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TOWARDS A NEW DEFINITION OF CORPORATE ACTIVSM

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i. Abstract

Denne afhandling komplimenterer den begrænsede litteratur, der eksisterer på fænomenet *corporate activism*. Vi undersøger fænomenet ved at basere vores undersøgelse på den empiriske virkelighed, som den øvrige litteratur på området endnu ikke forholder sig til. Formålet med den nærværende afhandling, er at komplimentere den eksisterende litteratur ved at foreslå en mere præcis og empirisk funderet forståelse af, hvad *corporate activism* er. Dette gøres ved at besvare tre underspørgsmål hvori vi først ønsker at klarlægge eksisterende videnskabelige konceptualiseringer, dernæst vil vi identificere forskelle i typer af politiseret kommunikation på sociale medier, og slutteligt vil vi konkretisere den nuværende forståelse af fænomenet ved at adskille corporate activism fra politiseret kommunikation. Vi anvender *grounded theory* metode, til at analysere vores empiriske data, for at kunne fundere vores bidrag til feltet i en empirisk virkelighed. Som foreskrevet af *grounded theory,* har vi foretaget to komparative analyser, først har vi sammenholdt og dermed kategoriseret vores empiriske data, og dernæst har vi sammenholdt disse kategoriseringer af data med den eksisterende teori. Vi finder frem til, at de eksisterende videnskabelige konceptualiseringer, lægger op til en bred fortolkning af *corporate activism.* Endvidere, afslører en sammenholdning af den empiriske data og eksisterende teori, nuancer i den politiserede kommunikation som den nuværende litteratur på *corporate activism* overser. På baggrund af vores komparative analyse kan vi konkretisere forståelsen af *corporate activism*, og foreslå en ny empirisk funderet definition, som er på én gang utvetydig såvel som den inddrager eksisterende konceptualiseringer fra litteraturen. Vi samler vores bidrag i et konceptuelt skema, som er anvendeligt for andre forskere på området, der ønsker at bygge videre på forståelsen af *corporate activism*. Slutteligt, diskuterer denne afhandling *corporate activism* som en ny form for uformel politisk deltagelse.

ii. Keywords

Corporate Activism, Activism, Politicized Communication, Political Corporations, B Corporations, Social Media,

Corporate Social Responsibility, Political Participation

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1. Introduction

Corporations today, increasingly take a stance on political issues of common concern for society, and act as politicized entities through the participation in the political debate (Morsing & Vestergaard, Forthcoming; Böhm, Skoglund & Eatherley, 2018; Baur & Wettstein, 2016). Particularly in the US, corporations are seen to evolve from favouring a neutral position when it comes to social and environmental issues and concerns raised by society, to now increasingly take a public stance on such issues in mass- and social media (Morsing & Vestergaard, Forthcoming; Livonen, 2018). A company highly engaged in advocating for progress on societal issues is Ben & Jerry's who is publicly committed to campaigning for causes such as racial justice (Deighton, 2020). Similarly, shoe producer, TOMS, is publicly participating in the contagious gun debate in the US, advocating for legislation securing background checks at all gun sales (Gintzler, 2019). This phenomenon has been termed *corporate activism,* and as it is a rather novel phenomenon, few scholars have sought to answer what is behind this rise of corporations expressing public political opinions on societal issues.

Some scholars have argued that the phenomenon can be explained as a reactive response to external pressures from consumers and civil societal actors, including NGOs and social movements (Mckean & King, 2019; Wilcox, 2019; Böhm et al., 2018; Aronczyk, 2016; Davis & White, 2015). The external pressures have been further substantiated as a result of the shifting priorities of investment companies. Earlier this year, Laurence D. Fink, the founder and chief executive officer of the world's largest asset management company, BlackRock, sent his renowned, influential, annual letter to corporate executives around the world. In it, he expressed that his firm, which manages investments of nearly $7 trillion, would "make investment decisions with environmental sustainability as a core goal" (Sorkin, 2020), prompting the largest and most profitable American companies, to react and present elaborate plans to combat climate change (Sorkin, 2020). The prospect is clear: become responsible or lose your investment.

However, corporate activism has further been argued to be a *proactive* measure and way of enacting internal corporate values that are increasingly aligned with societal values (Mckean & King; Baur & Wettstein,

2016). Corporations are thus increasingly taking part in redefining the role of business in society. One expression of this development is the non-profit organization called B Lab, who certifies businesses that proactively balance purpose and profit (Certified B Corporation, 2020). Certified B Corporations then actively takes part in a "global movement of people using business as a force for good" (B Lab, 2020). Thus, corporate activism may be seen as both reactive responses to external pressure or proactive measures reflecting internal corporate values (Mckean & King, 2019). Although the majority of the existing literature on corporate activism seek to answer what may have caused the rise in the emerging phenomenon of corporate activism, there is currently no agreement on how it can be *defined*.

1.1 Problem Area

In this thesis we propose to offer a nuanced, yet specific understanding of what corporate activism is, and how it may be detected in B Corporations' communication on social media. Due to the novelty of the phenomenon, corporate activism, it is our view that the field is rather ambiguous with multiple conceptualizations, which may potentially run the risk of overstating the phenomenon. It is furthermore our view, that no current research has yet attempted to articulate exactly how corporate activism may be termed by looking towards empirical data. Thus, based on current theorization *and* empirical data, we wish to make distinctions of what is currently considered corporate activism, and distinguish corporate activism from what we term politicized communication. In doing so, we ultimately aim at suggesting a new, unambiguous, definition of corporate activism, and develop a framework which maps out the specific elements pertaining to corporate activism and politicized communication, respectively. Thus, the present research seeks to reassess the definition of corporate activism, by answering the research question and sub-questions presented below. By answering these, our thesis will prove relevant for other researchers, who wish to further explore the phenomenon of corporate activism.

1.2 Research question

What is corporate activism?

- *How is corporate activism conceptualized in the literature of the emergent field?*
- *Which distinctions can be identified in the B-corporations' politicized communication?*
- *How can corporate activism be distinguished from politicized communication?*

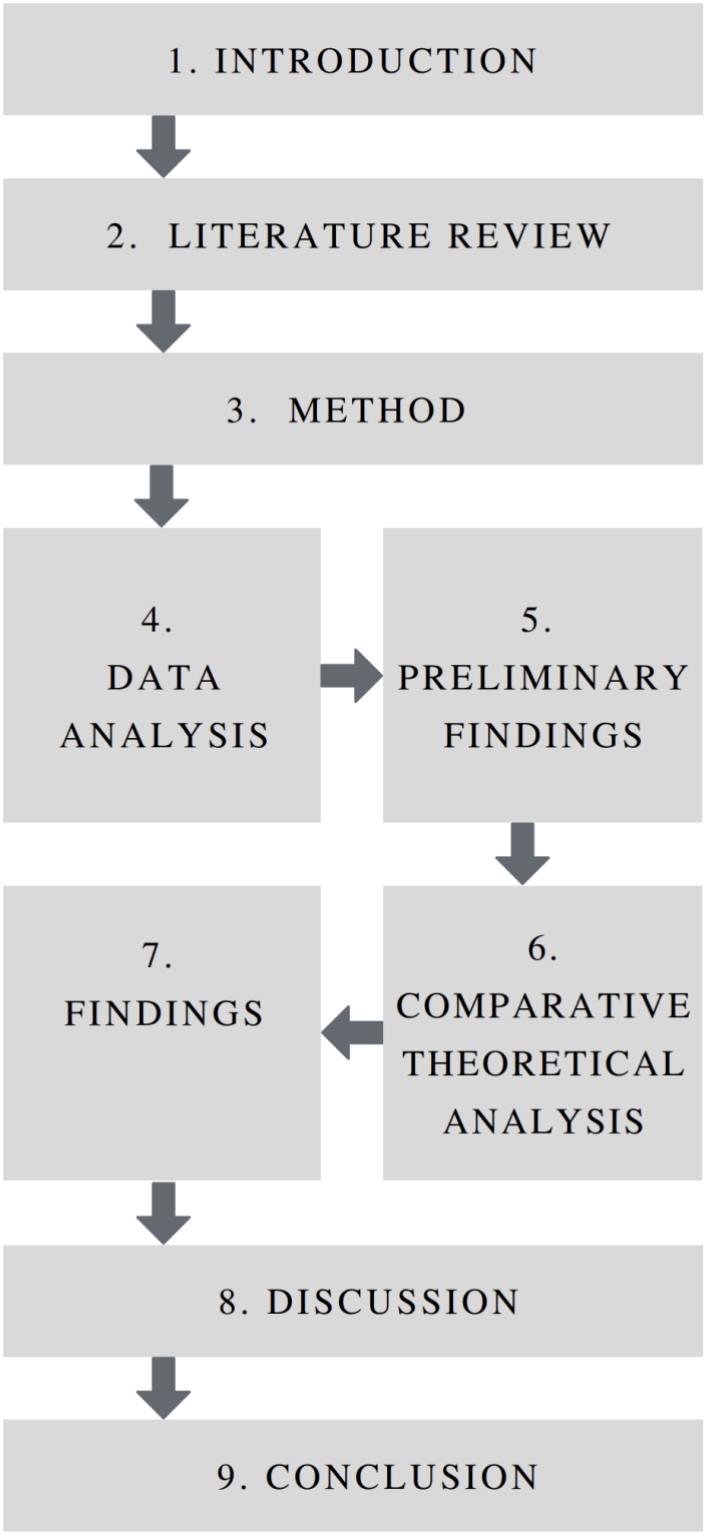
1.3 Explaining politicized communication

In our thesis we continuously refer to the term *politicized communication*, why we gather that a definition is essential. Hence, we suggest that politicized communication can be understood as communication that refers to issues with a social or environmental agenda, or issues that generally impact citizens in society.

1.4 Research motivation

The motivation of this research stems from our general interest in the field of corporate social responsibility. Especially, throughout the course of our specialization within *Corporate Responsibility, Governance and Communication* we have become particularly acquaint with the ever-changing responsibility of corporations towards society. Hence, it is not the first time that we investigate areas of the field. In our studies, we have previously investigated the development of corporate social responsibility (CSR) from differing perspectives pertaining to responsibility merely as a form of legitimacy or greenwashing. Additionally, we have investigated how corporate communication has come to explicitly include corporation's CSR efforts and commitments, rather than a formerly implicit form of CSR communication. Moreover, we have even investigated the blurring boundaries between actors in society, looking at CSR as a way of securing fundamental human rights. As such we have had a consistent interest and growing curiosity in the dynamic field of CSR. This interest, and the ever changing and encompassing nature of business' responsibility towards society, has led us to now explore one of the most recent developments within the field, namely the phenomenon of corporate activism.

1.5 Reading guide



2. Literature review

The intention with the forthcoming literature review and the purpose hereof, is twofold. Firstly, the presented literature has the purpose of enabling us to answer our first sub-question namely: *How is corporate activism conceptualized in the literature of the emergent field?* This is done, by initially placing the emergent phenomenon of corporate activism in a historical frame of earlier understandings of the field of CSR. Proceeding, the literature review will seek to cover the already established field of research on corporate activism. Since the phenomenon of corporate activism plays out in the intersection of several fields of research, the presented research on corporate activism will draw on elements and concepts from other overlapping literatures. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of corporate activism, the various concepts and ideas, which are drawn upon from the related fields, will be presented in separate proceeding sections. These fields of research, many of which are mature, concern: *The Political Corporation, Social Media and Activism.* Secondly, then, the literature review has the purpose of illustrating the lack of empirically grounded previous research on the topic of this thesis.

As prescribed by the grounded theory method, fundamental to the present thesis, the literature review has been conducted *after* conducting our preliminary analysis. However, it is presented in the *initial* pages, to provide a proper context of our field for the reader. As prescribed by the grounded theory method, the theories, concepts and ideas presented in the literature review, have been selected based on their relevance to our preliminary findings, with the purpose of allowing us to substantiate these in later sections (cf. 6). The methodological approach will be thoroughly explicated in later sections, under our method (cf. 3)

2.1 Historical developments of CSR

The present section is included in order to place corporate activism in a historical frame of earlier understandings of the field, as well as to describe the evolving role and responsibility of businesses in the context of globalization, from which the concept of corporate activism has emerged.

Social responsibilities of businesses have been discussed well before the term globalization manifested itself in the literature (e.g., Baumhart 1961; Bowen 1953; Donham 1927). In more recent literature, however, globalization is recognized as an explanatory factor for the changing role of business in society, with increasing responsibility and political influence (e.g. Rasche, Morsing & Moon, 2017). Scholars have argued that this leads to an erosion of national politics and presents a new form of governance, where the state withdraws from areas in which it has otherwise previously exercised a regulatory monopoly (Rasche et al., 2017; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Strange, 1996). Consequently, new actors and institutions has gained political influence, because their activities are not limited to one particular territory (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008). Thus, scholars have articulated that globalization is enabling corporations to expand their operations and become transnational, while the regulatory power of nation states remains bound to its national territory (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008; Avi-Yonah, 2003) creating a 'regulatory vacuum' (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008 p. 13). This mechanism has made corporations expand and relocate their operations to parts of the world in which democratic political systems, and concerns for citizen rights, are more or less non-existent (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008). In these instance, scholars have argued that for the citizens living in these areas, corporations may in fact prove to be more responsive to administer their values and interests than their governments (Rasche et al., 2017; Scherer & Palazzo, 2008).

It is recognized in the literature that because of globalization, members of civil society are increasingly able to influence legislative processes (Scherer and Palazzo, 2008). As a result, scholars have found that the societal expectations are changing and corporations are faced with increased suspicious scrutiny, changing conditions of legitimacy and growing demands (Scherer and Palazzo, 2008). In the literature, NGO's are recognized as advocates or watchdogs of universal values and general public interests, who take the role of scrutinizing corporations, and demanding that corporations become engaged in solving social and environmental issues, ideally through collaborations (Baur & Palazzo, 2011). The literature describes CSR as a means for companies to address certain issues and to engage in a degree of *self-regulation* (Scherer, Palazzo, & Baumann 2006). Businesses, then, are seen as a potential *solution* to global regulation

challenges (Margolis and Walsh, 2003). Historically, however, CSR has primarily been conceptualized from an instrumental, neoclassical perspective, and has been reduced to the economic argument that social performance positively affects *financial performance*, and hence, satisfies shareholder interests (Rasche et al., 2017; Friedman, 1970). However, Scherer and Palazzo (2008), argue that such instrumental perspective, is accepted only thus far that corporations are operating within clearly determined state regulations. Hence, due to globalization, the lack of global regulations, and the increasingly political approach to CSR that corporations are seen to pursue (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Garriga & Melé, 2004), more recent literature suggest a *political* understanding of CSR in which corporations are viewed as *citizens* and are expected to use their growing power responsibly (Matten & Crane, 2005). Other scholars, treat CSR as a an integral concept that includes doing good even *beyond* interests of the firm, and may even be driven by ethical responsibilities towards society (Garriga & Melé, 2004; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Carroll, 1979). Examples include normative management (Freeman, 1984) or sustainable development defined as businesses "integration of social, environmental, and economic considerations to make balanced judgments for the long term'' (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2000, in: Garriga & Melé, 2004, p. 61).

2.1.1 New forms of political participation

The literature on the historical developments of CSR, is thus deeply intertwined with the emergence of globalization, enabling and to some extent demanding, that corporations take political responsibility towards society (cf. 2.1). In the literature, globalization is further recognized to create a new public sphere (e.g. Castells, 2008). The concept of the public sphere was first introduced and defined by Habermas as "a network for communicating information and points of view" (Habermas, 1996, p. 360). Yet, with globalization, 'the network' has become global and online, and thus, scholars argue that the *global* civil society is able to express concerns, interests and values of the *global* society online (Castells, 2008). This is suggested to have improved civil society's ability to express opinions and seek to influence decision makers in global society (Castells,

2008). Hence, globalization may thereby have enabled a more informal way of political participation, in what scholars term lifestyle politics (Loader & Mercea, 2011; Dahlgren, 2005; Bennett 2003a).

In the literature, political consumption is also considered a growing and alternative form of political engagement and participation (Stolle, Hooghe, & Micheletti, 2005). Political consumption is defined by Micheletti, Follesdal and Stolle (2003) as "consumer choice of producers and products based on political or ethical considerations, or both" (in: Stolle, Hooghe, & Micheletti, 2005, p. 246). Similarly, Jacobsen and Dulsrud (2007) argue that political consumptions entails consuming politically, by using purchasing power to either buycott or boycott products, with the purpose of changing institutional or market practices. Thus, consumption has been argued to have been politicized. Jacobsen and Dulsrud (2007) even ascribe these individual acts of political participation, with the possibility of transcending into political movements, which may ultimately challenge economic and political power. Opposing this claimed ability of political consumerism to bring about social and political change, is Stolle et al., (2005) who's research indicate limitations in the ability of political consumerism to install change on these types of issues. Although the authors still contend that political consumerism is a form of political participation, they suggest that the effectiveness of such political participation should place it as an addition to traditional political participation, and not as a replacement (Stole et al., 2005).

These two parallel, historical developments, of alternative ways of political participation, are considered crucial predecessors to a more recent form of political participation, namely corporate activism.

2.2 Corporate Activism

Corporations today, increasingly take a stance on political issues of common concern for society, and act as politicized entities through the participation in the political debate (Morsing & Vestergaard, Forthcoming; Böhm et al., 2018; Baur & Wettstein, 2016). Businesses, particularly in America, have gone from favouring a neutral position when it comes to social and environmental issues and concerns raised by society, to now increasingly taking a public stance on such issues in mass- and social media (Morsing & Vestergaard,

Forthcoming; Livonen, 2018;). The emergence of this empirical phenomenon in recent years, has begun to catch scholarly attention. Being a relatively new and emergent field of research, few studies exist. Scholars have termed the phenomenon *Corporate Activism* (Böhm et al., 2018), *Corporate Political Activism* (Morsing & Vestergaard, Forthcoming), and *Corporate Political Advocacy* (Baur & Wettstein, 2016). The present study will treat these terms as one concept, and refer to it collectively as *corporate activism*. As an emerging phenomenon, research within the field remains limited, and much of the existing literature focuses on the type of corporate activism called CEO activism (Voegtlin, Crane, & Noval, 2019; Hambrick & Wowak, 2019; Livonen, 2018). Other research perspectives on corporate activism has looked at consumer perception of corporate activism (Corcoran, Devasagayam & Newman, 2016), corporate activism as a force to influence the regulatory agenda (Corvellec & Stål, 2019), corporate activism enabled by social media (Wilcox, 2019), tactics employed by corporate activists (Aronczyk, 2016), and employees as change agents/corporate activists (Davis & White, 2015).

2.2.1 Conceptualization

Scholars have discussed the concept of corporate activism in connection to the umbrella term of CSR and to Corporate Political Activity (CPA) as it shares different traits with both practices. Corporate activism and CPA, including lobbying, share the same ultimate purpose in the sense that both practices seek to influence politics (Livonen, 2018). CPA is typically concerned with influencing politics, with the goal of creating an advantage for business practices, irrespective of public interest and sometimes even contrariwise (Livonen, 2018; Baur & Wettstein, 2016). Hence, the driver for CPA practices is often the economic self-interest of the firm (Baur & Wettstein, 2016). By contrast, corporate activism has been found to most commonly seek to influence politics, which does not relate to the core business practice of the firm (Livonen, 2018). Additionally, another important characteristic separating the concepts, is that while CPA practices (e.g. lobbying) usually are hidden from the public, corporate activism occurs publicly and often through mass- and social media (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Likewise, although CSR has come to encompass many different practices, it most

often has an internal focus, looking at how businesses can contribute positively to society through its operations (Livonen, 2018; Baur & Wettstein, 2016). Thus, whereas CPA and CSR are often understood as driven by external forces (legislative environment, stakeholders and society at large), but with an internal focus e.g. a firm's CSR activities, corporate activism has an external focus (Livonen, 2018). Another factor, separating CSR and corporate activism, is the issues in focus (Livonen, 2018). Whereas CSR activities often concern more widely socially accepted behaviours, corporate activism is conceptualized by Livonen (2018) as being mostly concerned with more contentious topics, which hold many different positions among different societal actors. This means that contrary to the legitimation seeking nature of CSR, companies practicing corporate activism "[...] may be willing even to override this legitimacy requirement and promote specific ideal causes without their prior legitimization in broad stakeholder deliberations" (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 205). Additionally, to distinguishing corporate activism from 'classical lobbying', Baur and Wettstein (2016) further distinguish corporate activism from practices of philanthropy and cause-related marketing. The authors contend that philanthropy lacks the 'voicing' component of corporate activism, whereas cause-related marketing differs from corporate activism in that the support of a cause is inherently linked to and depending on selling a product (Baur & Wettstein, 2016). They further argue that in order for something to be termed corporate activism, it must move beyond the economic interest of the firm (Baur & Wettstein, 2016).

Morsing and Vestergaard (Forthcoming) propose an understanding of corporate activism as "[...] a form of activism that aims at influencing some political, industrial, commercial or cultural agenda" (p. 2). In similar terms, Corvellec & Stål (2019) suggest that corporate activism becomes a means for corporations to "actively shape their institutional environment by influencing, for example, the nature of competition, existing legislation, or social standards" (p. 29). Another definition is proposed by Wettstein and Baur (2016) who suggest that corporate activism can be defined as "[...] voicing or showing explicit and public support for certain individuals, groups, or ideals and values with the aim of convincing and persuading others to do the same" (p. 200).

The authors further specify that it is a type of political involvement, which is disconnected from the core business, meaning that "[...] the company understands those values and ideals as worth promoting independently of what its business is and it would do so even if it was engaged in an entirely different sector" (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 200). In its conceptual purity, the authors suggest that the driver behind corporate activism is "[...] the vision and the core values that define the role that the company aspires to assume within the broader society." (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 203). This view is supported by Mckean and King (2019), who claim that corporate activism poses as an opportunity for corporations to publicly demonstrate their values.

Scholars claim that what additionally sets corporate activism apart from other types of political engagement, is that it occurs outside the formal political systems (Wettstein & Baur, 2016; Baur & Wettstein, 2016). Building on this observation, is Corvellec and Stål (2019) who further expand the concept by contesting that corporate activism "[...] is an activism that takes place in social arenas such as the media and gallerias instead of political parties and parliamentary institutions" (Corvellec & Stål, 2019, p. 29).

2.2.2 Towards a political corporation

The responsibilities of businesses, state and civil society were previously clearly defined, and each actor had a specific role to pursue within society (Van Marrewijk, 2003). Civil society was formerly the sole responsible of shaping society via collective action and participation, the state the only responsible for creating legislation, and businesses' primary responsibility was traditionally limited to creating wealth (Van Marrewijk, 2003). However, as complexities have grown, scholars have claimed the three entities have become mutually dependent (e.g. Van Marrewijk, 2003). This means that the lines between businesses and civil society actors are gradually blurring, as the corporate world has entered the political realm of society (Böhm et al., 2018; Van Marrewijk, 2003). Recently, with the emergence of corporate activism, businesses are taking on a role as change agents to the social and environmentally pressing issues of society (Corvellec & Stål, 2019; Wilcox, 2019). The political role of the corporation has, so far, been given much attention by

scholars. This is partly due to the territorial limitations of national law and weak enforcement mechanisms under the new conditions of globalization (Buhmann, 2016; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). Political CSR has been proposed as an "extended model of governance with business firms contributing to global regulation and providing public goods" (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011, p. 901), where the nation state is unable or ceases to do so (Scherer & Palazzo, 2016, 2011; Matten & Crane, 2005).

When taking a public political stance, corporations run the risk of disagreeing with *someone*. According to scholars, this *someone* will inevitably include some of the corporation's customers and other stakeholders (Korschun & Smith, 2018; Wettstein & Baur, 2016). In an increasingly politically polarized world, scholars have sought to explain, why these corporations are willing to run the risk of alienating customers and other stakeholders (Korschun & Smith, 2018). One possible reason is the rising demand from society and internal stakeholders for corporations to take a stance and promote positive change in society (Wilcox, 2019; Böhm et al., 2018; Davis & White, 2015). Scholars have suggested that inside the organization, corporate activism is driven by especially the younger generations in management positions, as well as value-driven CEOs who use their personal values to guide corporate political action (Böhm et al., 2018; Real Leaders, 2018). Additionally, the term Social Intrapreneurs has been introduced by Davis and White (2015), to describe employees who "(...) lead change within their own organizations by aligning their social or environmental cause with the company's core business objectives" (p. 4). Furthermore, during the last 25 years, there has been a rise in activism campaigns made by civil society actors, which target and question business practices of corporations (Aronczyk, 2016). Traditionally seen as the state's responsibility, societal actors have begun to turn to corporations with "naming and shaming" campaigns aimed at forcing businesses to adopt more responsible practices (Aronczyk, 2016). Moreover, a rising consumer consciousness and demand for socially responsible and value-driven companies, has also been suggested to drive the demand for corporate activism (Real Leaders, 2018; Aronczyk, 2016; Corcoran et al., 2016). In similar terms, Corcoran et al. (2016) contend that "Consumers not only want corporations to act responsibly but they also want them to be sincere in their efforts." (p. 53). Thus, besides the goal of influencing the political agenda and supporting social change,

corporations have been found to engage in corporate activism as a means to respond to the increasing expectations from society and their stakeholders (Corvellec & Stål, 2019; Aronczyk, 2016). However, Wettstein and Baur (2016) suggest "[...] the alienation of certain stakeholders based on the values of corporations is nothing new, but has always been a part of business." (p. 208). As such, Wettstein and Baur (2016) argue that mission statements have been a common guiding part of business practices for long, and that these statements are not value-neutral. Expressing a particular mission means endorsing a specific value set. Thereby the risk of alienating stakeholders by adopting and promoting specific values, have been argued by the scholars to not be anything completely new to corporations (Wettstein & Baur, 2016).

2.2.3 Corporate activism and mobilization

The literature on corporate activism further comments on how corporations actively adopt behaviours and characteristics of traditional activists when engaging in corporate activism. Some interesting perspectives are offered by Aronczyk (2016) who has looked into the tactics used by corporations who have adopted activism as a business practice. In her study, she proposes that corporations, social movements, and NGOs all use the same toolkit in their activism efforts, and that corporations "[...] employ classic protest tactics such as boycotts and public demonstrations as part of their quest for visibility and legitimacy." (Aronczyk, 2016, p. 3). However, Aronczyk (2016) suggests that, now that corporations use the same tactics as social movements and NGOs, the lines between these actors are increasingly blurring. Furthermore, she argues that corporate activism is dominated not by the quest for social change and political action, but rather a quest for visibility, legitimacy and ultimately self-promotion (Aronczyk, 2016). "Such a self-interested approach has the strong potential to create a culture of apathy and scepticism toward these organizations. More problematic still, it privileges mediation over action; it becomes more important to represent the action taken than to pursue the action itself" (Aronczyk, 2016, p. 15). The consequence hereof, Aronczyk (2016) proposes, is that the use of such tactics in the name of capitalism may deprive the authenticity and sincerity of these concepts, when used by societal actors.

2.2.4 CEO activism

Most research, within the field of corporate activism, has focused on the type of corporate activism termed *CEO activism* (Voegtlin et al., 2019; Hambrick & Wowak, 2019; Livonen, 2018; Böhm et al. 2018). CEO activism is defined by Hambrick and Wowak (2019) as "a business leader's personal and public expression of a stance on some matter of current social or political debate, with the primary aims of visibly weighing in on the issue and influencing opinions in the espoused direction." (in: Voegtlin et al., 2019, p. 2). Based on this definition, CEO activism is understood as a phenomenon that takes its offset in a CEO's personal values, but which is then counterbalanced against the expected support from the firm's stakeholders (Hambrick & Wowak, 2019). As two closely related concepts, CEO activism, like corporate activism, proposedly focuses on social issues, which are not related to the core business of the firm (Chatterji & Toffel, 2017).

In their research, Chatterji and Toffel (2017) has explored the extent to which the phenomenon of CEO activism influences and shapes customer attitudes and public opinion. What the authors found, was that CEO activism does in fact "[...] shape public opinion by framing the public discourse and suggest that they can do so as effectively as statements by politicians or unattributed remarks." (Chatterji & Toffel 2017, p. 4). This influence is also to a large extent enabled by the fact that mass media widely report such political CEO statements, and thus the reach and influence of these is increased (Livonen, 2018; Chatterji & Toffel, 2017).

Livonen (2018) expands the understanding of CEO activism as a new phenomenon by looking at which tactics and actions the CEOs use. Livonen (2018) conceptualizes these politically active CEOs as "[...] periodic social movement (SM) participants who use a wide variety of tactics, also disruptive ones, usually associated with traditional social movement actors." (p. 2). Thus, it is suggested that the CEOs practicing CEO activism, use a variety of activist tactics already used and tested by social movement actors, in order to reach the goal of installing positive change in society (Livonen, 2018). She further argues that when CEOs take on the role as change agents throughout the public political engagement, they usually enter an already established issue field inhabited by social movements (Livonen, 2018, p. 6).

2.3 The interdisciplinary nature of corporate activism

In the above section, we have introduced the existing literature on corporate activism, and in the following, we will highlight the other fields of research, which the literature on corporate activism has been shown to draw upon. In the literature, the political role of the corporation is regarded as a fundamental premise for corporate activism. Therefore, it is found relevant to highlight the key thoughts and concepts, from within the literature, of the political corporation, which proves relevant to our topic. The literature on corporate activism has stated that the phenomenon of corporate activism unfolds through communication on mass- and social media (that functions as a political arena). Given that the interest field of our research unfolds within the realm of social media, we find it relevant to highlight the concepts and ideas within this field, which can be seen in relation to the topic of our research. The literature on corporate activism further proposes that corporate activism may be conceptually understood as a form of activism, as well as it has been suggested that corporate activism, in practice, adopts the same toolkit as traditional activists. Therefore, we find it relevant to present concepts from within the field of activism. Corporate activism thus, contains elements from the fields of social media, political participation and activism. Therefore, relevant concepts and theories from within all of these fields will be presented in the subsequent sections.

2.4 The Political Corporation

Beyond the widespread understanding of CSR merely as a form of compliance with, or integration of, societal expectations, is the belief that corporations are increasingly pursuing a political approach to CSR (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Garriga & Melé, 2004). Similarly, the political nature of the corporation and way of engaging in corporate social responsibility, is a fundamental premise for corporate activism. Consequently, the mind-set of political CSR is found to be a fundamental and overarching frame for the concept of corporate activism, as these two concepts share the same logic. The following literature review, will draw together academic research on the topic of political CSR as well closely related concepts.

The political role of the corporation has been widely researched in recent years, and scholars suggest that the increasingly political role of the corporation, should be seen in the light of globalization, and the increasingly transnational character of corporations and the increase of power, which has followed (Scherer, Rasche, Palazzo, & Spicer, 2016; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; Scherer et al., 2006; Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten, Crane, & Chapple, 2003). Scherer & Palazzo (2007) suggest that corporations have obtained an increasingly powerful role in society, yet their power is not found to be based solely on the vast amount of resources they possess, or their ability to simply allocate these resources to the most profitable locations around the world. Rather, scholars have accredited the power of corporations to their increasing political impact (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; Scherer et al., 2006; Matten et al., 2003). According to Scherer and Palazzo (2008) “political solutions for societal challenges are no longer limited to the political system but have become embedded in decentralized processes that include non-state actors such as NGOs and corporations” (p. 20). As a result, researchers suggest to think of corporations as more than merely economic actors, and that rather, corporations should indeed also be regarded as political actors (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; Scherer, Palazzo, & Baumann, 2006; Matten et al., 2003).

As formerly noted, globalization has been argued by scholars to present a determining factor, in explaining the significant shifts in the relationship between society and business (e.g. Garriga & Melé, 2004). This view, is supported by Barber (2000) who contends: "We have managed to globalize markets in goods, labor, currencies and information, without globalizing the civic and democratic institutions that have historically comprised the free market's indispensable context" (p. 275). On the backbone of these new governance structures, the lack of global regulations, and the politicization of the corporation, scholars have proposed a paradigm shift in CSR towards political CSR (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008). In recent research, the phenomenon of political CSR (PCSR) is defined by Scherer, Rasche, Palazzo, & Spicer (2016), as “responsible business activities that turn corporations into providers of public goods in cases where public authorities are unable or unwilling to fulfil this role” (p. 4). According to Rasche et al. (2017), this definition emphasises that

when entering the political sphere, corporations become involved in the regulatory practices of social and environmental problems.

Political CSR, following Scherer et al., (2016) conceptual understanding, is primarily focused on the relationship between the state and the corporation. Although corporate activism has been found to seek to influence and contribute to the political agenda and the regulatory environment, it is a practice, which, contrary to political CSR, focuses on the relationship between the corporation and citizens. However, one approach to political CSR, which looks at this relationship, is the closely related theory of corporate citizenship (Rasche et al., 2017; Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Matten & Crane, 2005; Garriga & Melé, 2004). By introducing the theory of corporate citizenship, a closer understanding of the premises of the relationship between the corporation and the individual citizen is brought forward. Thus, the notion of political CSR and the notion of corporate citizenship, represents two different levels of political CSR.

2.4.1 Corporate citizenship

In recent times, the theory of corporate citizenship has been developed particularly by Matten et al., (2003) and Matten and Crane (2005). They reflect deeply on the notion of 'citizenship' arguing that barely any other scholars on the subject, consider citizenship beyond the idea that it implies membership in a political community, normally bound to national territory. The notion of corporate citizenship is conceptualized by the authors as a *political* understanding of CSR in which corporations are viewed as *citizens* and are expected to use their growing power responsibly (Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003). Within the liberal view of citizenship, the state is considered a pivotal actor, as it is the duty of the state to uphold and protect civil rights, protect social rights by providing the appropriate welfare, and finally constitute the main arenas, in which citizens can exercise their political rights (Scherer et al., 2006; Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003; Hettne, 2000). Yet, as already proposed, research has found that due to the process of globalization, and the accordingly increased power of corporations, the nation state is no longer the only guarantor of citizen's rights (e.g. Matten et al., 2003). Wood & Lodgson (2002) have added that although it principally

should be the role of the nation state to protect citizens' rights, in many countries globally, the state has been failing to fulfil this role. The authors further remark: "[...] economic forces of global capitalism have proven to be far stronger than the political muscle of any nation-state, and the right of the world's citizens have sometimes been trampled in the rush of opportunist behaviours" (p. 168). Matten and Crane (2005) propose that corporations engage with citizenship under particular circumstances in which traditional actors of the state fail to "be the "counterpart" of citizenship" (p. 171). The authors note that under such circumstances, corporations are then expected to 'take over', and it is in such instances that corporations enter the arena of citizenship and legitimize the term corporate citizenship. Matten and Crane (2005), further suggest that corporations, then, should be regarded "legal entities with rights and duties, in effect, 'citizens' of states within which they operate" (p. 169). Following this, researchers argued that some *corporations* have now begun to assume a state-like role (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003; Wood & Lodgson, 2002).

Matten and Crane (2005) define corporate citizenship as "[..] the role of the corporation in administering citizenship rights for individuals" (Matten & Crane, 2005, p. 173). Scholars have further adopted the categorization of corporate citizenship, proposed by Marshall (1965). He contends that the notion holds three elements of entitlement, i.e. civil rights, social rights and political rights (Scherer et al., 2006; Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003; Marshall, 1965). Social rights are understood by scholars as the right to education, healthcare and other forms of welfare (Scherer et al., 2006; Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003; Marshall, 1965). Civil rights refer to those rights that enable "[...] freedom from abuses and interference by third parties (most notably governments) [...]" (Matten & Crane, 2005, p. 170). Finally, political rights are understood by Scherer et al., (2006) as "[...] the right of the citizen to take part in the processes that determine public rules and issues of public concern." (p. 505).

As pointed out by Matten and Crane (2005), a corporation is not entitled to social or political rights, and thus, it is challenging to accept the notion of corporate *citizenship*. Yet, since the term is still considered relevant, it is due to the loosened definition of citizenship that argues "corporations enter the picture not

because they have an entitlement to certain rights [...], but, rather, as powerful public actors which have a responsibility to respect those "real" citizen's rights in society" (Matten et al., 2003, p. 115). Similarly, Wood & Lodgson (2002) claim that it is not only businesses' responsibility to respect these human rights, they also have a moral duty, to actively participate in creating, and furthering, the conditions under which human rights can be attained. The human rights perspective, which the notion of corporate citizenship brings about, is strongly related to that of corporate activism in that it involves businesses taking a broad responsibility for, and engagement in, securing universal rights for citizens. Furthermore, the theory of corporate citizenship highlights the relationship between the corporation and the citizen, which is a central aspect of corporate activism. Although the two concepts are related, there is no literature from within this field of research which grasps corporate activism as a whole.

2.5 Social Media as forums for political debate and mobilization

It has been suggested in the literature of corporate activism, that the phenomenon of corporate activism takes place outside formal political institutions, such as social media (Corvellec & Stål, 2019; Baur & Wettstein, 2016). Furthermore, since the mobilizing effect and ability of social media is considered a determining factor of activism, the concept of mobilization through social media proves relevant for the topic of corporate activism.

Scholars have demonstrated social media's ability to facilitate new arenas for political participation and political communication that reaches far beyond national territory (Enjolras, Johnsen & Wollebæk, 2012; Valenzuela, Kim, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2012; Dahlgren, 2005). These platforms have enabled individuals, corporations and civil society actors worldwide, to engage in political activities (Valenzuela et al., 2012). Scholars have looked at the effects of these digital networks in a context of political participation. Here, Dahlgren (2005) has argued that, from a traditional understanding of the role of the media in the formal political system, the internet has not had much influence on the political participation of citizens. However, looking at politics from a more informal perspective, scholars have found that the political participation on

these platforms, can be seen as a shift towards a more informal form of political participation (e.g. Dahlgren, 2005). Despite its informal character, researchers have regarded this a new form of political participation, as it consists of behaviours, seeking to influence government action and legislation (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012; Dahlgren, 2005). What has been found, is that the internet, and social media in particular, has fuelled a massive growth in the amount of engagement and participation in informal politics (Loader & Mercea, 2011; Bennett, 2003a; Dahlgren, 2005).

Research on the technical artefacts of social media has provided several relevant insights to help us understand the premises for this type of political communication and participation. In their research, Pfeffer, Zorbach and Carley (2014) argue that the communication on these platforms are often limited by character limits, and that the communicative responses and opinions are made into binary choices, as they are often based on i.e., 'like' or 'dislike'. This view is supported by Lupia and Sin (2003) who likewise highlight that these digital platforms make collective efforts into a product of binary choice i.e., 'retweet' or 'sign petition'. The tendency of participating in low-cost activities without any real action behind it, has also been termed "slacktivism" (Shriky, 2011). Scholars have further criticized the digital platforms for isolation and the lack of diversity. This view is presented by Pfeffer et al. (2014) who found that the factor of speed and algorithms of these platforms, may result in a temporal dominance of one topic. As a consequence, these platforms have been argued to fall short of promoting the civic ideal (e.g. Dahlgren, 2005).

2.5.1. Mobilization through social media

Scholars contend that social media has considerably lowered the cost of organization and information gathering and distribution, and thereby the cost of participating in political activities (Davis & White, 2015; Enjolras et al., 2012; Boyd, 2010; Lupia & Sin, 2003). Research has further suggested that social media networks supplement existing political participatory options, as these platforms have been found to attract groups of individuals, who have otherwise not been participating actively in the political debate (Whelan et al., 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2012; Enjolras et al., 2012; Correa & Jeong, 2011; Lupia & Sin, 2003). The technical

architecture of social media, combined with the reduction of cost associated with participating in politics, have been argued to make social media networks idle channels for mass mobilization (Enjolras et al., 2012). Research on the mobilizing effect of social media has found that new communication technologies, and especially the rise of social media, have been major factors, in the ability for activists to mobilize mass support for causes across borders, and install pressure for social change (Davis & White, 2015; Enjolras et al., 2012). In similar terms, social media has been found to be a powerful communication tool for activists, as it bridges the local and global, by enabling activists to spread a local cause across the networks, and create global effects (Enjolras et al., 2012). Social media has been found to enable not only online mobilization for a cause, but also the mobilization of offline demonstrations (Enjolras et al., 2012). Moreover, scholars have found that social media networks play an important role for corporations, when mobilizing support for a cause (Davis & White, 2015). Supporting this view is Bennett and Segerberg (2012), who, in their research, argue that organizations can obtain a broader public engagement for a cause when using social media and focusing on easily personable action themes. Furthermore, the authors suggest that we have witnessed a move from collective action to what the authors term connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Connective action networks, the authors suggest, are enabled by technology and digital media that works as an organizing agent for creating large scale fluid networks (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012).

2.6 Activism, social movements and the pursuit of institutional change

The literature on corporate activism, has suggested that corporate activism, including CEO activism, adopts some of the same tactics as social movements and activists (Livonen, 2018). Hence, the academic literature on activism is often intertwined with the fields of social movements theory and institutional change theory, and thus, literature from within these overlapping fields will be drawn upon in the following.

In the activism literature, it has been widely recognized that, as the responsibility of addressing social and environmental issues increasingly lies on corporations and other private institutions, rather than states, pressure from activist groups has also become all the more prevalent (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007;

Matten & Crane, 2005). Hence, as corporations' activities become matter of public debate, scholars argue that activist groups can stand at the forefront as legitimate, and often successful, claimants on behalf of society, in addressing issues of interest to the general public (Spar & La Mure, 2003; Knight & Greenberg, 2002). Scholars argue that activist groups may emerge from the need for organization and coordination (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007) and that, on a continuum of extremes, activist groups may be created either by people coming together into *loosely* organized networks, or, depending on their ability to mobilize, by people creating *formal* social movement organizations (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Simultaneously, it is recognized in the literature that the rise of the internet serves as an important enabler of global activism, in the sense that it further strengthens the ability of activists, to coordinate communication and action transnationally (Bennet, 2003b). Corning and Myers (2002), understand activist behaviour as "[...] an individual's developed, relatively stable, yet changeable orientation to engage in various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviors spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors." (p. 704).

The majority of literature within the field of activism further draws on social movement literature. For instance, Den Hond and De Bakker (2007) define activist groups as "stakeholder groups that represent a social movement or that claim to do so", and as such they directly link the fields of social movements and activism. Social movement activity is recognized in the literature, as becoming an ever-present and routinized form for expressing public concerns, and theories and definitions on social movements have been well-articulated (e.g. Goodwin & Jasper 2014; Goodwin & Jasper, 1999; Meyer & Tarrow 1998; McAdam & Snow 1997). Despite various definitions, there seems to be an agreement in the literature upon a set of dimensions that are incorporated in social movement definitions, i.e. collective or joint action; change-oriented goals or claims; some extra- or non-institutional collective action; some degree of organization; and some degree of temporal continuity (e.g. Snow, Soule & Kriesi, 2008). Snow et al. (2008) define social movements as: "collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is

institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part" (p. 11). The scholars further argue that "social movements are one of the principal social forms through which collectivities give voice to their grievances and concerns about the rights, welfare, and well-being of themselves and others" (Snow et al., 2004, p. 3). Additionally, they explain that social movements may engage in various sorts of collective action, such as public protesting, in order to express their concerns (Snow et al., 2004). The literature on social movements generally offers a tradition of research focusing on how the public expresses collective grievances (e.g. Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007; Della Porta & Diani, 1999). Klandermans (2004), argue that people join social movements due to one of three interdependent motives, namely, instrumentality, identity and ideology. The latter motive has further been recognized in the literature as what may set activist groups apart. Hence, Clemens (1993), argue that within a social movement there may be a number of activist groups, with differing arguments and tactics, implying that while they may have similar reasons *why* they operate (Rowley & Moldoveanu, 2003), *how* they operate can differ significantly (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007). This further implies that while a social movement may have a shared identity, it is suggested that activist groups are in fact defined and driven by their ideology, i.e. views and beliefs of what is problematic, and may thus choose different influence tactics in support of their claims (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007).

2.6.1 Seeking institutional change

As indicated in the literature on both activism and social movements, an orientation towards *change*, is a central dimension of activism, and tactics are chosen depending on the objective of change. In this regard, scholars have argued that the objective of activism, is often not to change individual corporate practices, but rather, the core motivation of activist groups, is that of field level change (Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003). Furthermore, the literature suggests that the ultimate objective is to achieve institutional change, in the form of either deinstitutionalization of current practices, i.e. the elaboration, decline or abandonment of an institution, or preferably, reinstitutionalization, i.e. one institution's replacement by another preferred

institution (Jepperson, 1991). Den Hond and De Bakker (2007) incorporate literature on institutional change (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996), to suggest possible routes through which institutional change may be achieved at the field level. One is to work at the field level, through activities such as lobbying towards state regulations, and another is to work at the organizational level by influencing and convincing individual members to change their practices, with the aim of changing individual firms and ultimately evoke field-level change.

In obtaining either form of institutional change, scholars within the literature of activist groups and ideology (Minkoff, 2001; Zald, 2000), suggest that activist groups may be distinguished as either *radical* or *reformative* in their approach (Haines, 1984). As stated by Zald and McCarthy (1980), activist groups that "offer a more comprehensive version of the problem and more drastic change as a solution… are normally called radical" (p. 11). Such groups perceive corporations as the problem. On the contrary, activist groups may be considered moderate or reformative. While still recognizing corporations as part of the problem, reformative groups, however, also consider corporations as part of the solution in driving corporate social change (Den Hond & De Bakker 2007).

2.6.2 Mobilization

Inherent in the literature on both activism and social movement theory, and central to the ability of achieving any form of change is the ability to mobilize support for a particular set of beliefs or a certain cause. This relates to what scholars refer to as the logic of numbers and the power of collectivists, in the sense that the actions of a large number of people showing mutual and collective support for a given cause (through for instance petitions or boycotts), are more likely to lead to change (Della Porta & Diani, 1999). Similarly, other scholars have argued that in order to induce any sort of change, and in order to mobilize support, it is a necessity to establish the sufficient awareness around a particular issue (Lawrence & Weber, 2008). Thus, the need to mobilize is linked to the need for activists to become more salient in order to be able to better impose pressure on an organization or institution (Lawrence & Weber, 2008).

While a lot of social movement theory considers mobilization a result of grievances and discontent (e.g. Snow et al., 2004; Della Porta & Diani, 1999), other literature on social movement mobilization, suggests that resource mobilization is an alternative interpretation of social movements (Jenkins, 1983). In this alternative view on mobilization, originally formulated by McCarthy and Zald (1977), the availability of resources, e.g. organizing facilities and relationship to the media, is considered a major determinant of mobilization. In modern literature, such organizing facilities may be understood as social media (cf. 2.5).

2.6.3 Tactics (for change and mobilization)

Regardless of which perspective, one applies to social movement mobilization, mobilizing support is considered an absolutely crucial and inherent element of achieving change. Therefore, we consider it is relevant to assess whether the frames that may be applied by social movements, are oriented towards problems or solutions.

In the literature, many frames for mobilization have been suggested (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988; Goffman, 1974). Goffman (1974) defines frames as 'schemata of interpretation' enabling individuals to make sense of occurrences within their life and in the world in general. This is supported by other scholars who contend that social movements use collective action frames to condense aspects of the 'world out there' (Benford & Snow, 2000). However, it is further suggested that action frames not only hold an interpretive function, but that collective action frames are also intended to mobilize potential supporters, and to demobilize antagonists (Snow & Benford, 1988). Benford and Snow (2000) suggest that social movements may use three core framing processes, i.e. "diagnostic framing", "prognostic framing," and "motivational framing" in inspiring and legitimizing social movement organizations. In this regard, Gamson (1992) contend that action frames are the potential outcome of negotiating shared meaning, so that they are not just representative of individual attitudes and perceptions.

In the literature, another suggestion of mobilizing frames is presented by Furnari (2017). Furnari (2017) argues that for any given actor (also referred to as issue proponents), to be able to change existing

field structures, actors attempt to mobilize support for the actor's view of the issues by "engaging in 'issue framing' – that is, by crafting issue frames that make some aspects of an issue more salient to other field actors in order to attract their support" (Furnari, 2017, p. 328). Building on the former two core framing tasks, diagnostic and prognostic framing by Benford and Snow (2000), Furnari (2017) defines two basic ideal-types of issue frames, adversarial and collaborative, that vary in relation to their diagnostic and prognostic components, which again, affects the support that a social movement may mobilize. Finally, Furnari (2017) argues that issue frames typically coexist in a field, all competing for mobilizing the same, scarce support from other field actors, why "many issue frames will not succeed in mobilizing support in the field" (p. 328), which is supported by Oliver and Marwell (1992), who suggest that this inherent challenge may even directly affect what causes, activists to choose to seek mobilization for and what tactics they pursue in doing so.

2.7 Sub-conclusion

In the literature review presented above, we have been able to answer our first sub-question, namely how corporate activism is conceptualized in the literature of the emergent field. The presented literature on corporate activism has distinguished the phenomenon from related concepts of CSR, CPA (lobbying), philanthropy and cause-related marketing. Furthermore, we have illustrated that the literature offers various suggestions on what may be termed corporate activism. Hence, drawing together the conceptualizations from the field, leaves a broad conception of what defines corporate activism. Furthermore, we have assessed interdisciplinary fields of research, to highlight related concepts and ideas to corporate activism. Finally, the presented literature from the field of corporate activism has illustrated that there is a need to further explore this emerging phenomenon and that there is a current lack of empirically grounded research on the topic of corporate activism.

3. Method

3.1 Scientific paradigm

A scientific paradigm contains a set of fundamental principles, which control a given field of research (Nygaard, 2012). Each paradigm consists of a unique set of ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs (Nygaard, 2012). The ontology of a paradigm describes how reality is looked upon, and which things are believed to exist. The epistemology of a paradigm sheds light on what knowledge is and what is considered to be obtainable knowledge (Nygaard, 2012). Finally, the methodology of a paradigm describes how to conduct research and which methods to use (Nygaard, 2012). The choice of paradigm therefore plays a determining role for the results of a research. The following sections, will present the scientific paradigm of this study, and comment on the implications of the choice of paradigm for our research.

We have chosen the social constructionism paradigm as our scientific standpoint for this study. This scientific paradigm is relevant for our study, given that our research field lies in the interconnected relationship between organizations, citizens and society at large (Nygaard, 2012). Adopting this scientific viewpoint implies that we, as researchers believe that the reality in which we exist, is socially constructed and does not exist without our construction hereof (Nygaard, 2012). It is believed that it is not possible to obtain knowledge about social reality, independently from the individual's subjectivity (Nygaard, 2012). Furthermore, within this paradigm, it is believed that all human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained through social interactions (Nygaard, 2012). Several types of social constructivism exist, and these can be subdivided into four main categories (Collin, 2003 in: Nygaard, 2012). The main differentiator between these four types of social constructivism, is whether the paradigm presumes that knowledge about reality is a social construction, or presumes that reality in itself is a construction (Nygaard, 2012).

We have chosen to adapt the epistemological perspective on social constructivism, which implies, that we acknowledge that a physical reality exists independently from our perception of it, but that our knowledge about the physical reality is socially constructed. Thereby, this thesis acknowledges that corporate

activism exists as a social phenomenon, which can be researched, and within which, theory and knowledge already exists. The ontology of this paradigm is relativistic, meaning that the object of scientific research is often directly created by the researcher him/herself (Nygaard, 2012). Moreover, the epistemology of this paradigm is subjective, meaning that reality is believed to be perceived differently by different people. Consequently, the knowledge produced about *corporate activism* in this thesis is believed to be a social construction, which does not represent an objective truth about the phenomenon, but which is created through social interaction among the researchers and the empirical material of the thesis. Thus, the findings of the present thesis will present only a subjective perspective on *corporate activism* (Nygaard, 2012). The methodology of this paradigm uses qualitative methods, to be able to expose nuances and details and thereby obtain an in-depth understanding of the examined phenomenon. Moreover, qualitative methods are used to uncover, how social constructions are created in qualitative data, such as linguistic data. Therefore, this study will make use of qualitative methods to interpret our data and gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of *corporate activism.* The qualitative methodological approach is particularly relevant to the present thesis as the purpose of the study is to understand how this phenomenon can be defined, and this type of knowledge cannot be quantified.

Adopting this paradigm, thus implies that we, as researchers, cannot produce objective knowledge, as our knowledge production will always be a product of our subjective understanding and social context (Nygaard, 2012). As social constructivists, we therefore, accept that the findings of this thesis do not present an absolute truth about the phenomenon of *corporate activism,* as we do not believe that this is possible to obtain. Nor are the findings of this thesis considered to be definitive, but must be seen as a subjective contribution to the understanding of *corporate activism*. The consequence for our thesis, of having adopted the social constructivism paradigm, is that the results found within this study must be continuously interpreted and tested in the given context. However, the empirical findings and interpretations of this thesis, combined with the presented existing theoretical work on the subject and related fields of research, present a new subjective perspective/interpretation of the phenomenon of *corporate activism*.

3.2 Methodology

Our study takes place within a field, which may yet be considered rather novel within academic research. Therefore, we seek to produce knowledge and contribute to the academic research of corporate activism, by exploring primary, qualitative data with the aim of providing a more nuanced understanding of what can be defined corporate activism. As such, we are conducting an explorative study, which is a social science method used to explore particular relations or certain phenomena, which are, at present, less known/theorized (Andersen, 2013). Hence, this method is used when the researchers' knowledge about the phenomenon is limited (Andersen, 2013). Thus, by exploring empirical data, we ultimately aim at suggesting a new definition of corporate activism, and develop a framework, which maps out the specific elements pertaining to corporate activism and politicized communication. Our findings, we hope, will prove relevant for future research and other researchers, who may further develop these. Adding to this, it can be the very goal of exploratory studies, to raise interesting questions that can be investigated further at a later point in time (Andersen, 2013).

We take a qualitative approach to our research question, and as such, we will base our research on more complex, empirical material such as language and words, which will demand a high level of interpretation (Schjødt, Nielbo & Mauritsen, 2020a). Taking a qualitative approach, further implies that we are inductive in our research, meaning that we construct our theory based on observations. This is opposed to interpreting observations based on a theory, which is the norm in the deductive approach (Schjødt, Nielbo & Mauritsen, 2020b).

3.3 Grounded theory

Our method for analysing and making sense of our qualitative data is grounded theory, which is inductive in its approach. The method was originated by sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, as they conducted a number of observational studies in hospitals in the United States in the 1960s. Primarily, they observed how and when nurses, doctors and patients became aware that a patient would die, and,

subsequently, how this information was handled by the patient. Then, “Glaser and Strauss gave their data explicit analytic treatment and produced theoretical analyses of the social organization and temporal order of dying” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). Whilst constructing their analysis, they concurrently developed systematic, methodological strategies for other social scientists to adopt when studying a vast variety of topics (Charmaz, 2006). Their strategies were then articulated in Glaser and Strauss’ book from 1967, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, in which they “advocated *developing* theories from research grounded in data rather than *deducing* testable hypotheses from existing theories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). Hence, the authors proposed, “systematic qualitative analysis had its own logic and could generate theory” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). By doing so, they aimed at moving qualitative methods “into the realm of explanatory theoretical frameworks” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 6), and thus, move beyond merely descriptive studies.

In practice, the grounded theory method includes a number of defining components, listed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) (in: Charmaz, 2006, p. 5-6), which we will attend to as a guide for our research. However, it is worth noting that, according to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory methods should be seen as a set of general principles rather than actual prescriptions, why slight modifications of the components may occur. For one, grounded theory includes “simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis” (p. 5). Our process will not be fully simultaneous since we will conduct a preliminary collection of all data, prior to our analysis. However, we *do* allow for the possibility that we collect more data simultaneously with our analysis, as our analysis progresses. Furthermore, following Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) strategies, we will make sure to construct “analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses” (in: Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). We will make sure to advance our theory development “during each step of data collection and analysis” (p. 5), as well as we will make comparisons of our codes during each stage of our analysis, to identify apparent themes, and thus use a “constant comparative method” (p. 5). As such, we accept that grounded theory is a dynamic process, through which we will continuously obtain novel insights and optimize our understanding of the field we are investigating (Schjødt et al., 2020b). Further, we will perform a level of “Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships

between categories, and identify gaps" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 6). Furthermore, we will keep in mind that our sampling is aimed towards theory construction, and not at generalizability (p. 6). The final principle of the grounded theory method, is to conduct the literature review *after* the analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

By engaging in these practices, we will arguably be able to better control our research process as well as increase the analytical power of our workings (Charmaz, 2006). According to Charmaz (2006), such methodological approach and adherence thus legitimizes the usefulness of qualitative research beyond just functioning as a mere "precursor to more 'rigorous' quantitative methods" (p. 6).

The final component of grounded theory practice, listed above, prescribes letting the researcher concentrate on an analysis, rather than on the arguments about it. As such, it prescribes to conduct an analysis *irrespectively* of preconceptions (Charmaz, 2006). While we have conducted our literature review *after* the analysis, yet presented it at the beginning of this study, we might still not be considered pure grounded theorists as we do indeed have, and accept, a theoretical vantage point. In this regard, it is further worth citing Dey (1999, in: Charmaz, 2006) who argues: "There is a difference between an open mind and an empty head" (p. 48). Still, however, we must be careful not to force our preconceptions on to the data we code, and we must not turn to 'common sense theorizing' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 67). Thus, while it is inevitable that researchers, ourselves included, hold preconceptions that might *influence* findings, it may under no circumstance *determine* what we analyse and what we pay attention to, as well as it must not determine how we make sense of it (Charmaz, 2006). We will be able to safeguard ourselves from preconceptions by asking ourselves if we are able to adequately interpret a segment of data without referring to our preconceptions (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, we will follow the advice suggested by Charmaz (2006): "If extant concepts are not integral for understanding your data, they do not have a place in your codes or your later analysis. The best approach is for you to define what is happening in your data first" (p. 68). Furthermore, since we are able to justify the use of the grounded theory method, it is because the theory enables us to make sense of our data with the most open mind possible, even with our preconceptions. We consider this ability crucial in our study, since the phenomenon of corporate activism is articulated only little

in the literature, and thus, grounded theory enables us to discover elements in our data that we could have otherwise considered insignificant. Furthermore, by not being driven by preconceptions, we are better able to offer a fresh understanding of the studied phenomena, and thus, make an original contribution to the field (Charmaz, 2006, p. 156).

Finally, in correspondence to our adoption of social constructivism as scientific standpoint of this thesis, it is important to explicitly note that "any theoretical rendering offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 7).

3.3.1 Grounded theory coding

This study adapts grounded theory coding of already existing pieces of data as our research technique. According to Charmaz (2006), coding "shapes an analytic frame from which you build the analysis" (p. 45), and is "the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations" (p. 43). Hence, conducting a piece of research with the aim of developing a grounded theory, demands a meticulous process of qualitative coding. Essentially, coding refers to the process of "categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). While coding may traditionally be considered a tool applied in quantitative research, the logic of quantitative coding differs significantly from grounded theory coding. In a quantitative logic, codes or categories are *preconceived* before being applied to the data. On the contrary, in qualitative research we "*create* our codes by defining what we see in the data" (p. 46). This essentially implies attaching labels to large segments of data and simultaneously depicting what each particular segment is about. Charmaz (2006) describes coding as the pivotal link between collecting and studying early data and then developing and synthesizing an emergent theory to explain these data. The author explains that through coding, "you *define* what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (p. 46).

The process of grounded theory coding consists of two main phases. For one, it consists of an initial phase that involves "naming each word, line, or segment of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46), and secondly, it

involves a more focused and selective phase, in which the most significant initial codes are used to "sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data" (p. 46). During the initial phase of coding it is important to make the codes fit the data rather than forcing the data to fit the codes. As such, Charmaz (2006) prescribes to remain open and stay close to the data when coding. In this way, we can ensure that unexpected ideas are able to emerge during our coding, and let the data define our understanding. During the initial phase, Charmaz (2006) further suggests doing coding by keeping codes simple and precise, constructing short codes and constantly compare data. There are several tactics that one can apply during this phase. Codes can be conducted in units such as incident-by-incident, line-by-line or even word-by-word. The latter is argued to be particularly helpful when working with Internet data. Still, regardless of the size of the unit, it is important to constantly compare codes. As put by Charmaz (2006): "coding of one observation after another of people's actions in a public place may not spark fresh ideas. Instead, making comparisons between observations gives you clues to follow if not immediate ideas" (p. 53). This process will enable us to establish a strong analytic direction for the further coding process.

During the focused coding, our codes will become more selective and conceptual than the initial coding tactics. The focused coding will help to explain the large segments of data, by focusing only on the most significant and frequent earlier codes: "Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57-58). Deciding what makes more sense can only be achieved by comparing data to data, and through that, develop focused codes. As described earlier (cf. 3.3), grounded theory is a dynamic process of moving back and forth. Hence, it is during this phase that we may decide to return to our initial codes several times, to properly compare and sort the data into themes that depicts the data most comprehensively. This, ultimately, gives us a theoretical understanding of what we are studying and culminates in a grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

3.3.2 Memo--writing

Memo-writing makes up a substantial part of the process of coding qualitative data. It is through explicit memo-writing that we are able to obtain a strong analytical grasp of what our data reveals, as memo-writing enables us to explicitly depict comparisons and various ideas about the data, as they occur. (Charmaz, 2006). This is due to the inherent process in memo-writing of stopping and analysing ideas about the codes "in any-and every-way that occurs to you during the moment" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). As such, as articulated by Charmaz (2006), "Memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyse your data and codes early in the research process" (p. 72). The memos should be written based on focused codes, and should elaborate what these codes contain. When elaborating codes and memos, we might then also be able to find that they subsume a number of initial codes. Hence, memo-writing too, will encourage us to "go back and forth between data and [my] emerging analysis and to relate it to other categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 75). Memo-writing will, thus, serve as the analytic core of our study.

Memos should be produced spontaneously rather than mechanically. Therefore, we will write our memos in informal, unofficial language, intended for merely personal use since it is the goal of memos solely to serve to spur ideas for analytic purposes, early in the analytic process (Charmaz, 2006).

Finally, by conducting a solid level of memo-writing, it will, for one, be easier for ourselves to identify the meaning of each code at later stages, and secondly, and importantly, it will increase the ability of replicating our findings and allow an external audience to properly review our work (Schjødt, Nielbo & Mauritsen, 2020c).

3.3.3 Use of Theory in Grounded Theory

A crucial aspect of developing grounded theory, includes the fact that "the constant comparative method in grounded theory does not end with completion of your data analysis" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 165). This implies that the literature review can also serve as a valuable source for comparison and analysis. This means that following our comprehensive data analysis, we will "compare the entire analysis of our data, with the pre-

existing literature or the ruling ideas in a field" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 84). Thus, we will revisit our literature review to compare other scholars' evidence and ideas with our own preliminary findings and emerging grounded theory. In this way, we are able to substantiate our grounded theory, by showing "where and how their ideas illuminate [our] theoretical categories and how [our] theory extends, transcends, or challenges dominant ideas in [our] field (Charmaz, 2006, p. 165).

3.4 NVivo

With large qualitative data sets, it is not effective nor desirable to conduct qualitative analysis manually (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Therefore, we have chosen to use NVivo as our research instrument, which is a qualitative data analysis software. Using such a program makes it possible for us to take the data analysis much further than what would have been possible if doing it manually. This is due to the tools, which the software provides, such as tools to organize, store, thematise and code the data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). NVivo thus, is a software used to classify, sort and analyse unstructured qualitative data. As such, this enables a structured analysis of otherwise unstructured data, where the software allows us to categorize the data into themes, which further enables us to draw valuable insights from the data, as well as science based conclusions. It is important to note that NVivo, and other types of qualitative data analysis software, does not analyse the data for the researcher. These programs simply assist the researcher and provide tools that can help a more in depth analysis, but the main tool for conducting the analysis remains the researchers themselves (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). NVivo allows the researcher, not only to analyse any size of data, but also multiple sources of data namely observations, photos/videos, talks, documents and drawings (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Terms that are unique for NVivo, and relevant to be familiar with include: nodes, focused nodes and free nodes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Nodes are comparable to codes, as these are what the researcher use to link a particular meaning to a particular part of a text/image (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Thus, the initial process of coding the data is concerned with translating the data into meaningful pieces, which is then given a particular understanding and meaning. During the coding process,

the researcher will organize nodes in groups, as he/she finds several nodes that have been ascribed the same/similar meaning. A grouping of nodes is called focused nodes in NVivo, and these groupings are made on a continuous basis as the coding process progresses (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). The last type of node in NVivo is called a free node and this term covers nodes, which have not been added to a focused node, and therefore are "standalone" nodes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

3.4.1 NVvivo coding process

As it has been introduced in a previous section (cf. 3.3), our grounded theory method prescribes using constant comparison analysis as our qualitative analysis technique. To increase the rigor of our qualitative data analysis procedure, we have followed a step-by-step guide provided by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2011) on how to conduct constant comparison analysis in NVivo. As noted by the authors "It is important to choose the analytical techniques, considering which analysis will be helpful understanding the data at a deeper level." (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011, p. 73). The constant comparison analysis is useful as it allows us to constantly compare of our codes during each stage of our analysis, and this way continuously optimize and deepen our understanding of the field of corporate activism. As the process of constant comparison analysis is dynamic, and thus not conducted in a fixed sequence, the following steps introduced by Leech and Onwuegbuzi (2011) should not be understood as fixed, as we may repeat certain steps during the process of analysing the data. The authors present four steps in the constant comparison analysis technique in NVivo, namely, coding with an already existing node, coding a new node, creating focused nodes and organizing/thematising the focused nodes (Leech & Onwuegbuzi 2011, p. 72).

The initial coding phase was conducted with an inductive approach to the data, where we created 34 initial nodes (codes), each with a number of references (Appendix 1). We furthermore described the content of each node, in short sentences, to ensure that all codes where clearly defined and to make sure that our initial thought about the data, were noted for later use (Appendix 2). Hereafter we re-assessed our initial nodes, themes and thoughts about the data, and through a process of constantly comparing them to

one another we moved some references to other nodes, if they proved either similar or misplaced (Appendix 3). Simultaneously, we colour-coded the nodes according to the level of significance we ascribed the nodes, in relation to our research focus (Appendix 3a), blue being the least significant and red being the most significant. Throughout the reassessment, we also initiated a level of memo-writing, which further assisted us in identifying nodes that could potentially be analysed together at a later stage.

Hereafter, we looked through our data and merged the nodes, which had previously been identified as having a similar meaning attached to it, thus creating 16 themes/focused nodes (Appendix 4). Certain titles were altered at this stage. The short descriptions of each theme were then finalized (Appendix 5). The themes where then ascribed with a memo, made to assist ourselves in memorizing important characteristics and findings, and to further ensure that the themes were elaborated, easily understood, and differentiated from each other.

3.5 Research design

Since corporate activism has been detected by scholars to commonly occur on social media (cf. 2.2), the present thesis will base its empirical study on pieces of online communication, derived from social media profiles of five B Corp certified corporations within a set time frame. These corporations and the certification will be presented in the following sections (cf. 3.5, 3.7.1). The pieces of online communication, consist of small paragraphs, typically associated with a piece of imagery. Hence, we will base our study on one type of empirical data, which we thus, contend to be adequate for exploring the phenomenon and answering our research question, *what is corporate activism*. Due to the novelty of the phenomenon, and the dynamic and ever changing nature of internet data, we will deliberately limit the scope of our data collection (cf. 3.8, 3.7.3) using a number of specific selection criteria (cf. 3.7). This will enable a much deeper and thorough analysis and exploration of the nuances in corporate activism. In order to derive as many nuances and rich understandings of the phenomenon, we will use the comparative method inherent to grounded theory. The comparative analysis will be conducted in two subsequent parts. The first part of our comparative analysis,

will be conducted solely using our empirical data (cf. 3.3). The second part of our comparative analysis will be based on both theory and the preliminary findings from our data analysis (cf. 3.3.3). Our comparative theoretical analysis will substantiate the preliminary findings, by comparing these with pre-existing ideas and theories within the field in (cf. 6).

3.6 Presentation of B Corp certification

Our data will derive from B Corp certified corporations to create a clearly defined empirical frame for our data collection (cf. 3.7), and therefore we will introduce the B Corp certification in the following sections. The purpose hereof is to enable a deeper understanding of our data collection. The B Corp certification is a global certification that measures a corporation's combined social and environmental performance. The B Corp certification emphasizes the importance of creating value for all stakeholders of the company, as opposed to only shareholders, and these include e.g. the company's employees, the environment and local communities. Certified B Corp corporations legally commit to use their businesses to create positive change in society, and thereby claim to benefit the world as well as their bottom line (B Economy, 2020). Moreover, these certified corporations are claimed to meet the highest standards in regards to both sustainable performance and transparency (B Economy, 2020). As of today, there are 3,301 B Corp certified corporations worldwide (A Global Community of Leaders, 2020).

Behind the B Corp Certification is the non-profit organization, B Lab, who claims to seek to redefine the role of business in society and who "serves a global movement of people using business as a force for good." (About B Lab, 2020). Hence, B Lab, together with all its global partners, NGOs and corporations sees itself as part of a movement on a mission to redefine businesses' role in society by making business part of the solution to society's problems (About B Lab, 2020). The vision behind B Lab is to create "[...] an inclusive, equitable and regenerative economic system for all people and the planet." (About B Lab, 2020). B Lab's new proposed mantra for corporations is that businesses should not compete in the market to be the best in the world but instead they should compete to be the best *for* the world, by using their business as a force for

good (B Economy, 2020). B Lab works with corporations, policy makers and the capital markets around the world, to drive the adoption of new structures for businesses (B Economy, 2020). The organization and certification has been publicly endorsed by former U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright (About B Lab, 2020), who recognizes it as a legitimate way for corporations to help solve societal issues.

The certification process and business requirements differ according to the size, structure and location of the business (Certification, 2020). The B Corp Certification has three pillars; social and environmental performance, public transparency and legal accountability (Certification, 2020). To become a certified B Corporation, companies must first go through the online self-assessment tool, B Impact Assessment, provided by B Lab, which evaluates how the business interacts with customers, workers, the community and the environment (Certification, 2020). After completing the B Impact Assessment, B Lab will verify the score and determine if the company meets the 80-point bar for certification (Certification, 2020). During this process, companies need to be able to provide documentation to validate the answers given in the assessment (Certification, 2020). Finally, if corporations meet the 80-point bar for certification, they must also meet the legal requirements set by B Lab. If they successfully do so, the corporation is eligible to receive the B Corp Certification.

3.6.1 B Impact Assessment

The B Impact Assessment is organized into five underlying categories, referred to as Impact Areas. These impact areas constitute Governance, Workers, Community, Environment and Customers (B Impact Report, 2020a). To have significant impact within the area of *governance* in the certification*,* implies that the corporation builds its vision and values into its bylaws, and ensures transparency and accountability with regards to its mission. The area concerning *workers* reflects how a corporation carries out employee-focused efforts, such as granting employees with task ownership and focusing on hiring practices that are inclusive. Corporations with a high impact score on *community* focus on building a “shared, sustainable prosperity for all” (2019 Best For The World Lists, 2020) and “embrace social engagement, charitable giving, and strong,

diverse communities" (2019 Best For The World Lists, 2020). A high impact score within the area of *environment* is achieved by 'putting the environment first' in a corporation's everyday business activities. Finally, a high impact score within the area of *customers,* means that the business sets "the standard for serving their customers" (2019 Best For The World Lists, 2020).

Within each of the five areas, there are furthermore a number of recurring topics, including for instance transparency, civic engagement, and local involvement (see Appendix 6 for an exhaustive list), which all receive an individual assessment and score for each corporation. The topics differ in value, in the sense that they may reflect either *Impactful Operations* or *Impact Business Models.* These two perspectives are in fact the foundation of the B Impact Assessment. In short, the former (in light brown in Appendix 6) reflects the corporations' daily operations, while the latter (in dark brown in Appendix 6) refers to responsible activities that are part of corporations' business models, and thus, reflects the fundamental design of the corporation (Kallehauge, 2019). According to Steffen Kallehauge, Project Manager at B Corp Denmark, an Impact Business Model, enables the corporation to reach beyond what is ordinarily understood as good business, to create a more positive impact for the world (Kallehauge, 2019). Hence, the impact business models will also vary for each corporation.

3.7 Data collection

As stated by Kathy Charmaz (2006), "grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (p. 2). As such, it should be clear that grounded theorists initialize their research with data. Concerning the data collection of grounded theorists, Charmaz (2006) propose "we construct these data through [...] materials that we gather about the topic or setting" (p. 3).

As previously noted, we will, due to the novelty of the phenomenon, and the dynamic and ever changing nature of internet data, deliberately limit the scope of our data collection. To provide a clearly defined empirical frame for our data collection, we have chosen to apply five criteria for our data collection.

These will be presented and explained in the following sections. Possible limitations following our chosen criteria for collecting our data, will be elaborated further under *Limitations* (cf. 3.8).

The first criterion for selection of our data, is that we have chosen to exclusively use online communication posted by B Corp corporations on social media, as subjects for our analysis. These corporations are certified based on the same principles (cf. 3.6). It can be argued that B Corp certified corporations represent the most recent and most encompassing attitude in terms of businesses' responsibility towards society, as the certification is the only one of its kind, measuring both the social and environmental performance of a company (Certification, 2020).

Our second criterion for selecting our data collection, is a geographical limitation, and as a result, we have solely collected data from American B Corporations. This geographical delimitation is made since corporate activism as a phenomenon, so far, has been most widespread in the US (Livonen, 2018). In order to select the corporations, from which we have collected our data, we have assessed the entire list of 1,263 American B Corporations (B Corp Directory, 2020), to be able to filter those corporations that meet our criteria for selection.

A third delimitation criterion is to only collect data from B2C corporations, among the American B Corporations. This selection criterion is relevant as corporations, who are practicing corporate activism, and engaging in political communication, primarily seek to communicate to consumers (cf. 2.2).

The fourth criterion we have made to our collection of data, is that the chosen corporations must have a B Impact Assessment score above 90 points (cf. 3.6). Thus, we have raised the selection threshold with 10 points from the 80 points requirement made by B Lab (cf. 3.6). This, we have done, in part, to sort out the vast number of corporations, whose score only just surpasses the required 80, and in part, to minimize our pool of relevant B corporations. Thus, the corporations exceeding a B Impact Assessment score of 90 points, can be argued to be the fore troop of these corporations, who claim to meet the highest standards within corporate social responsibility (cf. 3.6).

The fifth criterion is that the corporations must be present on the three social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. We have chosen to solely collect data from these social media platforms, as they, at the time of writing, have the biggest reach i.e. largest amount of users, in the US (Verto Analytics, 2019).

The sixth and final selection criterion for our selection of collected data is the corporations' amount of followers on the above highlighted social media platforms. As we contend that the more followers the corporations have on their respective social media platform, the bigger the impact they may achieve, following their engagement in corporate activism. We, thus, consider the corporations' amount of followers, across social media platforms, an important final criterion when selecting our pool of B corporations. Moreover, with a large following, we contend that the particular corporation has a seemingly higher probability of achieving support for a cause, compared to corporations with a smaller amount of followers. Therefore, the chosen pieces of communication selected for our data collection, will derive from corporations that have no less than a combined following of 500 thousand, across the three platforms.

Thus, following a meticulous selection process with the above listed criteria, going through all the corporations listed on the American list of B Corporations, our data will be collected from the following five American B Corporations: *Patagonia*, *Ben & Jerry's*, *TOMS*, *Beautycounter*, and *Stonyfield*, which will serve as the foundation of our analysis.

3.7.1 Presentation of selected B Corporations

In the following, we will present the corporations that have been selected based on the above identified criteria. The five certified B Corporations have been argued to be corporations, which represent the most encompassing attitudes towards corporate social responsibility (CSR). However, as our research seeks to define *corporate activism*, the individual corporation's CSR practices and motivations for this engagement will not be treated exhaustively. Nor will we impose any particular relevance to which corporation is the sender of particular content in our later analysis, but merely use the corporations as references for our later

exemplifications. Therefore, the following sections will provide only a brief introduction to the five B Corporations and their B Impact Scores (see Table 1). This is done to provide a context for the collected data, but does not extend to the analysis of this data.

3.7.2 Insights into selected B Corporations including score clarification

Ben & Jerry's is a producer of premium ice cream made of high-quality ingredients, sourced from family farmers, neither of whom treat their cows with synthetic growth hormones (B Impact Report, 2020a). The manufacturing corporation has been a certified B Corp since September 2012, and is the corporation with the second highest overall B Impact Score of 110, among the selected corporations for our study. We refer to Table 1 for a breakdown of this score on each Impact Area. Ben & Jerry's scores are by far the highest within the Impact Area of Community, scoring 44.1 (B Impact Report, 2020a) (cf. 3.6.1). Ben & Jerry's high Community score is in line with the corporation's seemingly progressive Social Mission "that seeks to meet human needs and eliminate injustices in our local, national and international communities" (B Impact Report, 2020a). The score further reflects what appears to be a fundamental part of how the corporation does business, as the corporation claims that its community-conscious commitment is not simply an add-on, but rather embedded in the identity and Company Mission of Ben & Jerry's (Ben & Jerry's, 2020).

Patagonia is an outdoor apparel corporation, designing and producing clothing for outdoor sports, such as climbing, surfing, fishing and trail running. The corporation has been a certified B Corporation since December 2011, and has a total score of 151.1 in the B Impact Assessment, making Patagonia the corporation with the highest score among the chosen B corporations (B Impact Report, 2020b). Patagonia scores especially high in the Impact Areas, Community and Environment, where it scores 58.7 and 44.8 respectively (B Impact Report, 2020b). These scores are in line with its declared core corporate values being; to use business as a force to protect the nature, cause no unnecessary harm, and build the best products (B Impact Report, 2020b). All of these core values are rooted in the quest for protecting the environment and empowering/supporting local communities to take action to do the same. Patagonia has a site dedicated to

connecting value driven individuals with grass root groups supporting the causes important to each individual (Answer with Action, 2020).

TOMS is a producer of footwear, eyewear, apparel and even coffee. The corporation was founded in 2006 and has been a certified B Corporation since November 2018. TOMS has an Overall B Impact Score of 96.3, of which more than half come from the Community area, with an Impact Area Score of 49.3 (B Impact Report, 2020c). This score is in line with TOMS self-declared founding principle that all humans everywhere should "feel physically safe, mentally healthy, and have equal access to opportunity" (TOMS, 2020a). The corporation claims to have had an inherent social concern from its very beginning, which has been reflected throughout the corporation's mission: to create a better tomorrow for people everywhere (B Impact Report, 2020c). One business initiative that may be reflected in this score is 'TOMS Roasting Co.'. The initiative is based on a business model that helps provide clean water to people in need, through sustainable water systems: "By supporting the creation of sustainable water systems, we are able to help provide entire communities with access to safe water, which leads to improved health, increased economic productivity, job creation and access to education" (TOMS, 2020b).

Beautycounter is a producer of beauty products, and a self-declared driving force, behind an American movement, working for a cleaner and more transparent beauty industry in the US (B Impact Report, 2020d). The corporation has been a certified B Corporation since it launched in 2013, and has an overall score of 94.9 points in the B Impact Assessment (B Impact Report, 2020d). A considerable amount of the obtained points stems from the Impact Area, Environment, where the corporation has received 36 points (B Impact Report, 2020d). The corporation has a declared goal, to change the beauty industry in the US into becoming safer and cleaner, and claim that this goal, is central to its business model (B Impact Report, 2020d). In its quest for creating safer skin care that is free of harmful chemicals and toxins, Beautycounter has created a list called 'The never list' consisting of 1,800 ingredients, which it has banned in its products (The never list, 2020). Thus, this mission corresponds well with the high amount of points achieved in the impact areas of Environment.

Stonyfield is a producer of food and beverage, and is the leading yogurt maker in the US (B Impact Report, 2020e). The corporation was founded in 1983, and has been B Corp certified since December 2016. Stonyfield has an overall B Impact Score of 91.8, of which a considerable amount of 35.9 is derived from the Environment Area (B Impact Report, 2020e). The corporation has a declared mission to "show the whole world that a company could make healthy, delicious food without relying on toxic chemicals that harm the environment and public health" (B Impact Report, 2020e).

B Corporation	Overall B Impact Score	Governance	Workers	Community	Environment	Customers
Patagonia	151,5	17.3	24.9	**58.7**	44.8	5.8
Ben & Jerry's	110	16.7	27.0	**44.1**	22.2	x
TOMS	96,3	13.1	22.0	**49.3**	11.8	x
Beautycounter	94,9	15.3	20.5	23.1	**36.0**	x
Stonyfield	91,8	10.4	24.4	21.1	**35.9**	x

Table 1. An Overview of the Breakdown of Each Company's Overall B Impact Score

3.7.3 Data collection size and characteristics

Having identified the corporations that meet our data collection criteria, we collect each piece of communication, published, retweeted or reposted by the five American B corporations across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The communication is collected within a specific time frame from February 1st 2020 until, and including, February 29th 2020. In collecting each piece of communication, naturally, some pieces of communication prove more or less relevant for our research. However, each piece of communication is collected, to provide a precise overview of our data set.

A distinction is made between content that is created internally by a corporation, and content that is retweeted or reposted by a corporation. We refer to content which is retweeted or reposted by the corporations as retweets or reposts respectively. Retweeted or reposted content is characterised by having

an external/third-party author and/or publisher. By engaging in retweets and reposts, it can be assumed that the corporation agrees with or approves the content of the third-party, and therefore, the corporations are, like when posting content made by the corporations itself, considered to be the sender. Hence, we consider all collected content equally relevant, yet technically we have separated the two types to ensure that the original author of any piece of communication is accounted for.

Regardless of the nature of the content, some pieces of communication may be posted multiple times by the same company, across different social media platforms. As a result, some communication appears as a double count in our data collection. We accept double counts, as we believe they offer a detailed understanding of the communicated content. By this we mean that novel, internally produced content, may be seen as an expression of a deeper involvement, in the sense that it requires extra resources such as time and labour when being produced. Internally produced content that is then uploaded to multiple platforms, requires much less resources, yet offers a valuable insight into the total amount of exposure of the company.

Having accounted for the different characteristics of our data collection, we are left with a total content count of: 429. A general overview can be seen in Table 2, while a thorough breakdown of this number can be seen in Table 3 and

Platform/type of content	Internally produced content	Retweets/reposts
Facebook	124	2
Instagram	126	1
Twitter	149	27
Total	399	30

Table 2. General overview of amount of data

B Corporation	Overall B Impact score	Social media platform	Following	Internally produced Content	Retweets/ reposts
Patagonia	151,5	Instagram	4.4 M	21	0
		Facebook	1.7 M	20	0
		Twitter	456 K	24	5
Ben & Jerry's	110	Instagram	945 K	27	0
		Facebook	8.8 M	28	0
		Twitter	334 K	32	4
TOMS	96,3	Instagram	940 K	23	2
		Facebook	4.2 M	21	0
		Twitter	1.9 M	22	6
Beautycounter	94,9	Instagram	370 K	42	2
		Facebook	237 K	45	0
		Twitter	15 K	45	2
Stonyfield	91,8	Instagram	26 K	9	0
		Facebook	518 K	12	1
		Twitter	82 K	25	20

Table 3. Breakdown of data collection, company, social media platform, amount of posts/tweets and reposts/retweets.

3.8 Limitations

This study, contains a number of limitations, pertaining to our chosen method and the collection of our data. The following, will present, what we consider the most significant limitations of the present study.

As our method prescribes sorting our codes into themes, we recognize, and accept, that by creating these themes, we guide our analysis in a certain direction and thereby avoid another. As such, we risk excluding alternative directions for our analysis that could have also been derived from our original dataset. Even despite the dynamic process of constantly reassessing initial codes, our process of creating focused codes/themes, will nevertheless influence our understanding of how we reassess and further analyse our initial codes. Yet, we accept this potential blind-siding since it is an inevitable part of the focused coding process. In other words, both initial and focused coding should be accepted as a process of data fragmentation, as the data is translated into themes (Schjødt, et al., 2020c).

With regards to our data, this has been collected within a limited time frame expanding from February 1st 2020 until and including February 29th 2020. This implies a few limitations. For one, we recognize that our findings could have ultimately looked significantly different, had we expanded the time frame or chosen a different period. Therefore, we wish to remind the reader that we consider that our findings, offer only a portrayal of the *studied* world, and thus, not a fulfilling picture of the world exactly as it is. Moreover, we analyse only a limited amount of the potential empirical data pertaining to the study of corporate activism. However, we do consider our empirical data collection adequate for exploring the phenomenon and answering our research question, *what is corporate activism* (cf. 3.7)

A further limitation to our study, is made as we limit our data to solely derive from American B Corporations. Consequently, we are not able to readily extend our findings to other parts of the world. Therefore, we cannot, based on our findings, answer whether the phenomenon exists in other geographies of the world. Nor can we comment on possible geographical differences in the engagement in corporate activism. Furthermore, as we have limited our data to deprive from *five* corporations, our research cannot provide any indications on how widespread corporate activism is, in the US.

By basing our analysis strictly on qualitative data, we are aware of the potential limitations such study may inherit. For one, the generalisability of our findings may be lower, compared to a study in which we would adopt or include quantitative methods (Schjødt, Nielbo & Mauritsen, 2020d). Yet, by adopting a qualitative method, we are able to explore data and obtain knowledge within a field that, particularly given its novelty within the academic field, is difficult to quantify (Schjødt et al., 2020d). Furthermore, by properly analysing qualitative data, we are able to obtain a strong internal validity (Schjødt et al., 2020d), i.e. ensuring that the results of our study are reliable within the defined premises of the study (Schjødt, Nielbo & Mauritsen, 2020e). However, given the aforementioned limitations pertaining to our qualitative data, with regards to both the data size and the time frame, the external validity of our findings might by lower, and therefore we cannot generalise our findings to other contexts (Schjødt, Nielbo & Mauritsen, 2020f). We aim at a high external reliability of our study, by being as transparent as possible, throughout our research. Hence, we disclose a comprehensive oversight of our process and codes. This will further enable external cross-checking, as well as it will increase the credibility of our study.

4. Data analysis

In the following, we will address the second sub-question of our research question. Thus, we will analyse the social media communication of the selected B Corporations in the combined focused nodes and, in doing so, we wish to identify distinctions in the politicized communication. To identify distinctions in the politicized communication, we return to our grounded theory method, which prescribes that we categorize our data into themes to direct our readers through the data analysis (cf. 3.3, 3.4). These themes signal and explicate what characterizes the communication within the theme. The references coded within each theme, can be found in Appendix 7. To be as transparent as possible, we include a general Code Summary Report (Appendix 8) and File Summary Report (Appendix 9). Finally, we will disclose our entire data collection prior to coding in Appendix 10.

Throughout the coding of our data, we detected a rather large cluster of communication that involves three themes, namely *Brand Personality, Brand Content* and *Sales*. The communication within these three themes reflect general marketing and sales-driven content, and is thus considered to be non-politicized communication i.e. it does not draw attention to topics which has a direct or indirect political nature (cf. 1.3). It should be noted that the three themes cover the majority of our coded data. The fact that these themes cover the vast amount of the communication of the five case corporations, is worth noting. It has been argued that these corporations can be said to be among the corporations in the US with the most encompassing corporate social responsibility (cf. 3.7). Despite this, based on these three themes' extensive presence in our data, the majority of the corporations' communication on social media is brand related content, not related to corporate social responsibility or politics. Due to the purpose of the forthcoming analysis, these non-politicized themes will not be treated any further.

The politicized communication identified throughout the coding of our data, has been found to possess a political agenda. However, the way in which the politicized communication is reflected differs significantly. It may be reflected through the communication of corporate values, or through clear political statements, biases and opinions. Moreover, it may also hold the purpose of shedding light on a particular

political issue, or even encourage societal action on topics that lie beyond the scope of corporations' own business-interests. We remind the reader that we understand politicized communication as: communication that refers to issues with a social or environmental agenda, or issues that generally impact citizens in society. Thirteen themes of politicized communication have been identified and will be presented in the following.

4.1 Political Consumption

The theme, Political Consumption, was detected several times throughout the coding of our data, and covers communication linking buying behaviour and political issues/causes. Consequently, this theme is termed political consumption and contains communication that explicitly urges consumers to buy a product based on its social or environmental value of supporting a particular cause. Thus, in these instances, the corporation uses its products to enable consumers to support a cause through consumption. The communication within this theme arguably holds an element of taking action on an issue, due to the political nature of the product it promotes. The communication within this theme, thus, urges the individual consumer to act. Thereby, the effort to act on an issue is directed towards the individual, and not towards a collective effort. This is done by using the logic that the consumer can make a difference on its own, by buying a particular product. Furthermore, the politicized communication within this theme does, arguably, not seek not to urge *citizens* to act on political issues, but rather *consumers,* as it makes the act of political engagement inseparable from the economic act of buying, and thereby also inseparable from the economic interest of the firm.

What is particularly interesting about this theme is that the corporation explicitly *informs* consumers that they are able to shape and influence society through their consumption. This distinct, politicized communication was detected several times, e.g. when Stonyfield addresses its followers by proclaiming that they have agency to shape the world through consumption: "The world you shape with your dollars!" (Stonyfield Facebook, Reference 1). This is also seen when Beautycounter uses the term 'conscious capitalism' on its Instagram (Beautycounter Instagram, Reference 3). Like the previous statement, this term

is interpreted as referring to a buying behaviour, where consumers act political in their choices, evaluating products based on the product's political, ethical or moral value.

An explicit example of this kind of politicized communication, is the urge to buy a product as a means to do social good. This is found, when TOMS proclaims "For every $3 we make, we give $1 away. See how our new giving model enables us to invest in partners around the world who are working to create positive change." (TOMS Twitter, Reference 1). Another interesting example in this regard is TOMS stating "As the original One for One company, our community has given almost 100 million shoes to people in need" (TOMS Instagram - Missing post, Reference 1). Thus, interestingly, it has been found that the corporation does not only claim specific products to have bettering effects on society, but goes far beyond, to state that its whole business is moving society in a more positive direction.

This kind of communication has been detected to appear commonly with a degree of education, as in this statement found on Stonyfield's Twitter: "Reasons to like the @MichelobULTRA 6 for 6-Pack program: 1) helps address US organic grain shortage 2) technical support for farmers transitioning to organic 3) organic agriculture sequesters carbon and van benefit soil. #Groworganic @organictrade." (Stonyfield Twitter, Reference 1). Although the product being promoted in this quote is not from Stonyfield, the brand still advocates for it and urges its followers to buy it for the additional value of 'doing good' and support of organic farming. Simultaneously, the corporation arguably educates the consumer by addressing issues like grain shortage.

4.2 Corporate Value

The communication within this theme refers to the corporation's core values (cf. 3.7.2). It might be as a hashtag or appear subtly as part of a story, or it may be expressed through statements. It is significant that of themes containing politicized communication, Corporate Value, is the largest theme, with regards to the amount of coded data. We suggest that this may be an expression of an apparent relationship between the corporations' values and politics. It arguably further reflects that the increasingly political nature of

corporation's social media communication, which may be an expression of corporations becoming more political.

An example of an environmentally conscious statement is when Patagonia, a self-proclaimed environmental protector expresses: "Our public lands and wilderness are our nation's greatest treasures" (Patagonia Facebook, Reference 2). Here, the corporation articulates a value that is, at once, claimed to be central to the existence of the corporation itself (cf. 3.7.2), but also a value that is indirectly used to reflect a political concern. Another example of a value statement, is when Beautycounter expresses its core value of creating and advocating for clean beauty products by uttering that "Clean is our love language" (Beautycounter Twitter, Reference 8). Here, the corporation explicitly refers to the corporation's value of eliminating toxins in its beauty products (cf. 3.7.2). Expanding the value of 'clean', Beautycounter further encourages its followers to "Commit to clean" (Beautycounter Instagram, Reference 5). What is particularly interesting regarding this piece of communication, is that the message is inherently two-fold. On one side, the communication reflects content and messaging that is central to the corporation in expressing what the *corporation* values. However, on the other side, these values are simultaneously rather outward and focused towards *society* in its attempt to make more people commit to a clean agenda. As such, the core value is projected onto society, in a way that suggests that society, too, should adopt this value.

In general, it should be noted that given the very nature of the corporations in our study, being certified B Corporations, the corporate values that are being communicated, most often, also represent a reflection of some *societal* values, intended or realized. As such, it may be argued that the values of these corporations has an inherent political nature. An example, where politics become a more explicitly articulated part of a corporation's values, is when TOMS communicates: "At TOMS, we've always been in business to improve lives" (TOMS Facebook, Reference 1), as well as the company communicates: "[...] Because our vision of a better tomorrow, is one where humanity thrives" (TOMS Instagram, Reference 1-2). Similarly, Beautycounter posts: "This is the story the beauty industry doesn't want you to know. As the leader in clean beauty, it's not enough for us to only use safer ingredients - we also want to stop the child and forced

labor that's rampant in the communities that bring beauty products to life [...]" (Beautycounter Instagram, Reference 3). In these examples, it is rather clear how the communicated values first and foremost move beyond the actual businesses. Secondly, it is clear how the values can be regarded as societal values as well, as they reflect fundamental human rights and thus, tap into the political realm. In fact, we suggest that this kind of articulation of corporate values might even tap into the preceding theme of 'Moral Guardians', as it holds connotations of corporations judging what is right and what is wrong.

4.3 Moral Guardians

The communication within this theme, reflects communication in which a corporation explicitly states what is right, and what is wrong about a given topic or issue. As such, this node contains references where the corporation rises to a specific set of moral standards that may lie well beyond its direct business activities. Further, the moral standards, which the corporations communicate they must adhere to, may not even be industry-related, but may rather reflect general humanitarian or environmental concerns. This is the case when Patagonia describes a political subject simply as "[...] being the right thing to do" (Patagonia Facebook, Reference 1).

An industry-related example, is when Beautycounter tweets: "When we started visiting our mica sources worldwide, we realized the magnitude of the industry's unethical supply chain - which can include forced labor. We had to take action" (Beautycounter Twitter, Reference 1). Hereby, the corporation articulates that the only right thing to do, beyond legislations and industry standards, is to fight against the use of forced labour. As such, Beautycounter, in effect, becomes a moral guardian of the entire industry.

What is also interesting is that, within this node, we see an example of how corporations allow themselves to judge other corporations, that are seemingly acting immorally or politically incorrect. Such is the case with Ben & Jerry's which, in a retweet, supports the statement that Chase Bank "[...] has a dirty little secret. Actually, it's a dirty big secret. Chase is doing as much to ruin the planet as these guys" (Ben & Jerry's missing post twitter retweet, Reference 1-5). This statement links Chase Bank to the coal industry through

an accompanied visual material and thus, rather explicitly states that Chase is immoral and ruining the planet. This accusation is bold considering that Ben & Jerry's is a corporation itself, and thereby runs the risk of having other corporations scrutinizing Ben & Jerry's own more or less moral and ethical business practices. Although this statement was made as a retweet that originated from an NGO, Ben & Jerry's is considered the sender when retweeting this post, and thus, Ben & Jerry's is also the sender of the criticism (cf. 3.7.3). The communication within this theme is significant, in the way that it exemplifies, how corporations may actually expose themselves to criticism, by allowing themselves to be moral guardians on behalf of an industry and criticise the moral of *other* businesses. Moreover, they thereby express, not only what the corporation itself feels a moral obligation towards, but even judge what other businesses should feel *immoral* doing.

4.4 Product Transparency

Another theme, detected in our data, is Product Transparency. This theme contains communication in which the corporation explains production processes or ingredients that go into its products, with the intent of being transparent. Thus, this theme is arguably most concerned with the value of being transparent and informing consumers, although there is also an inherent degree of sales in several of the references within this theme. A clear example of this communicative practice, is the brand Beautycounter which has posted a video with the title "Beautycounter presents: Transparency: The Truth About Mica" (Beautycounter Instagram, Reference 2-3) on Instagram, about an ingredient used throughout the beauty industry and by the corporation. It is interesting to note that the corporation use the term 'transparency' explicitly, to underline that transparency is also a goal for the corporation in itself. Although the communication revolves around the corporations' products, this theme arguably holds an indirect politicized character, as it indirectly comments on political issues and draws attention to societal problems e.g. in the supply chain.

4.5 NGO Collaboration

The next theme of politicized communication is termed NGO Collaboration. This theme contains communication where NGOs inform about a collaboration with a corporation, or vice versa. The communication in this theme is primarily detected in tweets and posts from NGOs, which have been retweeted and reposted by the corporations. Therefore, this node almost solely consists of retweets. Content made by NGOs or third parties that is then retweeted or reposted by the corporation, arguably requires much less resources than original content, which may, on the contrary, be seen as an expression of a deeper involvement (cf. 3.7.3). Further, by retweeting content created and published by NGOs, or by mentioning NGOs in original content posted by the corporations, they may potentially be granted a degree of credibility and legitimacy.

This is seen in the following post from Patagonia, where three NGOs are mentioned: “Patagonia is a member of the @greataustralianbightalliance and through its Grants program has supported @wilderness_aus and @surfrideraus in their efforts to keep the Bight wild and free” (Patagonia Instagram, Reference 1). Arguably, the B Corporations may be perceived more genuine in its efforts in addressing either social or environmental challenges, when associating with NGOs. Hence, it is the argument that Stonyfield may be considered more genuine when reposting a ‘thank you’ directed *at* Stonyfield from an NGO, rather than if Stonyfield had posted a tweet about its own efforts: “Thanks to support from @Stonyfield, @earthworksturf, @ECoolCities & more, our Forum is working to eliminate synthetic #pesticides on sports fields, native areas, coastal regions and other landscapes in 2020” (Stonyfield Twitter Retweet, Reference 2).

4.6 Third Party Legitimacy

The references within this theme all refer to some third party, outside of the corporation. The references may for example be, but are not limited to, a retweet by a politician, a tag of an industry expert, or a quote from an NGO. As such, these references do not necessarily contain communication that mentions either of our B Corporations, or otherwise fosters legitimacy directly to the corporation through an endorsement by

the third party. Rather, it may be an expression of the corporations considering the *third party* to hold legitimacy, and this might therefore explain why some corporations choose to repost, to signal an agreement, potentially with the aim of achieving positive associations. Such may be the case, for instance when Ben & Jerry's retweet a post by climate organization "The Year's Project" (Ben & Jerry's missing post Twitter retweets, Reference 1), or when Patagonia retweets a message from democratic congresswoman "Rep. Diana DeGette" (Patagonia Twitter retweets, Reference 4).

It is worth noting, that the majority of the references coded under this theme, stems from retweets. Keeping in mind the lesser amount of resources required with reposts and retweets (cf. 3.7.3), this distribution is significant, as it is can be an expression of how simple it potentially is for corporations to either express a political opinion/agreement or gain some legitimacy, by associating with NGOs despite not working with them directly. An example of such is when Ben & Jerry's retweet a tweet by the organization CloseTheWorkHouse, with the accompanied text: "Hey "STL, it's time to #CloseTheWorkHouse [...]" (Ben & Jerry Twitter, Reference 1). Hereby, they support the organization, without collaborating with them directly.

4.7 Party Politics

The politicized communication within the Party Politics theme is characterized by the corporation showing explicit support for a political party or politician. This theme is small, containing a total of only six references from two corporations. Still, it is significant due to its very explicit political nature, where the corporations are not only supporting a political cause, but are in fact supporting a political party or even a politician. Ben & Jerry's is one of the corporations which discloses a clear political bias when publishing a tweet saying "Here's to many more years making good trouble. Happy birthday Congressman Lewis from your fans at Ben & Jerry's!" (Ben & Jerry's Twitter, Reference 1). By posting this kind of support, and even regarding itself as a fan of the congressman, Ben & Jerry's inevitably invites a lot of animosity from political opposers. The same can be said about Stonyfield when the corporation reposts a statement saying: "Thank you @amyklobuchar for the photo op! Your plan to attack climate change while simultaneously benefiting the working class and

those most affected by climate change is uplifting!" (Stonyfield Twitter retweet, Reference 1). Here, Stonyfield explicitly supports a democratic presidential candidate, similarly inviting opposing opinions.

4.8 Political Opinion

Throughout our coding process, we identified the theme Political Opinion. This theme occurs when a corporation expresses a political opinion that refers to what is good or bad politics, often supported by an argument for or against a political cause. Although the references in the theme are clearly opinionated, they are not explicitly biased favouring one political party, and the theme is thus distinct from the previously presented theme 'Party Politics'.

An example of a corporation, expressing a political opinion, is when Patagonia publishes the following on Facebook: "Now, more than ever, it is critical that the recreation community and concerned citizens demand protection for our public lands, and support bills reforming oil and gas leasing like the one proposed by Nevada Sen." (Patagonia Facebook, Reference 4). Through this statement, Patagonia advocates for a cause by expressing a concern and a need to act on the issue, and, thus, seeks to influence the political agenda. Another example of a political opinion, is the following tweet by Ben & Jerry's: "[...] The climate change crisis is urgent and requires bold action" (Ben & Jerry's Twitter, Reference 2). In this tweet, Ben & Jerry's expresses a clear political opinion that climate change should be put at the forefront of the political agenda, and thus, it is both an opinion, but also works to advocate for a cause. What is more, Ben & Jerry's refers to a tweet by news station NPR, arguably as a way of substantiating the corporation's opinion regarding the urgency of the climate crisis, as NPR reports that "January 2020 was the Earth's hottest recorded January on average" (Ben & Jerry's Twitter, Reference 2-3).

In several instances, these political opinions are followed by argumentation. In such cases, the corporations' communication on social media contains explicit political argumentation. The is seen in the following statement made by Patagonia: "Besides being the right thing to do, passing the biggest wilderness bill in over a decade, is also good politics: Two-thirds of voters in Western states - both Republican and

Democrats - believe that congress should prioritize preserving public lands" (Patagonia Instagram, Reference 1). This statement is significant in the sense that it transcends political biases from the part of the corporation, yet it explicitly draws upon the potential political biases, which may exist among Patagonia's followers. By doing so, Patagonia presents the argument that preserving public lands is so important that voters can agree on the issue, despite of their polarized political orientations. The reference further refers to the opinion of 'all Americans', arguably, as a way to strengthen the argument that agreeing with this political opinion, is good politics.

4.9 Issue Awareness

Another recurrent theme, detected in our data, is Issue Awareness. This theme occurs when a corporation brings awareness to its followers, by providing factual information about a political cause/issue, which is not part of an argument or otherwise encourages action. This is exemplified when Beautycounter informs its followers: "There are so many issues that are associated with mica. 73 million children work in hazardous conditions." (Beautycounter Facebook, Reference 2-3). Although highlighting one particular political cause is inherently subjective, due to the choice of one cause over the other, this statement is, however factual, as it does not contain argumentation or obvious bias, but presents an issue and its scope in numbers. This similarly occurs in Stonyfield's statement on Facebook: "There are over 700 chemicals used in conventional farming and manufacturing." (Stonyfield Facebook, Reference 1). What is also interesting to note, with these two examples, is that the issues brought forward, are both strongly related to the business core of each company e.g. Stonyfield's organic mission, and Beautycounter's quest for clean beauty (cf. 3.7.1). It can be argued that the close relation between these causes and the core businesses of the corporations, may project the impression that the motive driving the political involvement is based on economic interest.

However, this node also contains communication where the company provides information about an issue, which is completely detached from its business core, e.g. TOMS highlighting the issue of lacking background checks on gun sales "More than 90% of Americans support background checks on all gun sales."

(TOMS Facebook, Reference 1). Besides being informative, this utterance also states that the opinion to support background checks is accepted by the majority of society. Hence, despite the factual nature of this statement, it arguably also contains a degree of argumentation. Another factual, yet politicized, reference in this theme, comes from Ben & Jerry's who tweets: "We just came out of the hottest January in recorded history" (Ben & Jerry's Twitter, Reference 3). This reference is interesting, since it is seemingly insignificant for the business of Ben & Jerry's. Still, the corporation publishes the communication, arguably to bring awareness to citizens, in a subtle way, about the seeming fact that climate change is real and happening. The same is the case, when Patagonia tweets: "It's 65 degrees F and sunny in Antarctica" (Patagonia Twitter, Reference 1). These statements provide awareness and leave it up to the citizens to reflect upon the impacts on the environment. Also, Patagonia engages in issue awareness when it posts the following: "The highest concentration of oil drilling activity in the City of Los Angeles is happening in District 15" (Patagonia Instagram, Reference 2). This reference contains a degree of education, however, it is predominantly considered to provide awareness of an issue.

4.10 Educating civil society

Throughout our coding process, the theme termed Educating Civil Society appeared frequently. This theme occurs when a corporation, through its communication, educates civil society on topics of common interest to civil society. Here, the corporations are found to use their social media presence to educate citizens about societal issues. This way, the corporations take on a role as educators. The purpose hereof is, arguably, both to inform, but also to gather support for a particular cause, by educating about it. The content may consist of everything from information on the necessity to vote, local politics, or for instance industry standards that do not comply with basic human rights. Hence, another recurrent characteristic for the communication within this theme, is that it contains a distinct political character. The communication within this theme differs from the previous theme 'Issue Awareness', as the communication within this theme, seeks to invite

followers to educate themselves further about a specific cause, by providing additional informational sources.

One example hereof is Ben & Jerry's on Facebook, informing that "Local government decisions can have a huge impact on your day-to-day life. Take the quiz to test your knowledge about local politics!" (Ben & Jerry's Facebook, Reference 1). What is particularly interesting, is that these topics are completely unrelated to the corporations' business core. Despite the fact that these topics are seemingly detached from the business core, the corporations take on the responsibility, to use their reach and voice on social media, to spread knowledge about topics fundamental to civil society. Furthermore, this quote exemplifies how Ben & Jerry's seeks to educate its followers and invite them to learn more, by taking a quiz on the topic. The same mechanism is evident in this post from Ben & Jerry's: "Have lots of potholes on your streets? Believe it or not, the census has something to do with that. See all 10 facts here: [...]" (Ben & Jerry's Facebook, Reference 4).

Another example is when Patagonia, in a Facebook post, presents information about what environmental injustice means, and invites citizens to learn more about the topic, by providing a link to additional information: ""Environmental injustice is the process of making a community into a sacrifice zone for the toxic stuff that nobody else wants" [...]. Read the full interview here: [...]" (Patagonia Facebook, Reference 8). Like the previous examples, this quote has a clear educational character, as well as it invites Patagonia's followers to educate themselves further on the matter. This, is arguably posted to ultimately gather support for the cause of environmental injustice.

A final example, interesting to highlight, is Beautycounter, who wish to educate about the unethical treatment of workers in the supply chain of the beauty industry. Here the corporation urges followers to "Learn more [...]" (Beautycounter Facebook, Reference 6) about the topic, and provides a link leading to more information on the topic. Although this topic can be said to have a relation to the business core of the corporation, it essentially revolves around human rights, which speaks to a broader agenda beyond the corporation itself.

4.11 Pressure on Legislators

Within this theme, corporations put pressure on legislators by either publishing direct statements, encouraging people to put pressure on legislators, or by reposting activities by a group of activists to support the group, and thereby substantiate the public pressure. In other words, the content explicitly contains a degree of mobilization or otherwise encourage citizens to gather into an organized collective effort to push legislators. Of all themes, this theme is the fifth least referenced, which we suggest, indicates that the politicized communication found in this theme, is less common among the B Corporations in our study. Yet, this does not make the theme any less significant. An interesting example of this theme is presented when Ben & Jerry's posts a piece of communication on Instagram, saying: "Hey Miami! Local students need your help. Tell your legislator that it's time to increase funding for school mental health services. [...]" (Ben & Jerry´s Facebook, Reference 1-2). Through this post, Ben & Jerry's supports the students by explicitly encouraging the citizens of Miami, to also help the students. The subject of this post is arguably completely unrelated to Ben & Jerry's business, as it is matter of mental health services. Hence, the concern for Ben & Jerry's is not to promote business-related activities, but rather the politicized communication is intended to promote what should be in the best interest of society, particularly for the citizens of Miami. Furthermore, this example has a direct 'call to action' by encouraging citizens of Miami to 'tell legislators' to take action. Thus, we argue that Ben & Jerry's engage in mobilization activities.

Other significant examples of mobilization activities is when Beautycounter directly urges its followers to text legislators, and ask for change on the issue of forced child labour "[...] text MICA to 52886 to ask our government leaders to act." (Beautycounter Facebook, Reference 1). The same type of political encouragement is found when TOMS urges its followers to "Contact your Senators and tell them to pass background checks on all gun sales. Text CHECKS to 644-33 and join us in standing for a better tomorrow." (TOMS Facebook, Reference 1). These two examples are considered rather significant, as the corporations so explicitly get involved in political causes, and even directly encourages citizens to take part in producing change on the issues. What is more, by encouraging the corporations' followers to take action, we argue that

the corporations mobilize their followers. Furthermore, the topics and issues brought forward by the corporations arguably, have value for society in general, as they serve the presumed common interests, to end forced child labour in the beauty industry, and tighten the control of private gun sales in America, respectively.

Throughout our data coding, we coded *one* reference in which a corporation used its CEO to communicate politicized content, through the corporation's channels. The reference refers to Patagonia's CEO expressing: "Congress should take this historic opportunity to protect our public lands from extraction and exploitation, and ensure the outdoors remain preserved for future generations of Americans - President and CEO of Patagonia, Rose Marcario." (Patagonia Facebook, Reference 1). While well-preserved public lands may be considered paramount to the existence of Patagonia (cf. 3.7.2), preserving publics lands is, arguably, not a reflection of Patagonia's own business activities. Rather, it is argued to express a concern for the environment, which is benefitting society in general. Moreover, while it is not directly encouraging Patagonia's followers to mobilize or take action, it *does* encourage action within *congress,* and urges congress to mobilize around the 'historic opportunity'. This reference is interesting, because while it is the *CEO* who, in effect, seeks to mobilize, it is the *corporation* that posts the communication through its own social media channels. Thus, Patagonia is the actual sender of the message, which arguably enables *Patagonia* to mobilize through its CEO.

4.12 Encourage Political Action

This theme is concerned with communication where the corporations directly encourage their followers to take political action. This is especially evident through the "call to actions" present in this theme. Here, they encourage and enable citizens to take action on a political cause e.g. with the provision of links and other action led methods. These action led methods explicitly urge citizens to join a collective effort to solve a social or environmental problem. Thus, like the theme 'Pressure on Legislators', this theme also contains mobilization efforts. Furthermore, the communication within this theme, inevitably also contains political

statements and opinions, as it seeks to advocate a cause and mobilize support for the particular political cause.

A clear example, of how the references in this theme consist of action led politicized communication, is Ben & Jerry's which tweets "Hey #STL it's time to #CloseTheWorkhouse! Let's invest in programs that build stronger, healthier communities instead of jails. Join tomorrow @ 6 PM!" (Ben & Jerry's Twitter, Reference 2-3). Not only does this tweet advocate for a cause, and urge political action through the encouragement to 'join tomorrow', it also uses hashtags, which can be argued to reflect a mobilization effort in itself. Therefore, the use of hashtags in this kind of politicized communication arguably has a twofold purpose. Firstly, it is used to enable social media users to easily find the communication evolving around this topic. Secondly, hashtags are used by users to show support for a particular cause or issue, and its format has the ability to spread on social media and thus be a factor of mobilization.

This theme does also contain communication, which holds a degree of education. This is seen e.g. when Beautycounter tweets "[...] We're committed to going beyond clean to become the first beauty brand with a full traceable mica supply chain. Watch the full documentary & get involved [...]" (Beautycounter Twitter, Reference 1). In this tweet, the corporation seeks to educate its followers, about the issue of forced child labour in the supply chain of the beauty industry. At the same time, the corporation urges citizens to 'get involved'. This issue is arguably related to the business core of the corporation, as Beautycounter itself is an actor in the beauty industry. However, the issue brought up by the corporation taps into a much broader issue agenda, which concerns and involves society as a whole, and not just the corporation or industry. Moreover, the communication seeks not only to educate but also to urge followers to get involved and take action on the issue.

The act of corporations seeking to mobilize support, for a cause of societal interest, is further exemplified in this post from Patagonia: "Together, we hope to achieve greater participation in our country's elections. Time to vote is a nonpartisan, business-led initiative to help ensure employees across America don't have to choose between voting and earning a paycheck. Join our movement [...]" (Patagonia Facebook,

Reference 2-4). This statement, very clearly seeks to mobilize support for the movement 'Time To Vote', but distinguishes itself from previous references, as the audience, which the corporation seeks to mobilize, is not citizens, but instead other corporations. Still, however, the goal of the mobilization will ultimately benefit citizens.

This action-driven politicized communication is also apparent through the corporations' retweets from NGOs. This is apparent in the following, where Ben & Jerry's retweets a post from the NGO, 350 dot org: "To stop pipelines like #KXL we've got to #StopTheMoneyPipeline. Join us April 23 at the Earth Day #ClimateStrike to stop fossil fuel financing. Sign up here: [...]" (Ben & Jerry's Twitter Retweets, Reference 1-3). By retweeting this post, Ben & Jerry's becomes the sender of the message, and urges citizens to engage in the climate strike. Furthermore, the issue is not related to the core business of Ben & Jerry's, although preserving the environment is arguably a core value for the corporation (cf. 3.7.1). The same dynamics are present in the following Stonyfield retweet from the NGO, Midwest Grows Green: "[...] our Forum is working to eliminate synthetic #pesticides on sports fields, native areas, coastal regions and other landscapes in 2020. Join them by sponsoring us at [...]" (Stonyfield Twitter Retweet, Reference 2). Although done through an NGO, Stonyfield does arguably urge citizens to take political action on the issue, by retweeting this action-led post. Furthermore, despite having relation to the organic mission of Stonyfield's business, the cause being brought forward to eliminate pesticides in public spaces, is arguably a cause, which is of common interest to society.

4.13 Change

This theme distinguishes itself from the remainder themes, because it reflects pieces of politicized communication that are published *post* achieving change on an issue. Thus, the politicized communication within this theme no longer attempts to mobilize neither politicians nor citizens. This theme is therefore termed *Change.* This theme contains communication about causes supported or directly advocated for by the corporation, which have been settled with an outcome in favour of the corporation's agenda. An example

of such, is when Patagonia posts: “SLICKROCK SAVED: Utah Governor pulls Slickrock Trail from proposed oil and gas drilling lease sale” (Patagonia Facebook, Reference 1). This type of politicized communication, underlines the political opinions of the corporation, and also reflects how a united or persistent effort may succeed. The latter is further exemplified in this statement: “People power keeps winning!” (Ben & Jerry’s Twitter retweets, Reference 1). The statement is accompanied by a list of cases, where a joint effort ‘by the people’ has prohibited a number of environmental intrusions around the world. As such, these references exemplify actions that has ensured maintaining nature, as it is, i.e. the *change* we detect in these references can be understood as ‘change of plans’. While not directly stated, we assume that these changes, or the hindering of negative changes, are achieved due to successful mobilization efforts and actions led by the corporation. One particular reference by TOMS, clearly indicates that mobilization efforts have taken place: “Last year, you helped us deliver 721,000 postcards to Congress advocating for Universal Background Checks” (TOMS Instagram, Reference 1). Here, the corporation explicitly communicates about a joint action, which has led to change on a given political issue, and in which a mobilized number of citizens have led to change.

Within the theme of ‘Change’, Patagonia’s fight for the Australian Bight, reached a positive outcome. In a Twitter post, Patagonia writes: “Big oil goes home! After a hard-fought battle with Norwegian oil giant, Equinor, Australian surfers have reason to rejoice. Equinor announced they’re abandoning their proposal to drill off the Great Australian Bight in South Australia.” (Patagonia Twitter, Reference 4). This post clearly reflects a victory for surfers and environmentalists alike, and explicitly identifies the hard-fought battle as the decisive factor for making Equinor change its plans.

5. Preliminary findings

Through the presented thirteen themes identified in our data analysis, we have exemplified variations in the politicized communication. Through the politicized content the B Corporations arguably become facilitators of political involvement and participation from citizens, as they explicitly spark a political debate of topics, on platforms that allow citizens and other stakeholders to participate. Hence, throughout our coding process, it has become evident that the B Corporations are inherently political actors, who not only shed light on various issues, but also express political opinions followed by argumentation for the specific cause. Furthermore, the presented data analysis has detected that the B Corporations, in some instances, even make clear and action led encouragements directed at citizens, whom they urge to take part in solving and supporting change on an issue of societal interest. Hence, the corporations have been found to engage in direct mobilization efforts on social media, e.g. through the use of hashtags, encouragements, and links to 'join a movement'. These mobilizing efforts have been argued to have the purpose of creating change on an issue, either by addressing legislators directly, or by urging citizens to push a particular political agenda forward.

The table below (Table 4) presents an overview of the preliminary findings from our data analysis. Thereby we answer our second sub-question: *Which distinctions can be identified in the B corporations' politicized communication?*

Politicized content	**Definition**	**Example**
Political Consumption	*When the corporation enables consumers to support causes through the consumption of products.*	"As the original One for One company, our community has given almost 100 million shoes to people in need."
Corporate Value	*When the corporation refers to the corporation's core values. May be both direct and indirect*	"At TOMS, we've always been in business to improve lives"

Moral guardians	*When a corporation explicitly states what is right and what is wrong about a given topic/issue*	"When we started visiting our mica sources worldwide, we realized the magnitude of the industry's unethical supply chain"
Product Transparency	*When the corporation explains ingredients or processes that goes into their products with the intent of being transparent*	"Transparency: The Truth About Mica"
NGO Collaboration	*When a NGO informs about a collaboration with a corporation, or vice versa.*	"Patagonia is a member of the @greataustralianbightalliance and through its Grants program has supported @wilderness_aus and @surfrideraus in their efforts to keep the Bight wild and free"
Third Party Legitimacy	*When the corporation includes a third party to signal agreement, and potentially gains positive association from the third party.*	"Hey "STL, it's time to #CloseTheWorkHouse."
Party Politics	*When a corporation is explicitly supporting a political party or politician*	"Happy birthday Congressman Lewis from your fans at Ben & Jerry's!"
Political Opinion	*When a corporation expresses a political opinion which refers to what is good or bad politics, supported by an argument for or against a political cause.*	"The climate change crisis is urgent and requires bold action"
Issue Awareness	*When a corporation provides factual information about a cause/issue which is not part of an argument or contain any call to action.*	"There are over 700 chemicals used in conventional farming and manufacturing."
Educating civil society	*When a corporation educates civil society on topics of common interest to civil society*	"National politics get all the attention, but local issues like these have a huge impact on our lives"
Pressure on Legislators	*When corporations put pressure on legislators by either publishing direct statements encouraging people to put pressure on legislators, or by reposting activities by a group of activists to support the group and thereby substantiate the public pressure*	"Text MICA to 52886 to ask our government leaders to act."
Encourage political action	*When a corporation encourage political action directly through e.g. links and other action led methods. I.e. "Call to action".*	"Time to vote is a nonpartisan, business-led initiative to help ensure employees across America don't have to choose between voting and earning a paycheck. Join our movement [...]"
Change	*When corporations publish pieces of communication that are published post what may be assumed to be some sort of successful corporate activism*	"People power keeps winning"

Table 4. An overview of the identified variations of politicized content.

6. Comparative theoretical analysis

In the following, we will compare our entire data analysis to current theorization, presented initially in the literature review using. Thereby, we will substantiate our preliminary findings. By doing so we engage in a further exploration of the identified themes of politicized communication. Moreover, we will present a unified theoretical frame of essential elements from the fields of corporate activism and activism. These elements will enable us to suggest a clustering of the themes, which share similar traits with regards to the elements they contain. To be able to identify and suggest these clusters, we have used the comparative method inherent in grounded theory (cf. 3.3). Ultimately, we seek to suggest distinctions in the politicized communication, and illustrate how politicized communication, within some themes, may be further distinguished as corporate activism. Hereby, we seek to answer our third and last sub-question: *How can corporate activism be distinguished from politicized communication?*

6.1 Providing a unified theoretical frame

To be able to suggest how some types of politicized communication can be clustered and ultimately distinguished as corporate activism, we first provide a unified theoretical frame. This is done, by outlining how different authors in pre-existing theory conceptualizes the phenomenon (cf. 2.2.1).

As a start, corporate activism has been argued to most commonly seek to influence politics, that are *unrelated to the core business* practices of the firm, and rather has an external focus in seeking to entice social change outside the organization (Livonen, 2018; Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Moreover, existing literature suggests that corporate activism includes holding *society's interests above business interests,* and may focus on how businesses can use its operations to positively contribute to society (Livonen, 2018; Baur & Wettstein, 2016). Here it should be noted, that we recognize that critical scholars of corporate activism contend that there will always be an inherent element of self-interest driving the activities of corporations engaging in any form of CSR (Aronczyk, 2016). Additional to this inherent economic interest, we contend that it is not possible for us, when studying these B Corporations from the *outside,* to determine whether businesses *do* in fact

hold society's interests above its own. We, therefore, adopt Wettstein and Baur's (2016) notion that as long as businesses are *also* always aimed at advancing the common good for society, we contend that the corporations act in society's best interest. However, in instances where the corporations *directly* benefit economically from the advocacy for a certain cause, we contend that the business' interest is placed above society's interest.

Another precondition for corporate activism, suggested repeatedly throughout the literature, is that corporate activism *takes place publicly outside the formal political system,* and this may often be in mass and social media (Corvellec & Stål, 2019; Baur & Wettstein, 2016; Wettstein & Baur, 2016). The public element of corporate activism further includes conveying public support for, for instance, groups or ideals, with the underlying purpose of convincing others to support the cause as well (Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Furthermore, literature on corporate activism suggests that the aim of corporate activism is to *influence* institutional environments, by influencing for instance politics, legislation or cultural agendas and social standards (Morsing & Vestergaard, Forthcoming; Corvellec & Stål, 2019).

Despite the fact that these conceptualisations do not directly contain any elements from the activism literature, we contend that the field of activism is deeply inherent in the field of corporate activism (Morsing & Vestergaard, Forthcoming; Corvellec & Stål, 2019). Therefore, we suggest that conceptualizations from the field of activism, and social movements provide essential understandings, to the phenomenon of corporate activism. *Mobilization* is an inherent part of the literature on activism, as activist groups and social movements are formed through the *ability to mobilize* (e.g. McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Thus, also central to activism, is that it is built on *collective or joint action* with some degree of organization (Snow et al., 2008). Finally, as indicated in the literature, on both activism and social movements, an orientation and action towards *installing change*, is seen to be a central element (Snow et al., 2008; Corning and Myers, 2002).

6.1.1 Social media as a premise for corporate activism

In the above, it has been presented that it is a premise for corporate activism that it *takes place publicly outside the formal political system,* and that this may often be in mass and social media (Corvellec & Stål, 2019; Baur & Wettstein, 2016; Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Furthermore, the presented literature on social media has agreed that social media can be regarded as channels in which informal political participation takes place, and thus the political participation taking place on these channels unfolds outside the formal political system (Corvellec & Stål, 2019; Baur & Wettstein, 2016; Enjolras et al., 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2012; Dahlgren, 2005). As all of the data analysed in this thesis originates from social media, we argue that the presented premise that corporate activism takes place outside the formal political systems, is thus, achieved from the outset.

Additionally, with all our data originating from social media, a highly relevant premise for the proceeding comparative analysis, is social media's ability to mobilize. As it has been presented in the literature review, theorists have agreed on the mobilizing effects of social media (Enjolras et al., 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Davis & White, 2015). Consequently, social media has been found to enable actors, including corporations, to mobilize support for a given cause. As the previous section has presented, this is considered to be a fundamental part of activism, and thus central to the forthcoming comparative analysis. Thus, we argue that the presented premise that corporate activism should mobilize support, may be achieved through social media, depending on whether the corporations utilize this opportunity.

6.2 First Cluster of Politicized Communication

Based on the unified theoretical frame and our data analysis, we have recognized that the communication within the three themes; Corporate Value, Product Transparency and Political Consumption share similarities, pertaining to which elements from the fields of corporate activism and activism, they contain (cf. 6.1). Based on these similarities, we have been able to cluster the themes into a unified type of

communication. Before presenting how we have been able to cluster the themes, we will unfold each of the three themes, substantiating each one with theory presented in our literature review.

6.2.1 Political Consumption

The theme of Political Consumption has been found to occur when corporations actively urge consumers to engage in consumption of certain products, which hold a political value (cf. 4.1). As it has been suggested by the literature, political consumption is conceptualized, as an act in which consumers utilize their purchasing power, with the goal of changing current institutional practices (Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007). This phenomenon has further been argued to be an informal type of political participation (Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007). Thus, comparing the findings from our data analysis, with the presented overarching theoretical ideas within the field of political consumption, it is found that this type of politicized communication, corresponds with how political consumption has been conceptualized in previous theoretical works (Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007; Dahlgren, 2005; Stolle et al., 2005). Additionally, based on the theory, our empirical findings exemplify how corporations are seen to facilitate a way for consumers to engage in political participation through social media. Moreover, it could be argued that our empirical findings even extend the presented theory on political participation. Our empirical findings show that not only do the corporations become facilitators of political consumption, with the provision of such political products, they also go beyond that, as the corporations explicitly urge consumers not just to buy *their products*, but to engage in the act of political consumption *in general*, as a means to shape the world.

6.2.2 Product Transparency

The theme of Product Transparency has been found to contain communication in which the corporations are transparent about ingredients or processes related to its business. Therefore, there is also an inherent degree of sales within this theme. The politicized nature of this communication is substantiated by the literature on corporations' ability to address certain issues and to engage in a degree of self-regulation (Scherer, Palazzo,

& Baumann 2006). For instance, Beautycounter wishes to be transparent with regards to its supply-chain. Transparency then, may be a way for corporations to disclose that they adhere to a certain standard (cf. 2.1), or confront issues inherent in the industry. As suggested in the literature, self-regulation is seen, as a consequence of the governance gaps, caused by globalization (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008). Thus, when Beautycounter is transparent about *not* using child labour in its supply chain, despite the fact that its production is located in parts of the world where citizen rights are not governed by the state, Beautycounter is seen to engage in self-regulation, and do its part in 'filling the gap'. Furthermore, Beautycounter then avoids being complicit in violating human rights.

The aspiration to appear transparent can also be seen in connection to the increasing power and accessibility to information, which the consumers have had with the emergence of the internet (Davis & White, 2015; Enjolras et al., 2012; Boyd, 2010; Lupia & Sin, 2003). This politicized communication, is thus regarded, not only as an effort to obtain legitimacy and trust from stakeholders, but also as a necessary response, to the increasingly informed and critical consumers, who demand transparency when consuming (Real Leaders, 2018; Aronczyk, 2016; Corcoran et al., 2016). This potential focus on consumer demands, is partly what leads us to argue that 'sales' is an inherent part of the communication within this theme, as it appears to be a necessity for corporations to be transparent, if they hope to sell their products.

6.2.3 Corporate value

This theme has been detected to occur when a corporation refers to its core values. Due to the substantial presence of this theme in politicized communication, the corporation's communication on social media has been argued to reflect that the corporation has indeed become political in its way of communicating to the outside world. Moreover, due to the political nature of these empirically found corporate values, it has been argued that the corporations are not only political in advocating for political causes *outside* the corporation, they are arguably also political in their *internal* nature. These findings are substantiated, when seen in relation to the claim presented by Mckean & King (2019) that corporate activism, proves as a way for

corporations to 'perform' its values. The findings, thus, further suggest that there is a relationship between corporation's values, and the issues, which its politicized communication revolves around. Our empirical findings further support the presented theorization by Wettstein & Baur (2016), who suggest that corporations engaging in corporate activism, are driven by their values and ideologies, rather than economic values. Finally, other scholars have argued that what has further been driving this increasingly value based corporate agenda, is an increasing demand from society, as well as internal stakeholders, that the corporations take on values that encourage positive change in society (Wilcox, 2019; Böhm et al., 2018; Real Leaders, 2018; Aronczyk, 2016; Corcoran et al., 2016; Davis & White, 2015).

6.2.4 Assessing the unified theoretical frame

In the following, we will compare the three empirically grounded themes presented above, to the unified theoretical frame (cf. 6.1), to present how the themes can be clustered. We find that the majority of the communication, within the themes, is not *unrelated to the core business.* Furthermore, we cannot argue that the corporations exclusively hold *society's interests above business interests.* With regards to the theme of Corporate Values, the theme has been found to contain both communication, disconnected from the business core, e.g. TOMS value of 'creating a better tomorrow where humanity thrives' (cf. 4.2), and communication linked to the business core, e.g. Beautycounter's value of 'clean beauty' (cf. 4.2). Applying the mind-set presented by Wettstein and Baur (2016), Beautycounter's interest is, despite this link, *also* aimed at advancing the common good for society. Therefore, we contend that the corporations, within Corporate Values, act in society's best interest (cf. 6.1). However, in the remaining themes within this cluster, the corporations have been argued to *directly* benefit economically from supporting particular causes. This is evident, as the communication found in the theme of Political Consumption, is inseparable from the economic benefit of the firm, due to the transactional link inherent between the corporation and consumer, when buying a product to do social good (cf. 4.1). Similarly, we argue that transparency is becoming a

necessity to sell products, and thus, there is an inherent economic interest within the theme of Product Transparency.

Proceeding, we argue that all the three themes indirectly seek to *influence* institutional environments. This is evident in Political Consumption, where the consumers are informed that they are able to shape and influence society through their consumption (cf. 4.1). The theme of Product Transparency has been argued to indirectly influence institutional environments, as the communication within the theme, attempts to improve the institutions of which the corporation is a part, as well as it urges followers to understand current institutional settings. The theme of Corporate Values, is argued to indirectly influence as well, through the mere articulation of values.

Neither of the themes contain communication that attempts to *install change*. In the case of Political Consumption, however, we argue that the communication contains an element of seeking change on an issue, due to the act of buying in support of a cause (cf. 4.1). Still, despite this, it has been argued by scholars that the ability to *install change* through consumption is limited (Stolle et al., 2005).

Finally, the communication within these themes does not attempt to *mobilize* any *collective or joint action*. Again, however, Political Consumption stands out in that the communication within this theme, has been found to urge the individual consumer to act. However, the effort to act on an issue has been argued to be directed towards the individual, and *not* a collective effort.

This comparative assessment reveals, that similar to the all the themes within this cluster, they do, at best, only seek to *influence* its audience. Consequently, we suggest that this type of communication remains merely politicized as it does not contain any of the remaining elements central to corporate activism, and none of the elements central to activism.

6.3 Second Cluster of Politicized Communication

Based on the unified theoretical frame and our data analysis, we have recognized that the communication within the seven themes; Political Opinion, Issue Awareness, Party Politics, Moral Guardians, Third Party

Legitimacy, NGO Collaboration and Educating Civil Society share similarities, pertaining to which elements from the fields of corporate activism and activism, they contain (cf. 6.1). Based on these similarities, we have been able to cluster the themes into a second unified type of communication. Before presenting how we have been able to cluster the themes, we will unfold each of the three themes, substantiating each one with theory presented in our literature review.

6.3.1 Political Opinion

Political Opinion has been found as an emerging type of politicized communication in our empirical data analysis. Our findings suggest that this type of politicized communication occurs when a corporation expresses a political opinion, which refers to what is good or bad politics, supported by an argument for or against a political cause. Based on our empirical findings, corporations can be seen as political actors, who not only shed light on various issues, but even express political opinions, followed by argumentation for the specific cause. As such, they are by no means neutral. This taps into the literature of the field of corporate activism, which suggests that corporations have gone from favouring a neutral position when it comes to social and environmental issues, to now taking a public stance on such issues (Livonen, 2018; Morsing & Vestergaard, Forthcoming). Interestingly, when comparing these findings further to the literature of corporate activism, it is found that scholars conceptualize the explicit public political stances made by corporations as corporate activism (Morsing & Vestergaard, Forthcoming; Böhm et al., 2018; Baur & Wettstein, 2016).

6.3.2 Issue Awareness

Issue Awareness has been found to reflect politicized content, in which a corporation brings awareness to its followers, by providing factual information on a political issue. We have argued that the communication distinguishes itself from other types of content such as Political Opinion and Encourage Political Action, by the omitting of arguments or encouragements to take action. Therefore, the risk, described in the literature,

for corporations to disagree with someone, potentially including customers (Korschun & Smith, 2018; Wettstein & Baur, 2016), is thus less prevalent in this type of politicized communication. This is because Issue Awareness is argued to be much less opinionated than the communication in for instance Political Opinion, and thus arguably invites less animosity or disagreement. However, we do not argue that the corporations are completely neutral, since a subjective selection process of deciding which issues to convey, has inevitably taken place. As such, they are in some way expressing a political stance, and thereby this empirical finding, like the previous theme, is seen to be substantiated by literature arguing that corporations no longer favor a neutral position when it comes to social and environmental issues (Livonen, 2018; Morsing & Vestergaard, Forthcoming). These findings are thus substantiated similarly to the type of political communication found in 'Political Opinion'. The fact that the B corporations publish this type of politicized communication, without no further argumentation, we argue to be a clear expression of corporations being accredited an increasingly political impact due to corporations' equally increasing power (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; Scherer et al., 2006; Matten et al., 2003). Hence, it may even be suggested that argumentation is in fact unnecessary, and that bringing awareness to an issue can potentially have an impact in itself.

6.3.3 Party Politics

This theme has been found particularly interesting due to its very explicit political content, where the corporations directly support specific political parties or politicians. We argue that the communication identified as Party Politics inevitably invites a lot of animosity from political opposers, as it so explicitly favours one line of politics led by some politicians, thus, simultaneously opposing the political agenda of other politicians. Hence, what is remarkable, is that these companies, by disclosing a political bias, potentially allow for their social media platforms to become political battlefields. This empirical discovery taps into the scholarly discussion on why corporations, particularly in the current polarized political climate, are willing to run the risk of alienating stakeholders by taking a public political stance (McKean & King, 2019; Korschun & Smith, 2018; Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Scholars have proposed that this can be explained partly by the

increased consumer and employee demand for value-driven corporations, as it has been argued to provide "[...] us with a conscious choice to buy from, work for, or invest in those companies whose values align most closely with our own." (Wettstein & Baur, 2016, p. 208). Hence, corporations are seen to not only publicly support particular political issues, but also to publicly disclose political orientations. The literature of corporate activism, also seems to suggest that such strong political opinions, are reflections of corporate activism, in the sense that corporate activism is likewise *not* concerned with seeking legitimation in society (Livonen, 2018; Wettstein & Baur, 2016). Rather it may very well tap into political topics that hold many different opposing positions among societal actors (Livonen, 2018; Wettstein & Baur, 2016).

6.3.4 Moral Guardians

The theme Moral Guardians, have been found to reflect content where the corporation discloses a degree of morality that may lie well beyond its direct business activities, and rather reflect general societal values. A particularly interesting finding within this theme, is the example when Ben & Jerry's allow itself to be a determinant of what is right or wrong with regards to a particular topic, and directly judges the actions of another corporation (cf. 4.3). This example, is particularly interesting as we argue it exemplifies that the corporation does not simply communicate pre-existing understandings of problems in the world, they are also directly the originators of the problem identification. This example is further interesting, as literature suggests that this type of scrutiny and criticism is usually undertaken by *NGOs*, who, as civil society actors, are considered watchdogs of universal values and general public interests (Baur & Palazzo, 2011). However, when a B Corporation becomes the scrutinizer, and even moral guardian for society at large, we may argue that it reflects dissolving boundaries between corporations and civil society. This empirical finding, is substantiated by the literature suggesting that corporations have now entered the political realm of society (Böhm et al., 2018).

This politicized content can also be further substantiated by revisiting the literature on corporate activism. In the pre-existing literature in the field, Baur and Wettstein (2016) suggest corporate activism to

be a type of political engagement, which is very pure in its conceptualization. They suggest that the driver behind the phenomenon is for corporations to take on a role, which reflects what the corporation wish to assume within the broader society. The theme of Moral Guardians can be argued to reflect this purity on an overarching level, in that it indirectly places the corporations as entities with a morality more pure than other corporations'.

6.3.5 NGO Collaboration

The politicized content termed NGO Collaboration has been found to contain communication where NGOs inform about a collaboration with a corporation, or vice versa, appearing typically through retweets or reposts. This finding in our empirical analysis can be substantiated by pre-existing literature. The literature suggests that in NGOs' efforts to make corporations engage in solving social and environmental issues, one ideal way of making corporations engage, is through *collaborations* (Baur & Palazzo, 2011). This is very interesting, as these two societal actors have traditionally been clearly divided, and have had clearly defined and very differing purposes as organizations (Van Marrewijk, 2003). Yet, this type of communication suggests that the B Corporations take on an increasing amount of responsibility towards society. This is further substantiated by the literature, which suggests that the corporate world moves further towards the NGOs, creating a privatization of political activities, and an apparent opportunity to collaborate (Baur & Palazzo, 2011).

Based on the literature, it can be suggested that NGOs have a reputation of being trusted to advocate and safeguard society's interest above any other interest (Baur & Palazzo, 2011). This substantiates what we have found in our data analysis i.e. that corporations may benefit from NGO collaborations, in that it potentially grants the B corporations with a degree of legitimacy and sincerity. Thus, the corporation may be perceived more genuine in its efforts to address either social or environmental challenges. However, as we contend that reposts and retweets demand little involvement or resources from the corporation, it may *not* be the most genuine approach (cf. 3.7.3). In the literature on corporate activism, critical views, substantiate

this idea by suggesting that corporations have a self-interested approach (Aronczyk, 2016). Hence, corporations are dominated not by the quest for social change and political action, but rather by a quest for visibility, legitimacy and ultimately self-promotion (Aronczyk, 2016).

6.3.6 Third Party Legitimacy

In our empirical data analysis, we identified a theme of politicized content which we termed Third Party Legitimacy. The communication within this theme has been found to refer to retweets by politicians, tags of an industry expert, or quotes from NGOs. However, this theme may be distinguished from the above type of communication, NGO Collaboration, since the present type of politicized communication, does not necessarily contain communication that mentions either of our B Corporations, or otherwise refers to a direct collaboration. Rather, communication in this type of content, has been argued to signal an agreement with, or support of, a third party. Still, however, parts of the analysis conducted in 'NGO Collaboration' may equally apply to the present theme. What has been found in both types of content, is that the type of communication is substantiated by the literature suggesting that the corporate world moves further towards the NGOs (Baur & Palazzo, 2011).

6.3.7 Educating Civil Society

In this theme, corporations have been found to take on a responsibility to use their reach and voice on social media to educate society about topics fundamental to civil society. The topics have been found to be completely unrelated to the business core of the corporations, revolving around everything from information on the necessity to vote, local politics or for instance industry standards that do not comply with basic human rights (cf. 4.10). The empirical finding that corporations have now begun to take on roles as educators to society, have been argued to reflect an encompassing view, of the widespread responsibility these corporations take towards society. This finding can be further substantiated, when compared to the formerly introduced notion of corporate citizenship (Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003). As it has been

conceptualized by Matten & Crane (2005), a corporation take on a role as a corporate citizen when it engages in administering citizenship rights for individuals. Furthermore, it has been proposed by scholars that these rights include: civil rights, social rights and political rights (Scherer et al., 2006; Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003; Marshall, 1965). The topics brought forward by the B Corporations can be viewed in the light of this theoretical categorization, as they arguably revolve around political rights e.g. the right to vote and local politics, and civil rights e.g. basic human rights (cf. 4.10). Corporate citizenship has been proposed by researchers, to take place in situations, where the nation state fails to be the counterpart of citizenship (Matten & Crane, 2,005). Some of our empirical findings arguably support this claim. An example is Beautycounter, who has been found to take responsibility for violations on human rights, in countries in which the corporation operates (Matten & Crane, 2005) (cf. 4.10). However, much of the remaining communication within this type of content revolves around securing political rights in a local context, namely the US, where these corporations are based (cf. 4.10). This is an interesting finding, because, although this communication stems from corporations based in a democratic nation, with institutions in place to secure citizenship rights, it has been illustrated that these corporations *still* take on the responsibility for administering (some of) the citizenship rights.

6.3.8 Assessing the unified theoretical frame

Moving from the above theoretical substantiation of our findings, we will now compare the seven empirically grounded themes, presented above, to the identified unified theoretical frame, to present how the themes can be clustered (cf. 6.1). In assessing this type of communication we have found that the communication within all these themes are predominantly *unrelated to the business core* and revolve around issues that hold *society's interest above business interests.* This is evident in all the themes, as there is no direct economic benefit between the B corporations and the issues they highlight in the communication, as well as the issues have been argued to revolve around issues of societal concern. One example is seen in Party Politics where Stonyfield supports the broad societal issue of climate change (cf. Party politics). Also, in the theme Educating

Civil Society, the issues clearly hold society's interests above business interests, as they revolve around citizenship rights. Proceeding, when looking at whether the communication within this cluster seeks to *influence*, we argue that all the themes seek to *influence* institutional environments, some directly others indirectly. In communication within themes such as Party Politics, Moral Guardians, and Political Opinion, the communication arguably seeks to directly influence institutional environments, in for example uttering explicit support for political agendas and politicians or by highlighting immoral practices. While the communication in themes such as NGO Collaborations and Third Party Legitimacy also seek to *influence*, we argue that this is more indirect, as the influence on institutional environments, happens more through collaborations or agreements with NGOs and third parties. Thus, all the themes in the cluster contain all of the elements, central to corporate activism (cf. 6.1).

When looking at the elements pertaining to activism, however, none of the themes within this cluster contain all elements central to activism (cf. 6.1). In fact, the theme Party Politics contains neither of the elements, central to the field of activism. With regards to themes such as Educating Civil Society, Third Party Legitimacy, Moral Guardians, Political Opinion and Issue Awareness, they are similar, in the way that they arguably all provide communication with the ultimate goal of *installing change*, however, neither of the themes are regarded to hold any element of *mobilizing collective or joint action* (cf. 4.10, 4.6, 4.3, 4.9). The remaining theme, in this cluster, NGO Collaboration, arguably does reflect *collective or joint action,* because it reflects existing collective partnerships attempting to *install change,* however there is no attempt to *mobilize* further support for the issues in either of the content within this type of communication.

In conclusion, the above comparative assessment reveals that similar to all the themes within this cluster of politicized communication is that they meet the conceptualizations suggested by scholars within the field of corporate activism (cf. 6.1). However, they do not possess all the elements central to the field of activism (cf. 6.1). Therefore, we contend that this type of content remains politicized, and cannot be termed corporate activism.

6.4 Third Cluster of Politicized Communication

Lastly, based on the unified theoretical frame and our data analysis, we have recognized that the communication within the themes; Pressure on Legislators and Encourage Political Action, pertaining to which elements from the fields of corporate activism and activism, they contain (cf. 6.1). Based on these similarities, we have been able to cluster the themes into a third unified type of communication. Before presenting how we have been able to cluster the themes, we will unfold each theme, substantiating each one with theory presented in our literature review. Moreover, the theme of Change, will likewise be substantiated within this cluster, due to its similar traits. However, it distinguishes itself from the remainder themes, as it has a passive nature, and thus, it will be treated separately when assessing the unified theoretical frame.

6.4.1 Pressure on Legislators

Within this kind of politicized content, we have found that corporations put pressure on legislators. This theme contains an explicit degree of encouraging citizens to gather into organized collective efforts to push legislators. In other words, this theme of politicized communication is the first theme which has been detected to contain an explicit element of *mobilization*.

One of our empirical findings was that Patagonia used its CEO to communicate politicized content, through the corporation's channels, and thereby put pressure on legislators. In our data analysis, we argue that this implies that Patagonia, in effect, becomes the sender of the message on equal terms with its CEO. In the literature on corporate activism, this utterance of a personal political opinion by the CEO, is recognized as *CEO activism* (Voegtlin et al., 2019; Hambrick & Wowak, 2019; Livonen, 2018; Böhm et al. 2018). This leads us to argue that when the CEO takes on the role of an activist, the corporation, posting the communication through its own social media channels, arguably *also* becomes an activist *through* its CEO. Hence, we suggest that the CEO and the corporation may be considered claimants of certain beliefs and values about the world, in their own right, and not simply articulate that of existing social movements.

It is further argued, in the literature, that in CEO activism, there is a variety of activist tactics, already used and tested by social movement actors, that may be applied to install positive change in society (Livonen, 2018). Therefore, a social movement may frame an issue in a certain way to inspire and mobilize potential supporters, and to demobilize antagonists (Snow & Benford, 1988). We argue, that in our empirical findings, through their role as activists, corporations use frames as well. As an example, Patagonia uses a motivational frame (Benford & Snow, 2000). Through such frame, the corporation is argued to attempt to establish a rationale among potential supporters, for engaging in collective action through "the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 617). This rationale is then created by motivating and appealing to the 'future generations of Americans', who should have the same opportunities as the present generations (cf. 4.11). An example of a prognostic frame is also recognized in our empirical findings. We argue that when Ben & Jerry's encourages citizens of Miami, to help students increase funding for mental health services, by texting legislators, the corporation identifies a solution to the issue as well as it identifies processes to achieve such solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000; Furnari, 2017). This type of corporate activism is further recognized in the literature, to influence and shape customer attitudes and public opinion, and it is argued that this type of corporate activism does in fact "[...] shape public opinion by framing the public discourse [...]" (Chatterji & Toffel 2017, p. 4).

A distinction between approaches of activist groups has been presented in the literature. A reformative approach has previously been used in the literature to describe when activist groups wish to change corporations' conduct, but sees the corporation as part of a solution in driving change (Den Hond & De Bakker, 2007). This is argued to equally encompass when corporations seek to mobilize support for a cause. In doing so, a corporation arguably recognizes its own role and ability to influence politics and drive change. Hence, the B Corporations can be considered reformative similarly to an activist group.

6.4.2 Encourage Political Action

The communication within this theme has been found to directly encourage citizens to take political action. Hence, this kind of politicized communication has been found to hold an inherent element of *mobilization.* The theme in itself, thus arguably stands in opposition to literature suggesting that there is no real action behind the tendency of participating in low-cost activities, and that this may therefore be termed "slacktivism" (Shriky, 2011). In this theme, as well as the one prior, there are explicit elements of action, either, performed or encouraged, and as such, our findings suggest that genuine political action and political participation is possible, even through social media.

Our findings reveal that the corporations are seen to both engage in mobilizing efforts towards citizens *and* other corporations. The latter is exemplified in our findings, when Patagonia seeks to mobilize corporate support for its 'Time to Vote' movement. This empirical finding is arguably substantiated, when comparing it to the presented theory on corporate citizenship (Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003). Similar to the substantiations made in 'Educating Civil Society', this example arguably illustrates how the corporation come to reflect the notion of corporate citizenship, when it engages in securing political rights for American citizens. For instance, Patagonia seeks to establish a nationwide corporate practice that enables American voters to exercise their political right to vote, without compromising their paycheck. Hereby, Patagonia works to secure the right to vote. Here, research on the political role of corporations can be used to substantiate our empirical findings, as it argues that some corporations have begun to assume a state-like role (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Matten & Crane, 2005; Matten et al., 2003; Wood & Lodgson, 2002). Consequently, it may be argued that Patagonia assumes a state like role, in that the scope of the responsibility taken towards securing the political rights is nationwide i.e. within the legislative frame of governments, and thus formerly something *outside* the scope of corporations' responsibility. This type of mobilization *between* corporations arguably challenges the idea, predominant to the field of activism and social movements, that the logic of numbers is a pivotal element when seeking to induce change on an issue (Della Porta and Diani, 1999). The reason being the growing economic and political power of transnational corporations, as

suggested by scholars (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008; Rasche et al., 2017). Scherer and Palazzo (2008) have claimed that corporations are becoming increasingly transnational, and in becoming so, some of the world's biggest corporations now have revenues that do in fact equal, or exceed, the gross domestic product of a number of developed nation states. Additionally, as these corporations' activities are not limited to national boundaries, scholars have claimed that the political power of transnational corporations is increasing (Scherer & Palazzo, 2008). Thus, we argue that the logic of numbers does not apply when corporations seek to mobilize support *among* them, as their political and economic power, makes them very powerful even in smaller numbers. Furthermore, it has been proposed in the literature of activism and social movements that the ability to create awareness is crucial to be able to mobilize support and lead change on an issue (Lawrence & Weber, 2008). In general, we argue that due to the large social media following of the chosen B Corporations, the geographic reach (Davis & White, 2015; Enjolras et al., 2012) and speed of social media (Pfeffer et al., 2014), these corporations hold an immense power to create awareness for a cause, and thus mobilize political support.

6.4.3 Change

This theme was found to reflect successful corporate activism activities, posted *post* achieving change on an issue. These findings can be substantiated by comparing the tactics, which the corporations used to achieve this change, to the literature of corporate activism. The literature suggests that corporate activism, including CEO activism, uses a variety of the same tactics as traditional activists and social movement actors (Livonen, 2018; Aronczyk, 2016). An example hereof has been detected in our data analysis, where TOMS presumably have used the protest tactic of letter writing, to gather collective appeals to persuade the government to change legislation (cf. 4.13). Moreover, the communication within this theme has been found to be a result of creating *change* on an issue. This, we argue, indicates that the communication within this theme, points towards the actual effect of these corporations' engagement in corporate activism, and that they *are* able to successfully install *change* on issue of societal concern. This finding is somewhat aligned with scholars

Chatterji and Toffel (2017), who in their research, has found that CEO activism *does* effectively shape public opinion and therefore might be effective towards installing change on an issue.

6.4.4 Assessing the Unified Theoretical Frame

Proceeding from the theoretical substantiation of findings, we will now compare the first two empirically grounded themes, presented above, to the identified unified theoretical frame, to present how the themes can be clustered (cf. 6.1). It has been detected, that the communication within these themes, contain all the essential elements pertaining to the characteristics of corporate activism as well as to the characteristics of activism. Initially, the communication has been argued to be *unrelated to the business core* as well as it holds s*ociety's interests above business interests*. One example, pertaining to the former, is found in Pressure on Legislators, where TOMS advocates background checks on all gun sales, which is argued to be highly unrelated to TOMS business core (cf. 6.4.1). Furthermore, all of the communication within these themes has been found to further seek to *influence* and *change* institutional settings and *mobilize collective or joint action* around a cause. This comparative assessment reveals that both of the themes Pressure on Legislators and Encouraging Political Action within this cluster, contain *all* elements central to corporate activism, as well as they possess *all* elements central to activism. This leads us to suggest that the two themes within this cluster can, in fact, be termed corporate activism.

As indicated in the introduction of this cluster, the final identified theme, Change, is assessed separately. As already established, this type of communication distinguishes itself from the remainder themes, because it reflects pieces of communication that are published *post* achieving change on an issue. Hence, the communication within this theme, arguably reflects successful mobilization efforts, and is thus considered to be the *result* of corporate activism. However, the communication is arguably passive in that it does, no longer, seek to actively *install change* on an issue by *mobilizing collective or joint action.* Therefore, this theme is regarded a passive theme, belonging to the third cluster, but it cannot be distinguished as corporate activism.

7. Findings

In this second part of our analysis, we have used the initially presented theory from our literature review to substantiate our findings from the data analysis. Furthermore, we have compared our empirically grounded preliminary findings to the unified theoretical frame (cf. 6.1). By conducting a thorough assessment of each theme of politicized communication, we identify that while a large number of the themes contain various essential elements of corporate activism, the majority omit essential elements pertaining to activism. This assessment has enabled a clustering of the themes, and as a result three clusters have been suggested based on which elements of the unified frame they possess. Throughout our comparative theoretical analysis, we find that only two themes of politicized communication contain all the of elements from the unified frame, and can thus be distinguished as corporate activism, namely Pressure on Legislators and Encourage Political Action. Hereby, we have answered our third and last sub-question: *How can corporate activism be distinguished from politicized communication?* As a final remark, while the two themes, distinguished as corporate activism, are argued to clearly exemplify the phenomenon, the appearance of corporate activism in the corporations' politicized communication on social media is found to be limited in our research.

7.1 Suggesting a new definition on corporate activism

Having answered our three sub-questions, we are able to answer this thesis' main research question: *what is corporate activism?* Based on our theoretical frame, derived from our literature review, we suggest that current theorizing on the field of corporate activism overlooks nuances in corporations' politicized communication, as it does not distinguish corporate activism and politicized communication. We contend that this is due to too many different conceptualizations of corporate activism, of which neither has aimed at encompassing all elements, which *we* argue to be central to corporate activism, including those that originate from the literature on activism. Our empirically grounded approach to studying the field of corporate activism, we argue, has been largely absent from the preceding studies in the field. By using this empirically grounded approach, comparing empirical data to pre-existing theories and ideas within the field,

we have been able to distinguish corporate activism from politicized communication. Based on this proposed distinction, we are able to offer a new definition on corporate activism, which is empirically grounded. Thus, we contribute to the field with a grounded theory, or rather, a grounded definition. We suggest a new and encompassing definition on corporate activism, as a phenomenon that occurs when: *corporations publicly seek to mobilize a collective effort outside formal political systems, to influence institutional environments with the aim of inducing change on issues of societal interests that are unrelated to the business core.*

7.2 Conceptual framework

Based on our empirical and theoretical findings we are further able to suggest a conceptual framework for distinguishing corporate activism from politicized communication, and former conceptualizations of corporate activism. In the conceptual framework presented below, the themes we have identified and substantiated in the preceding analysis, will not appear. We argue that the themes are not conclusive for future research on corporate activism. However, the themes have served as an important enabler for us to empirically ground the phenomenon, and have thus supported us towards suggesting a new empirically grounded definition. Instead, in our conceptual framework, the variations of apparent essential elements are regarded as determinants of the three clusters of politicized communication.

The proposed framework consists of three types of politicized communication, of which two have been granted the same term, *politicized communication*. This we argue, because of our initial aim of providing a distinction, only between corporate activism and politicized communication. Hence, despite having detected distinctions between the two types of politicized communication, the scope of the present research leads us to solely distinguish between politicized communication and corporate activism, and not suggest degrees of the former. This implies, that regardless of whether only *some* elements of corporate activism or *all* elements of corporate activism with only *some* elements of activism, are present, the communication will remain solely politicized thus far that it does not contain *all* elements of both activism and corporate activism.

Table 5. *Conceptual framework distinguishing corporate activism from politicized communication*

Type of communication	Determining elements	Definition
Politicized communication *Contains only some elements central to the pre-existing field of corporate activism.*	Occurs outside formal political institutions	*Communication that refers to issues with a social or environmental agenda, or issues that generally impact citizens in society.*
	Occurs publicly	
Politicized communication *Contains all elements central to the pre-existing field of corporate activism but not all elements central to the pre-existing field of activism.*	Occurs outside formal political institutions	*Communication that meets the elements found in existing conceptualizations of corporate activism, however not all elements from the field of corporate activism.*
	Occurs publicly	
	Unrelated to the business core	
	Holds society's interest above business interests	
	Influence institutional environments	
Corporate Activism *Contains all elements central to both pre-existing fields of corporate activism and activism.*	Occurs outside formal political institutions	*Communication that publicly seeks to mobilize a collective effort outside formal political systems, to influence institutional environments with the aim of inducing change on issues of societal interests that are unrelated to the business core.*
	Occurs publicly	
	Unrelated to the business core	
	Holds society's interest above business interests	
	Influence institutional environments	
	Change	
	Collective or joint action	
	Mobilize	

Table 5. Conceptual framework distinguishing corporate activism from politicized communication

7.3 Applying the framework

We suggest that the conceptual framework presented above, can assist researchers in assessing corporate communication, published on social media platforms, with the intent of classifying the content and, ultimately, identifying and separating what is merely politicized communication, and what is corporate activism. Our distinction between politicized communication and corporate activism is presented in the far-left column, *Type of communication*. This column further includes descriptions of what the different types of communication contains, with regards to the elements, present in the communication. These elements, are listed in the middle column, *Determining elements of politicized communication*. As such, these elements reflect what we suggest is present in the particular type of communication. Further, definitions of each type of communication is provided in the final, far-right column, *Definition.* These definitions are developed based on our empirical analysis and includes our new, empirically grounded, definition on corporate activism. The listing of definitions alongside tangible elements of the communication, we argue, should enable other researchers to assess other pieces of communication, with the intent of distinguishing corporate activism from the vast amount of politicized communication.

7.4 Theoretical and practical implications

In the previous section, we have presented a taxonomy that we propose to be a new conceptual framework for mapping out the distinction between corporate activism and politicized communication in the US. Moreover, we have proposed a new empirically grounded definition of corporate activism. However, we acknowledge that the empirical foundation of the present research is limited seen in the light of the vast amount and dynamic character of data that exists on social media, and the relatively narrow dataset collected solely from B Corporations in the US. As the phenomenon of corporate activism remains most widespread in the US, we recognize that there might occur complications when applying the conceptual framework to communication from corporations outside the US. As a result, our conceptual framework is to be regarded as only representative for distinguishing corporate activism and politicized communication in an American

context. Therefore, we suggest that the present research is expanded upon empirically with a broader data collection containing a wider geographical scope, in order to be able to apply the conceptual framework to corporations from outside the US.

We acknowledge that some of the elements presented in the conceptual framework may reflect somewhat of an ideal. For instance, it has been argued that the element, pertaining to whether the corporations place society's interest above business interest, may be practically difficult to ascertain. Our conceptual framework should therefore serve as a first attempt to distinguish corporate activism from politicized communication, and could therefore potentially be further developed continuously as the phenomenon of corporate activism evolves. Finally, we suggest that the proposed new definition of corporate activism, can serve as a more nuanced and distinct way of determining what corporate activism is, and thus we hope to contribute to moving the research on corporate activism in a more focussed and unambiguous direction.

8. Discussion

Our empirical findings have illustrated, that corporations act as politicized entities, who engage in the political debate through politicized communication, and how, through corporate activism, they even become facilitators of informal political participation. The reason being that corporate activism on social media, as opposed to merely politicized communication, has been found to invite citizens to participate in the political debate through encouragement to take political action, and mobilize collective efforts to install change on issues of common interest of society.

Corporate activism can partly be seen as a result of developments caused by globalization and a global decline in trust in political institutions. Globalization has enabled corporations to expand their operations and become transnational, while the regulatory ability of nation states remains bound to its national territory, hence weakening their regulatory power. This has substantially impacted the responsibility of firms and changed the relationship between public and private authorities. Moreover, an increasing lack of trust in traditional political institutions has been detected in recent years globally (Deloitte, 2019). Particularly, gen Z and millennials have little trust in social/political institutions, and nearly 73 percent expressed that political leaders are "(...) failing to have a positive impact on the world" (Deloitte, 2019). This losing faith in traditional political institutions, is said to be an explanatory reason for why the engagement in informal political participation is growing.

Through this thesis, we have critically assessed the claim made by the literature on corporate activism, stating that the phenomenon is becoming increasingly widespread. Based on our empirical findings, we have shown that corporations do engage in corporate activism, however in a much more limited scale than the literature prescribes. Although in a limited scope, our findings have found that corporations are actively seen to engage in corporate activism, mobilizing citizens to take action on political issues. Corporate activism, has been suggested by scholars, to represent one of several ways of informal political participation (cf. 6.1.1). Due to the global tendency and demand for informal ways of participating in the political debate, we argue that corporate activism, although occurring in a limited scale, represents a possible means for

accommodating this tendency. Because of the apparent potential of corporate activism to become more widespread we wish to critically assess and discuss corporate activism on social media as a type of political participation.

On one side, scholars have argued that social media has democratized the ability for citizens to engage in political participation, and thus these platforms have broadened the ability for citizens to exercise their civil rights (Whelan et al., 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2012; Enjolras et al., 2012; Correa & Jeong, 2011; Lupia & Sin, 2003). However, on the other side, political participation on these platforms have also received scholarly criticism, pointing to the undemocratic technical artefacts of these platforms, which makes it difficult to have constructive debates on discussion topics (Dahlgren, 2005). A central criticism, is this that social media fall short of promoting the civic ideal (Dahlgren, 2005; Pfeffer et al., 2014). Another criticism has centred around the lack of real political action involved in political participation through social media (Shriky, 2011). As our findings reveal, much of the politicized communication, may arguably be rightfully criticized for omitting political action or enabling political participation. The lack of action-driving elements is partly what has led us to distinguish corporate activism from politicized communication. Our empirical findings and definition on what *can* be termed corporate activism does inherently invite citizens to participate in taking actual political action on issues. Still, the criticism regarding the promotion of the civic ideal, and democratic will formation, might still be present in our definition of corporate activism. Despite the argument that corporations practicing corporate activism will hold society's interests above business interests, there might be democratic issues related to the fact that the corporations, who are always *also* economic actors, seek to determine the political agenda and set a scene for political participation. Therefore, albeit it is beyond the scope and findings of the present thesis, it is important to further discuss the potential democratic consequences and implications of corporations increasingly facilitating the political debate and taking on a role as civil society actors. At the one hand, corporations have been seen to further civic competence, as they engage in educating citizens on political issues, as well as encouraging citizens to use their civic agency to affect change. However, on the other hand, corporations are seen to advocate for political consumption,

claiming that the world can be shaped through consumption. Hereby, they imply that the world is no longer shaped, solely through the democratized act of *voting* or other traditional ways of exercising political participation. Thus, arguably, corporations are induced in oppositional roles, as both a civil society actor and an economic market actor.

9. Conclusion

In this thesis, we have provided an empirically grounded definition on corporate activism, which we argue is currently absent in the existing literature on the phenomenon. Drawing together existing conceptualizations on corporate activism, suggests that it is a phenomenon that takes place publicly, outside the formal political system and seeks to influence institutional environments. Further, it revolves around issues which are unrelated to the business core, and holds society's interests above business interests. This thesis has critically assessed these broad conceptions of what corporate activism is, by examining which distinctions that can be identified in the B Corporations' politicized communication. Our data analysis revealed various variations within the politicized communication, resulting in thirteen distinct themes of politicized communication. Relating these empirical findings to the elements, central in current theorizations on corporate activism *and* activism, enabled us to propose a new definition on corporate activism. Furthermore, we were then able to suggest a conceptual framework, outlining how corporate activism can be distinguished from politicized communication. Thus, we have suggested a distinction between what politicized communication remains politicized, and which parts of the politicized communication can be termed corporate activism.

Based on our empirically grounded comparative research, we have challenged the current theorization on what corporate activism is, by suggesting that a clear distinction should be made, between what may be termed politicized communication and corporate activism. This has led us to suggest a new and unambiguous definition of what corporate activism is. Conclusively, our main contribution deprived from our empirical research is thus a new definition of corporate activism, as a phenomenon that occurs when: *corporations publicly seek to mobilize a collective effort outside formal political systems, to influence institutional environments with the aim of inducing change on issues of societal interests that are unrelated to the business core.*

9.1 Implications for future research

A natural consequence of the explorative nature of our grounded theory method, is that our findings have raised questions, proving interesting for future research (cf. 3.2). Hence, the findings of this thesis have a number of implications for future research, and these will be addressed in the following.

One particularly interesting finding in our research was the indications detected, within the theme of Change, pointing towards the actual effect of these corporations' engagement in corporate activism. However, the effect and change produced as a result of corporate activism lies beyond the scope of this research. Although the occurrence of corporate activism, at this point in time, might be too limited to provide substantial empirical data, to examine the actual impact and influence of corporate activism, this would be an interesting topic for future research.

Further, as the present study was delimited to examine the phenomenon in the US, it could be interesting for future research to look at whether corporate activism, can be found in other geographies of the world. If so, future research could examine possible differences, in the engagement in corporate activism, as a result of variations in cultural and political history, legislative environment and society structures.

Moreover, corporate activism has been detected to have a limited presence, in the communication of the corporations. Despite this, we argue that it is relevant for future research, to critically reflect upon the democratic consequences, of inherently economic entities becoming guards over areas, central to civil society and its prospective development.

Finally, we hope that our new definition of corporate activism, and the conceptual framework presented in this thesis, will guide future research on corporate activism in a more focussed and unambiguous direction.

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11. List of Tables

12. List of Appendix