get upset by the campaign were referred to as bigots, misogynists, and people who oppose themselves towards different

sexualities. In one of the focus groups this was established early on, and arguably triggered a theme in the responses. This appeared when participants gave credit to Billie despite the feeling that the campaign did not speak to them personally. Josy chose to outline her thoughts about it, even if she did not feel that she wanted to join the fight in the campaign:

I feel they are a brand that is very comfortable knowing that they are alienating certain audiences. They very much know who they want to target, and they are very much comfortable isolating other people who do not align with their values. And then, part of that is them being the first company that shows female body hair, it is not actually provocative obviously, but it is something that people will raise their eyebrows for the first time they see it, which is a bold step to take.

These findings confirmed a strong sense of a contradiction between liking the campaign but not seeing herself as the target audience, and therefore not feeling that the campaign spoke to her directly. The participants were keen on sharing what they liked about Billie's campaign after they voiced their own criticism of it. To exemplify this, Lovisa reported how she felt uncomfortable seeing the close-up shots of the hairy women in the video, and that it also felt intimidating as she did not identify herself with the message of not shaving. Then, as a justification for how she felt, she voiced how the campaign could be seen as a great investment for Billie: "I think it is a great investment because it brings up a lot of feelings and people will talk about the company". This demonstrates how the participants weigh the positives and negatives in order to discuss and explain how they felt. The call to action did not sit well with the participants.

All the campaigns made the participants feel skepticism at different levels. John saw Billie's campaign as unserious and referred to it as a PR stunt because of the fact that it focused more on feminist empowerment rather than on men's health as Movember traditionally does. However, it was still argued that it worked as a stunt to generate buzz around the brand. These findings align with those by Van Laer et al. (2014) and Dessart and Pitardi (2019) on how the degree of verisimilitude in narratives relates to the emotional responses among the public. It appeared that the major belief among the participants about Billie's campaign was that the call to action did not seem realistic enough to appeal to them emotionally. Madison admitted that the video did feel empowering but that it would not have any long-term emotional effects on her. In addition, she said: "I guess maybe they just should not have been doing a campaign for Movember". Therefore, the narrative did stir up mixed emotions towards

Billie, suggesting that some participants did not view empowerment as an emotion strong enough for any long-term results when the cause seemed inappropriate for Billie. As the participants also expressed skepticism about how genuine the efforts were, Madison points out:

They have a very clear aesthetic that they're trying to put across, which I feel a lot of these feminist campaigns also have, which is good in the sense of attracting attention. But then when it kind of disappears from the actual goal or becomes this kind of, pinkwashing kind of thing. I just feel surely we need to move away from that kind of branding because that a bit detracts from the message you're trying to send anyway. So I think that campaign is keeping with those stereotypes of kind of surface level campaigns.

She did not feel that the campaign is genuine in its efforts to emotionally appeal to people and discusses the effectiveness of feminist campaigns that fit that stereotype. Madison believed that having a clear aesthetic can be useful in grabbing people's attention, but that it also can distract from the campaign's actual goals if it becomes too focused on superficial aspects. Thompson et al. (2006) have studied the risks and effects of what they refer to as a *doppelgänger* brand, where a brand's image can be easily replicated. Madison mentioned the feminist stereotype of surface-level campaigns. Therefore it can be argued to be a risk factor for Billie to utilize stereotypical aesthetics in their feminist campaigns that do not prioritize substance, which may create a *doppelgänger* brand, where the surface-level branding overshadows the actual message and goals of the campaign.

A conversation that occurred in one of the focus groups regarding Billie's campaign was the realization of an issue that might have been an unintended consequence of the campaign. Amanda said: "But it made me think if I have a mustache, that was the only thing that it made me think about. Oh, and if I should be removing it". Then Charles answered: "Oh that's a good point, that you didn't necessarily feel like your stash was a problem". Even if the object of the narrative was to make women confident despite their body hair, it made Amanda feel more self-aware of her body hair. The conversation continued to address how appropriate it was for Billie to talk about this issue and Charles said:

The message is trying to say it's very inclusive and girls have stashes and that's okay. But if you are a razor company, you're just increasing the amount of people that will feel insecure, they start thinking about their mustache. That's very smart actually when you think about it that way. Because now Amanda is going to go save her stash.

Charles's reasoning of why Billie was emphasizing women with mustaches in their razor advertising led to the realization that it could be a clever way to approach the topic of shaving mustaches. The focus group discussions about cleverness also broke out in relation to Patagonia. The participants demonstrated how they were aware of Patagonia's efforts to convey their message and felt that they did it in a smart way. Ethan gave an account of his feelings toward Patagonia's campaign:

I have a good impression. But as some have noted already, it is also a clothing brand. And here is this campaign to make people buy their products. It is a very clever way to make people buy their products. Playing on the emotion of doing good for the environment and doing your part. I mean, you cannot stop wearing clothes, and they know we still have to get clothes.

The hypocritical feelings toward Patagonia's campaign, and the increased emotion of skepticism, became more present when one participant after the other started to address it. To exemplify this, Stacey started to sway the conversation by stating: "I think it is a little bit of greenwashing". Madison voiced emotions of cynicism, and detachment when she criticized the efforts that a brand makes to activate the individual and she questioned how much one person can do:

They're really going along the lines of, which I feel most brands do, in the activism realm of making you feel as an individual, you have a lot of power to invoke change in the environment, which I think is a challenging one because I don't personally think we have that much power, it is a big corporation issue, but I think that is part of their message in the sense of your own decisions have the power to change for the future and for the better.

By considering the positive and negative aspects of Patagonia's campaign, Harry said: "They still want to sell clothes. And I don't know how environmentally friendly they are in reality, but I heard great things about them. Even if you buy more environmentally friendly clothes you still have an impact on the environment". This doubt among some participants stimulated more critique from others in the discussion but also led to some people feeling that they needed to defend Patagonia. Similar conflicting feelings were expressed when the groups discussed Gillette's campaign, as Katlyn mentioned that men might feel offended by the campaign:

But maybe conservative men would feel like this was, "not all men". It would feel like an attack rather than encouragement, um, to those men that might be taking this as a negative ad. I think it's weird to think they are trying to portray that because I think they are trying to really

show a positive side of how men can make a difference and be good people. So to say that this ad is telling everyone that all men are bad. I'd rather think they're trying to tell everyone that all men can be good.

As she expected, the male participants did have more negative feelings when discussing Gillette's campaign. For example, Charles said: "It's like capitalizing on a social movement without actually doing anything about it. Like, it's not like Gillette is doing something about male violence or sexual violence or anything. No, of course not". Charles's opinion did not seem to be against the social movement itself, but more against Gillette's involvement in the issue. This led him to not believe that Gillette would make a contribution to the cause. Will also indirectly questioned if Gillette had those beliefs and values when he said: "It didn't affect me necessarily, positively, seeing this campaign, but if for some reason it got out that Gillette did not have these values, I wouldn't buy their product." Here, Will both point out that the campaign did not seem to bring out a positive response in him as well as indicating openness to the idea that Gillette's values do not align with the message in the campaign. Then, he progresses to mention that he would not buy their product if he found out that Gillette's values did not align with what they claimed in the campaign. Will's sentiment aligns with studies on brand communication on how the young public value consistency and honesty in a brand's messaging (Hsu, 2017). John was also apprehensive about some parts of the campaign:

I think it's both positive and negative. In a negative stance, it's like, okay, do men really need to guard other men to not be, assholes and stuff. But apparently, we need to do it because it's still a problem.

Throughout his process of interpreting Gillette's campaign, he began to question if this issue actually was something that men needed to be part of. Then, he reasons with himself that it seems to be the case because it is still a problem. As the participants continued to reflect on the campaign, they noted that other individuals in the focus group had mentioned how well Gillette was suited to address the issue of positive masculinity. It was clear that many felt that this was a topic that needed to be discussed, and despite feelings of doubt from some participants, for example, when Kaitlyn said:

I think the connection might be that razors are used by men and then men can be better. I think it's kind of far-fetched. But their branding is mostly targeted toward men, so maybe that's why they thought they could make a difference.

This indicates how Kaitlyn, early on in the discussion, had doubts about how effective the campaign was. However, when she later was asked if her feelings for the brand were different from before seeing Gillette's campaign, she said that it was: "Better now, I think". Hence, the skepticism at the beginning of the focus group did decrease with the evolution of the discussion of Gillette's campaign. The empirical material also indicates that participants felt both confused and a desire to get more context or explanation of Billie's campaign. As Freitas (2010) has discussed the narrative challenges that occur when making an advertising campaign, brands have to rely on the viewer to fill in the narrative gaps from their prior knowledge and understanding due to time constraints. This process proved difficult for the participants when discussing the Movember campaign by Billie. As Amanda expressed her confusion: "They were all in their underwear. But still it was just a focus on their mustache. So that didn't really make sense". The empirical material indicates this pattern of skepticism as the participants were feeling critical and skeptical of Billie's approach, and Stacy expressed a sense of frustration with the way companies sometimes attempt to align themselves with social movements or trends.

I think they are trying to get on the bandwagon of hot topics that are going on in the world right now, it's all about body positivity. And they're like, what can we associate with body positivity that's actually a part of our company or in brackets, "something we can relate to, stashes". Oh, let's take that on. Let's put aesthetic colors to it. Let's give a confusing message and then we are actually a very basic company.

Stacy was critical of the campaign, as evidenced by the use of phrases such as "trying to get on the bandwagon" and "give a confusing message." This suggests a sense of disapproval or skepticism towards the company's motives or approach as well as being confused about the message. Stacy's point of view is one that researchers are aware of and Mirzaei et al. (2022) did find that the public is likely to have a negative impression of a brand when they find the fit between the cause and the brand weak. When making sense of the campaign, participants indicated a mix of emotions, including disappointment or frustration with the way that the campaign deviated from the cause.

6.3 Hopefulness

Another identified pattern in the discussion was the feeling of encouragement and hopefulness. The empirical material demonstrated that for Billie's campaign, the participants sup-

ported the main message of female empowerment. This did not change throughout the discussion, despite previously negative feelings towards the campaign. Juliet for example said: “For myself, I like the messaging. I would not grow out my mustache necessarily. But I do think it is the right type of messaging that should be put out by companies”. The participants also voiced their support for Billie’s cause regarding how they felt it might be interpreted by other women as well. Ella articulated:

They're very clearly targeting younger women. And I think it's a very positive message for younger women who are starting to deal with their body hair and they're like, oh my god, how do I get rid of it? Or they're feeling shy about it, to see it represented. And use that as encouragement for them.

This demonstrates how Billie’s campaign contributes to a better representation of women and how it challenges gender stereotypes, as it leaves the women in the study with feelings of encouragement. Together with encouragement, another emotion identified in the empirical material was hopefulness. When discussing Patagonia’s campaign, both of these emotions were present. After viewing the video, an initial reaction was voiced by Hanna:

I think it is encouraging. You can do a big thing by doing this small thing. You do not realize how big it is to do this small thing. Kind of puts it in perspective. Like wow, I can contribute to that by buying this shirt.

Here, Hanna highlights the simplicity of the task that Patagonia is encouraging the public to do. She mentioned how she felt encouraged, which Harry voiced too, but more in relation to frustration: “As they said, we wrote this 50 years ago, so people could see it coming. We just didn't act in time. It creates a bit of anger, but also maybe hope”. Harry voiced how the introductory statement from Patagonia on how they historically have advocated for the environment made him both angry and hopeful. Ella also mentioned how the introduction to the campaign influenced her interpretation:

I like that it makes you think about the future. For coming generations. Also that they started from a historical perspective, where they showed their first catalog, then now, then the future. I think it is a very nice timeline.

Patagonia's campaign sparked the emotion of hope in Ella, and when she talked about how Patagonia has placed itself in the historical fight for the environment, she also mentioned that she thought the timeline is nice. Patagonia's historical efforts to address the environmental problems were appreciated by Ella, and the way the narrative unfolded made her feel hopeful for the story's future. Patagonia's efforts for climate change continued to be addressed from a meta-perspective, where Hanna mentioned how she thought Patagonia did a good job developing the narrative and complementing their technique of appealing to the public.

Patagonia's efforts to make the public consume less in general, and not explicitly encourage them to purchase from themselves, was the main argument for the participants' feelings of hopefulness, but also optimism. As a result, it can be argued that the myth in the storytelling portrays Patagonia as a challenger. This way, Patagonia is challenging the conventional norms and values of many other brands today, and most importantly the traditional consumerist culture. As Torelli (2013) reports, today's brands need to apply cultural branding in a way that can appeal to a large audience, and since over-consumption is a generally pressing matter, Patagonia is using this to stimulate these positive emotions such as optimism and hopefulness. This may also have served as an emotional enhancer, as Josy here describes how she felt a sense of ownership and responsibility:

I was thinking of how it starts with history, and for two-thirds of it, it is very much focused on Patagonia representing themselves and their accountability. Then it flips from them to the consumer because the last half is giving the call to action - which is demand recycled, demand organic. And I think that part is really clever because around sustainability there is always a conversation about if it is the company or the individual that should be sustainable. Like who has the ownership in that issue? I feel that they are telling the individual to take ownership by using their money to, you know, demand companies to sell organic and fully recycled items. And by doing that, they are again saying, come to us because we do that.

Additionally, a typical emotion identified in the empirical material was the urge to defend the brand campaigns from any type of critique. Defensiveness was usually present in relation to doubt, and when one participant voiced doubt, someone else felt the need to defend the brand in question. This was identified in the discussion about Patagonia, where Josy replied to a statement that questions Patagonia's motives.

I do think that they actually reject maximizing sales and just doing things solely for profit. They are much more for the planet and for people rather than just having a solely capitalistic mindset of most profits and most revenue.

Patagonia may have counted on these debates and relied on dedicated customers or environmental activists' own knowledge and schema (Freitas, 2010), that would defend them in these types of situations. However, the defending statements seemed to generate more optimistic views, and Eddy replied to Josy:

I guess you can question their motivations, whether they are really being good for the environment or doing it for profit. But in my opinion, you can do both. It is a company, so it is normal that they want profit, but they can seek profit in an environmentally friendly way. I do not think it is mutually exclusive.

As the quote illustrates, the participants defended Patagonia when others in the discussion felt that the brand was contradicting itself, by describing the brand as self-aware and responsible. Because Patagonia's narrative threw shade on the clothing industry while still being part of it, the participants felt appreciative of their efforts to care. The empirical material indicated that Patagonia's self-awareness and call to action were especially important for why the participants felt these emotions. As Hanna said: "At least they are not saying, demand more, buy Patagonia, they are saying demand more, buy less. They are not saying buy us. They are being self-aware". Another indicator of why the participants felt the urge to defend Patagonia was because of the brand-cause fit. For example, Amanda said: "I feel like it is working, they are actually going with the cause. They are investing and trying to make clothes that are good quality. They are actually trying to focus on their message". It became apparent that participants thought of Patagonia's activism efforts as genuine. Madison also pointed out how she felt that the importance of the chosen cause is:

I can acknowledge that it's a clothing brand so it has that other side, but also but I think it's actually really true to their values. They really do promote maintaining their clothes for many years and not needing to replace your items.

The chosen cause of climate activism, Patagonia's own environmentally friendly profile and values, and the person's own relationship to climate change were all factors that contributed

to the arguments by the participants when describing how they felt. Participants acknowledged that Patagonia could get critique for the campaign because they still are a part of the clothing industry. However, this did not weigh heavy enough for the participants to voice anger or frustration toward Patagonia, rather those emotions were pointed at the climate changes which were illustrated in the narrative. Instead, Patagonia was defended by trying to make the best out of their situation, especially by broadening the message of the story and shifting focus from not only sustainable clothing but to sustainable living as well.

Appreciation was another present emotion in the focus group discussion. Regarding Gillette's campaign, Hanna expressed her appreciation for the campaign this way: "They're aware of the problem, and they are a part of the problematic behavior, which I can appreciate. And also, it's such a big company, everyone knows Gillette, so they're very much using their platform, in a good way". Lovisa went on to express how also younger people and women are more likely to feel appreciation for the campaign:

The more older generation is going to be more conservative. We will be more liberal and forward-thinking. Younger people mostly, I think will appreciate this and I think a lot of women will appreciate this type of thing.

The feeling of appreciation was echoed in all the focus groups during the discussion of Gillette's campaign. The participants appreciated that Gillette was acknowledging the problem and taking responsibility for their part in it. When the groups were asked about who they find likely to not like this campaign, most people agreed that that would be the older generations that have more of a conservative view. Furthermore, these feelings were connected to the brand-cause fit, as both Madison and Ethan stated how well-suited they thought toxic masculinity was addressed by Gillette. Madison felt that Gillette was genuinely committed to promoting change and that their commercial had the potential to inspire meaningful action. She expanded her idea: "I think Gillette seems to me, the most convincing of wanting actual change. And maybe getting it as a result of their commercial". This was agreed by the other participants and for example, Hanna said: "They cater to men and then they're like, okay, we have this platform where we have this audience. Let's make something good of it. I think that might have been their intention with this". This indicates that the more the focus groups discussed the campaign the clearer the connection between the brand and the cause became. According to Abitbol & Sternadori (2019), an organization's values must be consistent with those of the supported cause. Further, Kaitlynn expressed how she felt appreciative towards

Gillette. This was based on Gillette's response to the social movement of #MeToo as well as on how they are changing their approach to advertising:

So I guess maybe they're kind of trying to come back from that old way of advertising enforcing these strong male stereotypes. In a potentially harmful way. And so maybe this is also them trying to get back into the good books post #MeToo and coming up with this kind of more empowering slogan, which I think works. That's definitely I felt the most affected by that one out of all of the campaigns.

6.4 Conflicting emotions

Alongside the typical sets of negative and positive emotions, a theme of conflicting emotions was also present during the discussions. As the focus group discussed Gillette, it became clear that Gillette's campaign had an impact on many of them, prompting them to reflect on their own attitudes toward masculinity and inspiring them to consider how they can contribute to a more positive future. As Patrick expressed:

I feel like, as a man bit shameful like that. It has gone so far. It's still going. Uh, but it also makes me, it makes me hopeful that, what I can contribute with and the people that I surround myself with and how I can affect them to behave in a way that is better for the future, basically.

This suggests that he is grappling with feelings of shame and responsibility in response to the issue of toxic masculinity, but is also hopeful about the potential for positive change through personal action and relationship-building. He added later on that: "It is hard to challenge norms in society, generally, which this one was very much about, it's like demanding". Subsequently, towards the end of the focus group interviews, when participants were asked about which campaign they liked the most, Patrick said: "I think my favorite was the first one (Patagonia). That's just because it's an easier topic to process in your head and you don't really have to". This implies that he found Gillette's cause important, but his feelings toward it were more demanding than his feelings toward Patagonia's. Because of this, he concluded that he liked Patagonia's campaign the most. Researchers on brand activism state that an organization should target the same audience who would support the social cause (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019). According to the empirical material, it is hard to tell how passionate many of the male participants are about this cause compared to, for example, the environmental cause that Patagonia supported. Other participants in the focus groups found it more likely that people might

feel guilty about the situation portrayed in Gillette's campaign. Eddy said: "We mentioned already hope and a sense of duty and accountability. Maybe guilt, maybe to some people feel guilt". Another aspect that occurred in the focus groups was that Gillette's campaign was highly appreciated by the female participants, but not as much by the men. If any criticism was pointed at Gillette and the campaign, it was pointed out by a male participant. Furthermore, at the beginning of discussing Gillette, Kaitlyn voiced doubts in terms of how effective the campaign was. However, at the end of the discussion, Kaitlyn's skepticism seemed to have gone away and when the participants were asked which campaign they liked the most she said: "I think the last one (Gillette)". Many of the participants agreed with her and recognized that it was important for Gillette to be a part of the conversation. Ethan put it this way, emphasizing his emotion of feeling like a man:

If it's one company that should probably be taking this stance it is probably Gillette. Because a lot of things are connected to masculinity, also shaving. Having a beard and a mustache. And I think Gillette is probably, that was the only brand I knew when I was going to shave for the first time.

Ethan suggests that Gillette is uniquely positioned to address the issue of positive masculinity because of their association with traditional masculine grooming practices like shaving and maintaining facial hair. The empirical material also revealed three other emotions: amusement, relatability, and authenticity. As previously stated, participants felt confused and skeptical toward Billie's campaign. However, these emotions were also mixed with positive emotions. The emotion of amusement occurred when viewing Billie's campaign, and this feeling was present among the majority of the participants. It was also noted that this particular campaign seemed less serious compared to the other two campaigns in the study. Lovisa noted Billie's comedic elements in this way:

I think there was some comedy to it. Yeah, it was funny. But they were obviously talking about a big issue, but they were doing it in a funny-ish way, a very playful and easygoing way. Maybe like, you know, satire.

Lovisa acknowledged the campaign's amusing approach but also believed it addressed a significant issue in a playful and casual way. According to Lovisa, the campaign utilized satire to approach the topic, making it stand out while still maintaining sensitivity. Josy also found the campaign to be cute while supporting the message. She believed the campaign was humorous in some aspects, which helped the message to stand out. However, she still felt mixed feelings

towards it. Josy did not believe that she would personally participate in the campaign, as she doubted its popularity among women who may not be interested in growing their mustaches.

I think it's a cute message and I think I support it and I like what they're trying to do. I think it's kind of funny at times just because I've never heard that before. Because I assume this campaign didn't get a lot of popularity, because I don't think many women are too keen on growing out their mustaches. But it was a cute story, but I don't think I'd personally partake.

Against this, Billie has arguably been able to establish a distinguished brand image among the participants, by using humor, when taking a non-traditional path to advertising their product (Thompson et al., 2006). Regarding relatability and authenticity, these emotions were exemplified when discussing Patagonia's campaign. The empirical material indicates a pattern of the participants having stronger feelings towards a brand when they could relate to something in the narrative, either to the cause or the characters in the story. Hanna stated it like this: "But they know that people... Or at least I get upset when I see videos of pollution". Other participants agreed on the importance of the issue of climate change as Eddy said:

I also think the environmental cause has been growing and it influences more and more people. So I think that the people who are most likely to be influenced by the campaign are also people who are concerned about the environment because not everyone is equally concerned about it. And I think their campaign also is following the trend, because maybe not that many people care that much, but the number of people that care is growing. It's kind of a way of investing because it will be some of the first ones to, you know, defend the cause.

Theory on storytelling highlights how commercial messages in narratives need to be relatively basic in order to capture the public's attention in an appealing way in a short amount of time. This is because they ultimately should rely on the receivers' own schema (Freitas, 2010). With climate change being a pressing matter, it can be argued that the public thinks of and adds their own prior knowledge and experience about the issue to Patagonia's message. In line with these theoretical principles, Patagonia's narrative engaged the participants in the conversation about climate change by using simple examples that evoked feelings of reliability and authenticity and led up to the call to action. Josy exemplifies this:

And it's also actionable that you can actually wear their clothes for many years. And if your puffer gets ripped, you can go in the store and get a repair for free. So I think the ad has good messaging and it also lines up very well with the company's overall messaging.

Here Josy relates her prior knowledge of the brand as they repair garments free of charge in the store. Therefore, she feels that Patagonia is constructing an authentic narrative in their campaign because her knowledge of the brand matches what they express in the campaign.

To summarize the typical emotions identified in the empirical material, the issue of toxic masculinity in Gillette’s campaign seemed to trigger a spectrum of emotions in the participants such as accountability and appreciation. However, there were also feelings of hopefulness for Gillette’s vision to create a positive change. Regarding Billie’s campaign, the participants expressed emotions of confusion, amusement, and skepticism. Even if Billie’s campaign may have fallen short in certain aspects, its ability to elicit a variety of emotions and generate attention from the audience cannot be denied. Patagonia’s campaign also produced a mix of emotions from the participants, as they felt hope and optimism. In addition, they expressed feelings of responsibility for the issue of environmental protection. The table below contains all identified emotions in the focus group discussions. Nevertheless, many of them fall under other prevalent emotional patterns in the discussion and therefore they were less emphasized in this analysis.

Buy Less, Demand More	Movember	The Best a Man Can Be
Angry	Amused	Accountable
Appreciative	Confused	Appreciative
Authentic	Critical	Apprehensive
Cynical	Disappointed	Demanded
Defensive	Empowered	Doubtful
Detached	Encouraged	Guilty
Frustrated	Frustrated	Hopeful
Hopeful	Insecure	Responsible
Optimistic	Intimidated	Shameful
Relatable	Self-aware	Skeptical
Responsible	Skeptical	
Skeptical		

Table 1. Identified emotions in the empirical material.

7. Discussion

This thesis aimed to explore how the young public feels about communication efforts that seek to emotionally appeal to them. The investigation utilized the example of brand activism as a communication strategy and the narratives of three brand activist campaigns to see how and which emotions occurred. In addition, it was problematized that current research is neglecting the emotional side of strategic communication. By examining both the strategic and receiving side of activist communication efforts, this thesis adopted a holistic approach to contribute to the limited knowledge of emotions within strategic communication. The way the narratives in the activist campaigns were constructed had an impact on the young public and generated different emotional responses, especially when discussing their emotions after viewing the campaigns. By departing from CCT and applying concepts from narratology, it was established that from the strategic side, storytelling was used to evoke emotions of inspiration, encouragement, frustration, and relatability. From the receiving side, three typical emotional responses were found: skepticism, hopefulness, and conflicting emotions. The young public felt that the activist campaigns were more emotionally appealing when the narratives' call to action resonated with their values, when they could understand the connection between the brand and the cause, and when they could use their prior knowledge of the brand and cause to fill in the narrative's missing information.

Regarding the thesis's first research question, how are the narratives strategically communicated in activist branding campaigns to evoke emotions, the findings showed that brands use storytelling as a technique in their strategy. In their storytelling, the brands are communicating their brand values, key message, and fight for a socio-political issue. As seen in the narrative analysis, the answer to how brand activist campaigns are structured to evoke emotions is based on a structure that makes people feel encouraged to take action, and as a result, ultimately feel good about themselves and the brand. While each campaign has its unique approach, there are some similarities and differences in how they structure their narratives. The similarity between the campaigns was that the brands did not position themselves as the hero of the story but rather as humble helpers to the public. By doing so, they seek to evoke inspiration and encouragement. By strategically introducing the cause and its problem-

atization at the beginning of the narrative, the brands aim to evoke feelings of frustration towards the issue. The narratives continue to unfold in a way to make the public feel inspired by the brands and their vision to solve the problem. This is an additional way to demonstrate how they are taking responsibility and appear genuine. As the latter part of the narratives illustrates how the public can solve the problems, the activist campaigns are aiming to evoke feelings of encouragement. This is additionally emphasized by the call to action, which finally instructs the public on what to do. In other words, the brand activist campaigns shift focus from their actions to the public's actions.

The differences in how the activist campaigns use storytelling to evoke emotions are based on the brand itself. If the brand can demonstrate values and historical endeavors that resonate with the cause this can emphasize feelings of authenticity and inspiration, which is exemplified by Patagonia's campaign. On the other hand, if a brand's history and previous brand communication do not align with the particular cause, it can still be used as an opportunity to showcase their progress and evolution toward the cause, as exemplified by Gillette's campaign. By doing so, the brand can evoke feelings of inspiration and encourage the public to take action. Furthermore, if a brand does not have a significant history or prefers not to highlight it, Billie's campaign is an example of where a comedic approach is used to illustrate their values as well as support for the cause. This way, brand activist campaigns also seek to evoke feelings of relatability in the public.

Regarding the second research question of what emotions are evoked among the young public in relation to brand activist campaigns, a mixture of emotions is evoked in the young public when brands use storytelling as a part of their brand activism strategies. While the intended narratives of activist campaigns are to focus on encouraging the public to take action and raise awareness for the selected cause, the audience of the campaigns will have different backgrounds and therefore a variety of emotions towards a campaign of that nature. Participants saw Patagonia as a hero who was fighting to address a more significant issue beyond their brand, which made them feel optimistic and hopeful about the future. Their interpretation of the narrative positioned the brand as an admirable and ethical actor that was working towards the greater good. As the narrative called on the public to act more responsibly, the participants felt both guilt and responsibility as well as inspiration to take action. The young public also felt a sense of desire towards the depicted lifestyle in the narrative, as well as a desire to do better for the future. These different feel-

ings the public had towards Patagonia's narrative highlight the complexity of activist campaigns and the challenges of crafting a message that will evoke desired emotions in the public.

Unlike Patagonia's narrative, Billie's campaign focused on female empowerment and gender equality rather than supporting the cause of Movember. The call to action, which was to grow out the female mustache, was not realistic enough for some of the participants to be emotionally attached to the message, which is consistent with the theoretical findings by Desart and Pitardi (2019). Regarding Billie's campaign, it was primarily felt to be a femvertising campaign rather than an activist campaign for the selected cause Movember (Skey, 2015). This was because the focus on body hair as a symbol of female empowerment overshadowed the message of supporting Movember. Combining femvertising with a different activist cause in the campaign evoked emotions of confusion and skepticism among the young public.

Turning to the participants' feelings towards Gillette's campaign, their emotions were vaguely divided, but the common feeling was that Gillette's initiative was accepted and respectable. While some saw the campaign as a positive step towards challenging toxic masculinity and promoting gender equality, others voiced critique and referred to it as an example of "woke-washing" or the use of a socio-political issue to sell razors. Against the conflicting emotions of hope, encouragement, and skepticism it can be concluded that while brands may have a genuine intention to advocate for socio-political causes, the strategic implementation of such messaging is critical to avoid appearing inauthentic. The analysis demonstrated that the public's feelings towards Gillette's narrative were not shaped by how they identified with the subject of the story, which was men, but rather by their feelings towards the cause and the people who will benefit from the activist campaign. This highlights the importance of selecting a fitting issue when a brand engages in brand activism and underscores that positive emotions are more likely to occur when the activism aligns with the public's values and cultural view of the issue.

Upon analyzing the empirical material, distinct patterns emerged regarding the emotional responses to each campaign. Overall, the participants engaged in similar conversations about their emotional reactions to all of the campaigns, but there were also differences in how they felt about them. The patterns that emerged as similar across the campaigns were the different degrees of people's familiarity with either the brand, the cause, or the characters within the narrative. Furthermore, discussions that included reasoning about both the positive and negative aspects of the campaigns led to participants either feeling the urge to defend the brand or highlight the negative feelings towards it even more. Lastly, the feeling of skepticism was present in all of the discussions about the campaigns.

The feelings all the campaigns evoked in the public was the degree of which they could relate to the story. The public expressed how they felt encouraged, hopeful, and appreciative but also had feelings of anger and frustration towards Patagonia's campaign. The feelings of encouragement and hopefulness were linked to their discussion on how the call to action, demand more and buy less, seemed achievable on their end, and therefore, the emotions they described typically had positive connotations. It was also appreciated that Patagonia historically has advocated for the environment, and this was a fact that participants used to defend any doubts other participants had about the activism.

However, the public's feelings towards Billie's campaign included amusement and encouragement, and their support for feminism in general. The public did not connect as much to the story as they did with other campaigns because they were missing the opportunity to relate to the story. The lack of familiarity with the brand, the connection between Billie and the cause, and the gaps in the narrative made the public unable to make a strong emotional connection to the campaign.

Moreover, the pattern of appreciation is often derived from people being familiar with the socio-political cause. Gillette's focus in the campaign was on the cause of toxic masculinity, a familiar topic for the public and especially for women. The women's emotional response involved a sense of appreciation. They appreciated that the narrative involved the history of the cause and how Gillette was changing how they historically approached the topic. Some men had more doubts about whether Gillette was doing anything about the issue that the campaign addressed. Although the cause was important to the public, there was a clear gender difference in how they expressed their emotions around the campaign. Men did not show the same appreciation for the campaign, and more doubt was present when discussing their emotions. The call to action in the campaign felt demanding to the men, and the campaign was calling men specifically to action, even though women also felt a responsibility to act after seeing the campaign. The socio-political issue and the campaign were more uncomfortable for the men than for women, as they had to discuss the steps they would have to take to reach the narrative's object, which would involve lifestyle changes in whom they surround themselves with and how they react to certain social situations. When making sense of why Gillette would tackle the issue of toxic masculinity, most of the public thought it was appropriate for them to tell the story and highlight the problem, which led to the participants appreciating the brand and feeling that the story was authentic.

During the discussions, participants also weighed out the advantages and disadvantages of both the campaigns and the associated brands in an effort to reason their emotions

towards the campaigns. The emotions of anger and frustration occurred when discussing the long period of time in which Patagonia fought for the environment. The public also voiced how the cause of climate change was upsetting and that it was an important issue that needed concern. Therefore, these typical negative emotions are more connected to their reasoning behind the cause, which is an emotional topic for many of them. The consensus of the young public was that Patagonia was being authentic, and that was demonstrated when they focused on the positives and negatives of the campaign and defended Patagonia if someone started to question the values and intentions of the brand.

Furthermore, the feeling of skepticism was expressed towards all the campaigns. Billie's campaign focused on feminism and body positivity through the lens of the Movember movement. The young public had a challenging time discussing their emotions regarding the Billie campaign. The connection between the key message and the cause of the campaign was complicated for the participants, and their prior knowledge of the topic did not fill in the necessary gaps to fully understand a campaign of this nature. The participants frequently mentioned confusion when discussing the campaign and whether the call to action was realistic enough to emotionally appeal to them. Because the production of the Billie campaign was simple and tongue-in-cheek, the public thought it was a stereotypical campaign that, under most circumstances, would make it easier for them to understand. This setup, therefore, added to the confusion rather than aided in their understanding of the campaign.

Concerning the last research question, how do these emotions arise when the young public discusses brand activist campaigns, this followed a similar development for all activist campaigns. Directly after viewing the campaigns, the general sense was not to have a provoking opinion of the campaigns. This highlights how the activist campaigns also tended to leave the public with a feeling of disciplining their answers. However, when the young public started to discuss the campaigns, their conversations stimulated different emotional responses. The discussions included a range of several emotions and why they felt the way they did. Usually, participants would start by highlighting a positive aspect of the campaign. Regarding Gillette's and Billie's campaigns, there was skepticism and confusion in the initial conversations that would lead to some people agreeing or other people reiterating the positive aspects of the campaigns.

These conflicting emotions were particularly evident when discussing the campaigns rather than right after watching them. The most significant emotional responses occurred during discussions when participants heard the emotional reasoning of others and had an emotional response to those. Exemplified by the discussion about Gillette's campaign, criticism

was voiced by some male participants, such as Charles and Will, voiced criticism. In addition, skepticism concerning the effectiveness of the campaign was also expressed by Kaitlyn at the beginning of this discussion. However, it decreased as she kept discussing with the other participants. On the contrary, as exemplified in the discussion about Billie, the young public's skepticism increased with the evolution of discussing it. Unlike the conversations about the other campaigns, the critique was not defended by other participants. In addition, the analysis shows that Billie was the least known brand in the study; therefore, people did not have any prior knowledge of the brand to use to defend it. Whereas with the Patagonia campaign, the discussion evolved differently. The more the participants talked about the campaign, the stronger the positive emotions towards both the brand and the campaign got. Because of the participants' prior knowledge of Patagonia, they felt appreciation of the brand's willingness to bring attention to a cause they already felt passionate about.

This thesis brings a unique perspective on studying emotions in strategic communication and adds to the literature on qualitative understandings. By highlighting the significant impact of emotional appeals, the findings contribute to understanding the public's interpretation of communication efforts and how they emotionally experience the communication initiatives. Regarding consumer culture theory, the findings also have implications for this field. Emotions are integral to consumer experiences, influencing their emotional connections to brands and their stories. This suggests that emotions are central to understanding the young public's response to brand activism as a communication strategy. By recognizing the power of emotional appeals in shaping consumer behavior, the findings align with the core tenets of CCT, emphasizing the role of emotions in the consumer culture context.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, research within strategic communication has neglected the emotional aspect of communication efforts, resulting in limited research on the topic. Therefore, this thesis adds to one of the overarching aims of strategic communication, which is to enlighten and shape organizations regarding the public's interests, by extending the research on how the public emotionally responds to communication efforts. Departing from CCT, this thesis also adds to the cultural research in strategic communication by unveiling that commercial messages have the potential to stimulate emotions that generate a desirable connection between the public and brands. Because of this, it is crucial for scholars within strategic communication to rationalize how communication efforts evoke emotions in the public, as it elevates the field's practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this thesis approaches the topic of how the public feels about communication initiatives instead of how they perceive them. As a result, this thesis is a contribution that narrows the knowledge gap that currently exists within the cultural research of strategic communication. As this study found that emotions are complex and culturally leveraged, strategic communication professionals should think about the emotions of stakeholders throughout the entire development process when crafting campaign narratives. Additionally, they should consider the desired emotional response as well as the possible emotional response in the public.

The activist campaigns evoked feelings of encouragement, relatability, and hopefulness when the young public could identify themselves or a personal desire within the narrative. For strategic communication, this implies that examining the young public's cultural knowledge is vital in creating a communication initiative that seeks to stimulate those emotions. In addition, traditionally negative emotions, such as skepticism, do not have to result in an undesirable emotional connection between a brand and the public. Instead, such negative emotions can lead to a desirable conversation that results in people defending the brand. This aligns with the ideology of CCT, which suggests that brands can become a part of the public's identities and goals when they incorporate symbolic meanings into their campaigns. Moreover, the thesis highlights the importance of understanding gender differences when discussing emotions. This implies that when selecting a socio-political cause to support, brands need to

consider the different perspectives of how their targeted public might relate to that cause. If the call to action and cause appears to be too challenging to commit to, the main message might produce unintended emotions. However, polarized opinions are to be expected from the public when brands engage with a socio-political issue, and as this thesis found, emotions can develop and change during the public's discussion and reasoning, and ultimately lead to a renewed perspective of the brand.

This study has made three significant contributions to the field of strategic communication. First, brands can utilize brand activism as a communication strategy and evoke desired emotions in the public with storytelling techniques. Second, the thesis sheds light on the typical emotions that brand activist campaigns evoke among the public. The identified patterns of typical emotions that the campaigns evoke provide a deeper understanding of how and why the public feels those emotions. Lastly, the study found that emotions arise when the public discusses brand activist campaigns. This is crucial for the improvement of communication efforts and for the understanding of how to strategically communicate messages. This is because the aim in strategic communication, and brand communication, is to make the public engaged. By using brand activism as a strategy, brands can generate conversations, discussions, and emotional responses.

8.1 Limitations

This thesis has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the topic of emotions is sensitive and complex. Participants may be reluctant to report their true emotional experiences due to social desirability bias, which can lead to inaccurate or incomplete data. Therefore, it is possible that a more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences could have been achieved through in-depth interviews or other qualitative research methods. Additionally, the study's results may have been influenced by the fact that all participants in the focus groups were university students of similar ages, with easy access to information and a certain level of education. Furthermore, the study was conducted in Sweden therefore, many participants were not speaking their first language, which can limit the depth of the result. This study had a small sample size, which can limit the generalizability of findings. It is also important to note that the focus groups were conducted with mixed-gender participants, and the results might have been different if separate men and women focus groups had been conducted. Gender differences played a role in the emotional experiences of participants and the dis-

ciplining of the emotional reactions to the campaigns. Moreover, as with many qualitative studies, the outcome might be different when it comes to the repeatability of this study.

8.2 Further research

As previously noted in the introduction, there has been limited research conducted on the emotional aspect of strategic communication. To further investigate this topic, future research could delve deeper and explore campaigns that operate within the same context, such as multiple brands' attempts to create activist communication efforts for the same cause. Researchers could analyze the effectiveness of various narrative structures in stimulating different emotions and targeting different stakeholder groups more effectively. This could provide scholars within strategic communication with a better understanding of the emotional responses that different communication tactics evoke from various audiences.

Moreover, future research could explore the role of emotional responses in different communication contexts, such as political campaigning, crisis communication, or healthcare messaging. Examining how emotional appeals are used in these settings and how they influence public emotions and behaviors could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of emotions on strategic communication outcomes. As this study only focused on students' opinions and emotional responses, further research could explore if different social groups have different emotional responses to brand activism. By extending the emotional side of strategic communication, scholars and working professionals could better understand how emotions influence strategic communication outcomes and develop more effective communication strategies.

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10. Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: Questionnaire guide

Patagonia

Opening

- What are your names and where are you from?

Introductory

- Do you know the brand Patagonia?
- Have you heard about their campaign Buy Less, Demand More?

Emotions

- Is there something you do like about this campaign?
- Is there something you do not like about it?
- Does the ad change how you feel about Patagonia?
- How do you think others might feel about watching this?
 - Do you think it lands as Patagonia wants it to land in the mind of other consumers?
- Who do you think this type of campaign appeals to the most?
- Which reactions do you think the brand is trying to provoke?
 - Is it working? Why/why not
- Can you see why people might get upset with Patagonia for making this type of campaign? I.e, they are still part of the clothing industry

The story

- How would you explain what happened in the video?
- What do you think Patagonia is trying to say with this video?
- What are the main characters (person or thing) in the story that Patagonia is telling?
 - Are there any bad or good characters? Or any else?

- Which character do you identify with?
- Would you say the story is a tragic or hopeful story? Which type of story?
- What is the main message of the campaign?
- If you have to pick two emotions this campaign made you feel, which would it be?

Billie

Introductory

- Do you know the brand Billie?
- Have you heard about their campaign Movember?

Emotions

- Is there something you don't like about it?
- Is there something you do like about it?
- Does the ad change how you feel about Billie?
- How do you think others might feel about watching this?
 - Do you think it lands as Billie wants it to land in the mind of other consumers?
- Who do you think this type of campaign appeals to the most?
- Which reactions do you think the brand is trying to provoke?
 - Is it working? Why/why not
- Can you see why people might get upset with Billie for making this type of campaign?

The story

- How would you explain what happened in the video?
- What is Billie trying to say with this video / What is the main message of the campaign?
- What do you think are the characters of the story that Billie is telling?
 - Is there any bad or good character? Or any other characters you think are important for the story?
 - Which character do you identify with?
- Would you say the story is a tragic or hopeful story? Which type of story?
- If you have to pick two emotions this campaign made you feel, which would it be?

Gillette

Introductory

- Do you know the brand Gillette?
- Have you heard about their campaign The Best A Man Can Be?

Emotions

- Is there something you do not like about it?
- Is there something you do like about it?
- Does the ad change how you feel about Gillette?
- How do you think others might feel about watching this?
 - Do you think it lands as Gillette wants it to land in the mind of other consumers?
- Who do you think this type of campaign appeals to the most?
- Which reactions do you think the brand is trying to provoke?
 - Is it working? Why/why not
- Can you see why people might get upset with Gillette for making this type of campaign?

The story

- How would you explain what happened in the video?
- What do you think Gillette is trying to say with this video?
- What do you think are the characters (person or thing) of the story that Gillette is telling?
 - Is there any bad or good character? Or any other characters you think are important for the story?
 - Which character do you identify with?
- Would you say the story is a tragic or hopeful story, comedy, hero story? Which type of story?
- What is the main message of the campaign?
- If you have to pick two emotions this campaign made you feel, which would it be?

10.2 Appendix 2: Narrative analysis questions

Departing from Tracey's (2020, p. 250) inspiration for narrative analysis, the following questions were considered when analyzing the campaigns.

1. Who are the characters? How are they arranged? Who are the winners? Who are the losers?
2. What is the setting or context of the action? How did the setting/context encourage the topic and type of story, and discourage others? How does the story reveal the conditions of its production?
3. Why do the events unfold in this progression? How could the story have unfolded differently?
4. What are the gaps, narrative silences, and inconsistencies in the story? What is unmentioned or unmentionable?
5. Who/what is narrating, who/what is not, who/what constitutes the audience, and how does the storytelling affect and position relationships among these people, groups or things?
6. What are the intended motivations and purposes of the narratives? How do these intersect with worldview, culture, power, and relationships?
7. What are the consequences (intended and unintended) of the narratives? How do the stories affect social orders, creation of identities, or therapeutic effects?
8. What stories are (re)told until they become taken for granted?

10.4 Appendix 3: Consent Form

Project Title: Master thesis in Strategic Communication Spring 2023

Researchers: Anna Elísabet Sölvadóttir and Alice Svärdhagen

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to explore the emotional side of strategic communication by using and investigating the example of brand activism.

Participant Consent: By signing below, you agree to participate in the focus group discussions for the above-stated research project. You understand that your participation is voluntary and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential, and your name will not be used in any published research reports. Instead, a code name will be assigned to each participant to ensure anonymity. However, you acknowledge that your name will be recorded on this document for the purposes of tracking consent.

Collecting empirical material: The focus group discussions will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The empirical material collected during the study will be used solely for research purposes and will be kept confidential. The empirical material will be stored in a secure location and will be destroyed after 2023-05-20.

Publication: The results of this study will be used in a thesis. By signing below, you agree to have your name included in the list of focus group participants in the final research publication. If, at any point before the publication, you wish to opt-out of having your name included, you may do so by contacting the researcher.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact (our emails).

I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate in the focus group discussions for the above-stated research project.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

10.5 Appendix 4: Participants

Name	Age	Occupation
Amanda	28	Student
Charles	27	Student
Eddy	20	Student
Ella	24	Student
Ethan	21	Student
Hanna	23	Student
Harry	25	Student
John	24	Student
Josy	24	Student
Juliet	23	Student
Kaitlyn	26	Student
Lovisa	24	Student
Madison	21	Student
Patrick	22	Student
Stacy	27	Student
Will	23	Student