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Master Thesis

The Controversiality of Brands Taking a Stand: Is Social Justice for Sale?

Navn:	Karoline Berna Pedersen, Roberta Lemgruber Vilela

Karoline Berna Pedersen

Roberta Lemgruber Vilela

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Supervisor: Erik Olson

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Abstract

In recent years, the popularity of social justice advertisements has grown, with some famous brands as adopters, such as Gillette, Audi, and Pepsi. This type of campaign exploits social causes in favor of leftist themes and usually attracts sparking dialogue, observed in the media coverage and consumer comments. While ordinary campaigns seek to inform, persuade, or recall consumers about brands, these commercials attempt to bear issues to public attention with concealed persuasion goals. This research aims to understand the different consumers' reactions to woke campaigns with a mixed public response. Previous research on this topic is lacking as well as the political viewpoints influencing the responses to the campaigns were not analyzed. Thus, this study will help address this gap, extend the advertising literature, and bring insights about the adverse reactions, the role of political orientation, and some of the elements necessary for an effective campaign. A content analysis of 746 comments is executed to investigate when woke advertisements perform well or are inefficient among consumers. Overall, the results suggest that 1 in 2 commenters is non-supportive to the approach, but the proportion changes depending on the campaign, usually representing more than half of the commenters. Comparisons show that highly provocative campaigns receive more backlash. It appears as different persuasion tactic knowledge can influence the response to the campaign, and criticism can come with the intention to boycott. Besides, the findings show that the likeability of the cause appears to be highly connected with the overall approval of the campaign, sometimes resulting in brand attitude changes. The political orientation also seems to have a role in the campaign's interpretation, with most of the conservatives in the non-supportive group. This study helps managers to understand the reactions to social justice advertisements, guiding about the specific conditions that should be fulfilled to maximize the effectiveness of this advertising technique among their target groups.

1.0 Introduction

In 2019, Procter & Gamble Co. released a polemic video advertisement for the brand Gillette called "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be." The commercial uses references to the #MeToo movement, showing improper behaviors, all executed by men (Meyersohn, 2019). Two days after its launch, the video received more than 4 million views, with split responses: some praised, but others criticized the campaign with the threat of boycott, mentioning how all men were portrayed and that the firm does not seem to care genuinely about the issue (Topping, Lyons & Weaver, 2019). It appears that the bold move ended up alienating part of its target group (Taylor, 2019). This type of campaign is called *social justice* or *woke* advertisement, an adjective with the meaning of being "aware" in a political or cultural scenario (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017). Though these campaigns usually attract divided reactions, its popularity has grown in recent years, being adopted by famous brands, e.g., Nike, Audi, and Pepsi (McKinney, 2017; Jones, 2019; Victor, 2017). Furthermore, billions of dollars were invested in advertisements by some of these labels in 2018 (AdAge, 2019).

To take a stance on a social issue is not a novelty and, since the 1980s, Benetton's United Colors appropriated social issues as the themes of its controversial campaigns (Tinic, 1997). This social consciousness-raising advertisement is part of postmodernism and, with less focus on the product, aims to bring awareness (Morris, 2005). To a certain degree, the consumers' adverse reactions to the communication are part of this process even though it received little consideration in previous research on other controversial advertisements (Barela, 2003; Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003; Chan, Li, Diehl, & Terlutter, 2007). This lack of knowledge constrains the capacity of managers to employ these campaigns precisely. Thus, the research focus is on the consumers' reactions to social justice advertisements with the split public response, which is investigated through the use of content analysis of viewer comments to social justice campaigns with various degrees of adverse reaction.

This study will provide insights on how publicly supporting a social issue can be both beneficial and harmful to a brand. This investigation aims to help managers to understand the divided reactions to the woke advertisements, revealing the main issues

pointed by consumers that reacted against the campaigns. Thus, managers can use the findings to evaluate better when this advertising practice is suitable, minimizing backlash. Research related to social justice advertising as well as analyses of public response to this campaign is lacking, and, based on the previous investigation, studies of this topic are inexistent. Hence, this study will help to address this gap, extending the advertising literature.

Previous research on advertisements with political content found that consumers' political views substantially influenced the campaigns' perception. The extent they disagree with the message is associated with a negative attitude towards the advertisement (Harben & Kim, 2008). Furthermore, the causes framed in these campaigns are related to left-wing social movements in favor of collective themes, e.g., inclusive immigration policy (Fasenfest, 2009). On the other hand, over the past few years, the tendency worldwide displays an increasing influence of conservative groups, with right-wing leaders advocating for opposing topics (Youngs, 2018). Previous cause-related marketing research revealed that conservatives and liberals react differently to advertisements (Lee, Yoon, Woo Lee & Royne, 2018). However, there has been no direct examination of how non-leftist consumers would react to social justice campaigns. Some of these consumers express their disapproval to these campaigns, for instance, by classifying the advertisement as "social justice warrior (SJW) garbage," an offense to people with progressive views. This study intends to address this gap, contributing with more information on how consumers' political viewpoints can impact attitudes towards the woke advertisement and the brand.

In the CSR Study, Cone Communications (2017) revealed that 78% of consumers consider it very important that companies stand up for social justice causes, and 73% of consumers would stop purchasing a product if they discovered that the firm supports an issue that opposes their convictions. Because consumers can boycott the brand based on its stand on social justice campaigns, research of this type seems like a valuable resource with interesting implications for companies, brands, marketers, and managers. All the preceding arguments form the basis for the following main research question:

> *When do social justice campaigns work, and when are they inefficient among consumers?*

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Controversiality in advertising

In the past decades, marketers studied different advertising techniques used to attract consumers' attention, for instance, shocking, provocative, or offensive appeals (Vézina, & Paul, 1997; Dahl et al., 2003; Chan et al., 2007; Parry, Jones, Stern, & Robinson, 2013). In contrast with other methods, they are proven to be more effective in bringing advertisement awareness and recall (Dahl et al., 2003). Likewise, controversial advertisements can increase the elaborative processing (Huhmann & Mott-Stenerson, 2008). However, it seems highly provocative campaigns affect consumers' attitudes towards advertisements and brands (Vézina et al., 1997), as well as produce fewer positive reactions than solution-based news stories (McIntyre & Sobel, 2017). This type of provocative appeal was used by some brands, such as Benetton, that framed and commoditized social issues in campaigns, generating colossal awareness, polarized debate, and registering an international sales increase at the beginning of the 90s (Tinic, 1997). This evidence confirms a prior study that associated satisfying responses to shock advertisements with positive buying behavior (Virvilaitė & Matulevičienė, 2013).

These offensive advertisements are considered context-sensitive, with more irritation provoked among consumers from collectivist cultures (Chan et al., 2007). Furthermore, previous research on humorous advertisement reveals that advertisements using humor while analogously evoking adverse emotional reactions contribute to damage brand attitudes (Warren, Carter, & McGraw, 2019). The different degrees of irritation caused by advertisements are connected to a reduction in the campaign's performance. Among the most common causes of irritability are elements such as suggestive scenes, that can be mitigated with the use of copy approaches (e.g., warm details) (Aaker & Bruzzone, 1985). Moreover, prior research indicates that people resist advertisements based on prior beliefs; therefore, indirect suggestions instead of conclusions are more efficient in the campaigns (Armstrong, 2010).

The prior literature shows that controversiality also has a negative influence on advertisement effectiveness; hence, it would be astute not to offend the audiences. However, social justice advertisements are increasingly being used by brands. One plausible explanation for taking this risk is a consumer behavior trend, with nearly 2 out of 3 consumers classified as "belief-driven buyers," those that select, change, refrain or boycott a brand based on its stand on social issues (The Edelman Earned Brand Global Report, 2018). According to the report, if a brand takes a stand, there is an eight times higher chance of selling a product among this group. In other words, some consumers will reward the brand for taking a stance. Besides, another incentive might be related to the high volume of advertisements with the advent of the internet and mobile phones, where breaking the consumers' boredom barriers to get their attention is necessary, and possible through "woke" campaigns. The awareness seems valid, and prior research found that the volume of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has a more substantial impact on sales than its valence (Rosario, Sotgiu, Valck, & Bijmolt, 2016). Although there is evidence on how controversial advertisements might be useful, little research has examined the consumers' objections to these advertisements and the potential effects on brand image, which is a gap that this study intends to address.

2.2 Balance Theory

Consistency theory is a method of persuasion that emphasizes the connection enclosed by the stimulus and the receivers' previous beliefs and values, that are used as frames of reference in the judgment of the message and its source (Shelby, 1986). One of the most notorious consistency enunciations is Heider's Balance Theory. It explains how a person's attitude concerning an event can impact the attitude to the source of the same encounter (Heider, 1946). These attitudes are relationships with positive or negative valence (e.g., to like or dislike). When the attitude related to the source and the event are analogous, the result is a balanced configuration; otherwise, imbalance appears (Heider, 1982; Shelby, 1986). Although imbalance stimulates the thinking process, the tendency is to reorient the cognitions to achieve balance (Heider 1946, Heider 1982).

Conversely, the Reciprocal Mediation Hypothesis (RMH) describes the causal relation among attitude toward an advertisement (Aad) and attitude toward a brand (Ab) (Mackenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986). Considering the advertising effects, the relationship between a particular brand and its advertisement is undoubtedly positive; thus, the consumer searches for a balanced state by liking both the brand and the advertisement or disliking (Mackenzie et al., 1986). Based on this theory, the consumer's perception of a woke campaign may influence how the advertised brand is perceived.

The concept of "Brand liking" seeks to establish a consumer's positive attitude regarding a brand by considering them beyond purchasers, as individuals (Boutie, 1994). Besides, Nguyen, Melewar & Chen (2013) defined Brand Likability as a multidimensional approach that englobes cognitive and affective perceptions. Brand Love, a concept more connected with emotions, refers to a relationship where consumers are more focused on how the brand can benefit them, and it can result in brand loyalty, positive Word-of-Mouth and refusal to accept negative information about the brand (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). In light of these sentiments, brand liking or loving will possibly influence the campaign's perception and conversely.

Previous research demonstrates that individuals' beliefs and values will impact advertisements' perception, with more congruence between them, leading to a more positive attitude towards the campaign (Samo, Joyo, & Abro, 2018). Likewise, the agreement with the message arguments influences attitude towards the advertisement, and high consumer involvement is connected with the impact on brand attitude (Lord, Myung-Soo & Sauer, 2013). In like manner, a prior study on cause-related marketing suggested that when the cause selected is significant to consumers' lives and their experiences; it will produce better outcomes (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). This perceived personal relevance is referred to as felt involvement, a motivational state that affects cognitive processes, such as attention (Celsi & Olson, 1988). This rationale is likely to affect how individuals will perceive the advertisement message, with more positive evaluation when the cause explored is following their values. Taking into consideration the prior theories, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

> **RQ1**: *What role does the dislike of the social justice campaign play in the consumer's prior brand likeability?*

RQ2: *How does the likeability of the cause affect the consumer's overall liking of the social justice campaign, as well as the intention to support or criticize?*

2.3 The political polarization

It is observed by the media coverage and some of the comments on polemical social justice advertisements that the divided reactions partly belong to a political polarization associated with political viewpoints in the left-right political spectrum. A research firm that uses artificial intelligence and social media data called Networked Insights analyzed the reactions to woke campaigns and found that among consumers who disliked the advertisement associated the commercials with political propaganda (i.e., liberal). In contrast, among the favorable reactions, consumers praised the leftist social issues explored in the campaigns (Bruell, 2017).

Prior research shows that political viewpoints might influence the likeability of the campaigns, with less positive attitudes related to conservatives (Harben & Kim, 2008). However, the stimulus used was a direct critic towards former U.S. President Bush, and the authors employed a convenient sample. Therefore, this research will address the gaps to understand if the political viewpoints trigger related reactions towards the social justice advertisements with leftist themes. Considering this background, from a practical viewpoint, companies employing woke campaigns risk upsetting and, in a worst-case scenario, lose consumers with conservative political viewpoints even though they can potentially attract some consumers with leftist views.

2.4 The controversial stance and attitudinal-behavioral change

Some of the famous brands that joined the *woke* trend have generated a split public response, and this engagement indicates that it is a relevant concern for consumers. "Controversy" is acknowledged as a discussion that is notable for conflicting views (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Therefore, the brand stance on important societal collective issues can be recognized as controversial. The controversiality of the stand might resonate on brands, with part of the public threatening with a boycott.

Prior research already showed how the valence related to attitude towards the advertisement could reflect on consumers' attitudes towards the product, disregarding

if the campaign does not provide information related to the product (Harben, & Kim, 2008). Furthermore, consumers are more inclined to boycott when the corporate behavior is recognized as more reprehensible and that the balance of the cost-benefit reasons for the act is favorable to their purposes, providing self-enhancement while avoiding guilt (Klein, Smith, & Andrew, 2004). Moreover, this sacrifice is also associated with dissonance reduction since a purchase could be a source of internal conflict (John & Klein, 2003). Besides, negative feelings are drivers of boycott participation (Rim, Lee, & Yoo, 2020). The intentional avoidance of buying products is also part of political consumerism, where boycotts are considered part of a political act in a polarized context (Kam & Deichert, 2020). This use of political reasons to boycott is more likely to occur among left-wing consumers (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020). Based on the controversiality of a brand taking a stance alongside the political consumerism as a possible response of consumers to social justice advertisements, this research seeks to answer the following research question:

> **RQ3:** *Are consumers more inclined to boycott the brands' products or services if these brands plainly support the controversial stance in a woke campaign?*

2.5 Attribution theory and the Persuasion Knowledge Model

Attribution theory postulates that consumers use knowledge to arrive at causal explanations for events (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). They pay particular attention to whether the conduct is intentional, and if motive and behavior are coherent (Jones and Davis, 1965). Generally, consumers attribute two reasons to pro-social corporate actions: *intrinsic motivations*, when the firm has a goal of doing good or *extrinsic motives*, which refers to the agenda of benefiting the company (Leonidou and Skarmeas, 2017). When a business launches a woke campaign, it can be associated with *intrinsic* or *extrinsic* purposes. The more congruent the prior corporate actions are with the cause, the more likely consumers will attribute the effort to intrinsic motives.

According to Friestad and Wright (1994), attribution theory accounts for persuasion and offers partial insight into consumers' capacity to interpret advertisers' behaviors. In the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), the interpretation and response to the persuasion attempt are influenced by consumers' knowledge on different structures,

such as *persuasion*, *agent, or topic* knowledge (Friestad and Wright, 1994). This knowledge can develop over time, according to people's accumulated experiences. Likewise, when consumers respond to a persuasion attempt, which is called "coping," they select response tactics from a personal repertoire (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Based on these theories, it is expected that consumers use the knowledge they have previously obtained in their responses to the advertisements. Furthermore, when the firm's motives increase suspicions, this knowledge will likely be used to contest or argue about the arguments' trustworthiness in the woke advertisement.

3.0 Method

3.1 Data collection

Several woke campaigns have become viral, attracting both media coverage and a high number of social media reactions (e.g., comments). Content analysis is considered an appropriate method to capture the consumers' actual attitudes to these advertisements. Surveys, which are often used, might suffer from the tendency of respondents to answer in a politically correct way, known as "social desirability bias" (Mick, 1996). This is considered to be crucial because these campaigns elevate politically correct topics. Therefore, the voluntary and anonymous nature of this method is essential. Besides, content analysis reduces the problem of finding a representative of the target audience, as commenters have actively involved themselves with the campaign, leaving opinions. This is significant since it might seem that woke campaigns are targeting only an audience who are more likely to agree with the topic; thus, sampling non-agreeing people could be considered irrelevant. However, any consumer who cares enough to leave a comment on the campaign, agreeing or not, most likely consider themselves the target audience, hence this method captures a more representative picture.

The massive number of comments is another reason that content analysis is considered a suitable method. The technique uses different steps to produce accurate inferences from textual data (Weber, 1990). Besides, content analysis is an inconspicuous and more context-sensitive approach than other methods, and it can handle a considerable amount of data (Krippendorff, 2013).

As a rule, it has been decided to majorly examine the comments from social justice advertising campaigns published on YouTube and Facebook. One of the benefits of collecting comments from videos posted on an online channel, such as YouTube, is that the commenters actively and voluntarily express their opinion, which is most likely their sincere opinion as they can stay anonymous. According to Wu & Atkin (2018), there is a positive connection between being online anonymous and the likelihood to communicate a point of view since the anonymity protects individuals from undesirable ramifications. This allows for the collection of relevant audience comments. Furthermore, social interaction assumes a vital role as a reason for commenting since the action is also connected with pursuing self-status (Khan, 2017).

Through YouTube, it is possible to recognize this research's general population by the source of the video, e.g., a video launched in the U.S. channel has a more significant impact on the general U.S. public. Besides, for one video, Facebook was used as a source to collect comments. The exception was allowed for a relatively new and polemic Scandinavian woke campaign. On Facebook, the majority of profiles contain personal information. However, personal information was not collected or analyzed, and respondents were "made" untraceable. For this last source, it was prevalent that the campaign had a more significant repercussion within the Scandinavian public.

To define which social justice campaigns to examine, woke campaigns that were considered controversial by the media and the public were identified. Further, these advertisements were searched for on YouTube. As a criterion, the publisher had to be the brand's official channel, and the videos should have generated a high number of reactions (e.g., comments) and controversy. In the selection, videos that had generated mostly negative, positive, or split reactions were included. Further, a good variation of woke themes had to be covered. Finally, some companies, such as Procter & Gamble, did several woke campaigns, but only one campaign per enterprise was selected, resulting in diverse corporate credibility connected with each video.

Considering the criteria above, after all, five videos were collected from YouTube and Facebook, and were included in the final analysis: "The Best Men Can Be" by Gillette, and "is it ok for you guys…" by AXE, representing the thematic of gender, stereotypes, and male roles. Also, "We Accept" by Airbnb, "Born the Hard Way" by Budweiser,

and "What is truly Scandinavian?" from SAS, approaching the immigration and open borders social issue (YouTube, 2020) (Appendix 1).

"The Best Men Can Be" is the most emblematic controversial advertisement because it has attracted over 33 million views, and 1,5 million dislikes on the video, compared with 810.000 likes. Talking about the wrong way men have been approaching women, the video resulted in 457.881 comments. On the other hand, "is it ok for you guys," emphasizes the male doubts concerning different behaviors that can be considered inappropriate for guys, such as disliking sports. This campaign results in 814.910 views, 734 comments, and only 7% of the evaluations are dislikes. The third campaign, "We Accept," is focused on accepting diversity in its different forms, resulting in more than 5 million views, 1.331 comments, and around 42% of dislikes. Besides, "Born the Hard Way" is related to the immigration of the Budweiser's founder to America and occasioned more than 1,8 million views, 2.947 comments, and 39% of dislikes. Lastly, "What is truly Scandinavian," with a message that everything considered Scandinavian has a foreign origin, has 325.000 views, 13.000 comments, and balanced reactions: 6.100 angry emoticons against 4.600 thumbs up (likes), and 2.300 hearts, in a total of 6.900 positive evaluations.

The five sources have, in sum, 475.893 comments. To make this analysis feasible, a sample of comments from the videos for the primary analysis will be selected. For AXE, Budweiser, Airbnb, and SAS, first, the category "newest" (Youtube) or "oldest" (Facebook) will be chosen to organize the comments on the social media channel. Then, the comments will be loaded several times, and every 5th comment will be extracted, and it will be kept or discarded depending on the relevance. When it is possible, the extraction will continue until 100 relevant comments are reached. If new relevant or new content related to the research is detected, an expansion of the sample will find a place, adding between 50-100 comments. When redundancy is achieved, the extraction is finished. Also, a sample of 30 or more comments from the category "most relevant comments" will be added to the regular sample of 100 by taking every single in this ranking. Differently, Gillette is responsible for the majority of comments, and the comments section is saturated with comments from the same users. Therefore, a special rule of every 15th comment will be used for the "newest" ones, allowing to

reach more from the old ones, and more comments from the "most relevant" will be extracted, with a caution of not taking more than one comment by the same user.

3.2 Coding

The subsequent steps, followed by the data collection, are the analysis and coding of the material. In this research, we will proceed with individual coding of the data employing *propositional units* (Krippendorff, 2013). The propositions are defined by Krippendorff (2013, 108) as "elementary statements—basic sentences, complete claims, whole assertions, not yet analyzed—that can be strung together with the logical connectors *and* either-or." In this way, the semantic relations formed among concepts that are components of the textual material can be identified, permitting to code attitudes and choices present in the comments, e.g., support of the advertising (attitude). First, some categories and coding guidelines were developed based on a comments' pre-screening and some assumptions of what was expected to be found while analyzing the content. Further, a second screening of the collected comments found a place. This was done to identify patterns in argumentation that can be categorized. Finally, the content analysis with the collected comments was done, with a coding based on the categories established and attention to make posterior adjustments.

3.2.1 Coding guidelines

In order to not be eliminated, the comment should not encompass an ambiguous language. The comments included in the analysis will be coded independently based on the following rules from Table 1:

Variable	Rule	Definition
General support of the advertisement and social issue in comment	1 = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly states his attitude towards the advertisement and social issue in a generic manner.
Support of the advertisement in comment	1 = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly states his/her attitude towards the advertisement.
Support of the brand in comment	1 = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly states his/her attitude towards the brand.

Support of the social issue in comment	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly states his/her attitude towards the theme (cause/issue) explored in the social justice advertisement.
Purchase intention from brand	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter communicating a clear intention to purchase from the brand because of the social justice advertisement.
Promising boycott of the brand due to the advertisement	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter states an intention to boycott the brand after watching the campaign.
Support of the conservative viewpoint	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly states his/her conservative political attitude after watching the campaign.
Support of the leftist viewpoint	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly states his/her leftist political attitude after watching the campaign.
Questioning the historical facts	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly questions the historical facts presented in the advertisement.
Questioning the trustworthiness in the advertisement	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly questions the authenticity or the motivation of the sender or the reliability of the message
Questioning the reasoning in the advertisement	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly questions the argumentation presented in the advertisement.
Questioning the relevance of the advertisement for the target group	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly questions the relevance of the advertisement for the target customer.
Questioning the logic between the product and the cause	I = YES; 0 = Any other way	Commenter publicly and plainly questions the relationship between the product and the cause presented in the advertisement.

Table 1. Coding Guidelines

3.3 Validity and reliability

Some reliability problems can appear while doing content analysis because of several motives, such as unclear word connotation, dubious coding instructions, and

disagreement between coders' classification (Weber, 1990). The coding guidelines presented above will increase the internal reliability as the same data will be further analyzed using the same criteria by both coders (Weber, 1990). Researchers discussed validity issues that can affect the acceptability of the results as plausible (Krippendorff 2013; Weber 1990). In the present material, we will ensure validity with theoretical support during the different stages and overcome the *conceptual obstacle* by following the coding guidelines and meticulous evaluating the data (Krippendorff, 2013). To certify inter-rater reliability in the procedure, the coders proceeded individually with the coding of the sheet with 746 lines. The only exception was SAS, where only one coder finished the process after the agreement, and the answers were copied to the other sheet. Afterward, the two datasets were imported from excel to SPSS and were compared using the function for comparison. With the tool, it was possible to verify the % of agreement between raters and identify the mismatches. The use of this technique enabled to compare the entire datasets instead of using Cohen's Kappa on each column. The method produced 79,4% of agreement and presented all the columns and rows with mismatches. After identifying the disagreements, every case was discussed until an agreement of 100% was reached and one dataset ready for analysis.

4.0 Results

The data analysis revealed that 33,1% of the comments (247 commenters) supported the campaigns, offering general support through a short comment with positive expressions, or directly endorsing advertising, brand, or cause, and sometimes claiming purchase intention. Approximately one-third of the supportive comments were in favor of more than one element in the same message. Contrary, 66,9% of the overall comments (499 commenters) were non-supportive of the campaigns. This category included comments that explicitly express criticism towards the advertisement, brand, or cause and messages that are not supportive of any of the defined elements (i.e., campaign, brand, cause, or purchase intention). Among those who are non-supporters, the main factors that are questioned are related to the trustworthiness or the reasoning in the advertisement. Politically, the majority of the non-supporters that express a political viewpoint are conservative. Additionally, almost one-fourth of non-supporters declared they would stop buying the brand advertised or using its service. Finally, the

expression of purchase intention is lower among the supportive group than the boycott intention in the non-supportive, indicating higher engagement in the latter category.

The results brought light into some common elements pointed by both consumers who reacted positively to the advertisements or rejected the campaigns, but they appear discrepant with the overall valence of the video campaigns described in the methodology, that showed slightly in favor of these videos, except for Gillette. One possible explanation is that as the number of negative comments from viewers increases, a selection occurs, and individuals with less involvement participate less, the same as occurs in online ratings (Hu, Bose, Koh, & Liu, 2012). Possibly, part of the people providing a "like" does not feel so involved as the ones providing a "dislike." Since felt involvement is a state that affects the cognitive process (Celsi & Olson, 1988), it can impact the need to leave a comment. Therefore, the messages would not necessarily represent the entire base of evaluators, and differences between the proportion of likes-dislikes and the overall valence of the comments occur.

The preceding section elucidated the categorization of comments. Subsequently, the analysis was converted in the successive tables. Table 2 presents the percentages for the overall categories, "supportive" and "non-supportive," created from the dataset. Furthermore, Table 3 introduces the frequencies for each campaign analyzed. Besides, Table 4 exhibits the disposition of the number of comments for the individual categories from the coding guidelines delimited in the method chapter and its respective averages. Further, the subsections 4.1 to 4.14 will examine the results from these different variables, showing different examples to illustrate the categories, from the most to the least common category. Lastly, the subsections 4.15 and 4.16 will discuss the results from the five campaigns, grouping in the two themes: (a) gender, "male role," and stereotypes; (b) "immigration," and "open borders."

Overall Categories			
Categories	**Description**	**Sum**	**%**
Supportive	Shows general or specific support to the advertisement, brand, or social issue in comment.	247	33,1%
Non-supportive	Does not show any support to the advertisement, brand, or social issue in comment.	499	66,9%

Table 2. Support and non-supportive amount of comments
*dataset = 746 comments

Overall Categories – per campaign										
Categories	**Airbnb**		**Budweiser**		**SAS**		**Gillette**		**AXE**	
	Sum	%	Sum	%	Sum	%	Sum	%	Sum	%
Supportive	38	28%	82	46%	46	35%	2	1%	79	80%
Non-supportive	99	72%	97	54%	85	65%	198	99%	20	20%
TOTAL	137	100%	179	100%	131	100%	200	100%	99	100%

Table 3. Support and non-supportive amount of comments – per campaign
*dataset = 746 comments

General Analysis				
Variable	**Supportive**		**Non-supportive**	
	Sum	%	Sum	%
General support of the advertisement and social issue in comment	134	54.3%	0	0,0%
Support of the advertisement in comment	95	38.5%	0	0,0%
Support of the brand in comment	54	21.9%	0	0,0%
Support of the social issue in comment	56	22.7%	0	0,0%
Purchase intention from brand	22	8.9%	0	0,0%
Promising boycott of the brand due to the advertisement	0	0.0%	116	23,2%
Support of the conservative viewpoint	3	1.2%	78	15,6%
Support of the leftist viewpoint	13	5.3%	5	1,0%
Questioning the historical facts	0	0.0%	9	1,8%
Questioning the trustworthiness in the advertisement	0	0.0%	87	17,4%
Questioning the reasoning in the advertisement	0	0.0%	77	15,4%
Questioning the relevance of the advertisement for the target group	0	0.0%	18	3,6%
Questioning the logic between the product and the cause	0	0.0%	10	2,0%
Questioning the corporate credibility	1	0.4%	33	6,6%

Table 4. Overall results for each variable
*dataset = 746 comments

4.1 General support of the advertisement and social issue in comment

As observed in Table 4, 54,3% of the supportive observations are considered general support of the advertisement and social issue, which means that of the 247 comments in support, 134 employed explicit and brief expressions of approval. The statements were not sufficiently elaborated to be in a more specific category. As exemplified by:

> This is beautiful ❤️❤️ **(From Youtube (Airbnb, 2017))**
>
> best ad you've made, thank you for this **(From Youtube (Axe, 2017))**

The exception to this category was used for Budweiser. Some commenters appear not to understand what is political in the production, thus being unaware of the message. Therefore, short positive comments are labeled in support of the advertising only. Moreover, if the brand were praised in the comment, this element would also be categorized in the category "Support of the brand in comment" (4.4).

4.2 Support of the advertisement in comment

A lower number of comments support the advertisement in the comment, 95 of 247 supportive observations. Therefore, 38,5% of the comments supporting the campaigns are evaluated to support the advertisement in a comment. As a rule, the category does not overlap the previous one because comments are only categorized in "general support" or "support of the advertisement," depending on the content. The explicit declaration of support to the commercial must be in the statement to ensure its approval. Different intensities of support can be observed from commenters. More than half of the commenters in this category support the advertisement and also the brand or social issue. Some commenters highlight how good the commercial is while others question why so many persons show disapproval. For example:

> wow... americans became very racist when I look at these comments... so sad Very strong commercial, how could anyone hate it?! **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> It's probably the most complete commercial I've seen in a long time! This is, after all, a tribute to the innovative Scandinavian people. About how we constantly allow new inspiration to shape our culture. Well Done! **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020))**

As the results show, the campaign seems as a critical element supported in the messages. It is noticed that the woke advertisement was also mentioned by the non-supporters to demonstrate dislike to the commercial. Sometimes, the disapproval of the campaign comes with a swift in their previous favorable brand attitude, such as:

> It's a horrible commercial. I used to love SAS. Now I dislike it more and more every day. **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020)**

> Budweiser lost me when they quit making commercials with the Clydesdales in them...... **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

The **RQ1** speculated on what role the dislike of a woke campaign can play in the consumer's prior brand likeability. Some comments show that the attitude towards the campaign may be associated with an attitudinal change towards the brand, e.g., the liking of the brand converted to dislike. If consumers change their prior attitude to the brand to be in balance with their perceptions about the campaign, this is consistent with Balance Theory (Heider, 1946; Mackenzie et al., 1986). Sometimes, the opposite, i.e., the liking of a social justice campaign was also able to transform a previous negative brand attitude, indicating a more positive feeling towards the brand. For example:

> You know, I used to hate Lynx/Axe. It was also the 'trendy' deodorant that people (13 year olds, at least when I was in school) used to use, and combined with the constant use of 'use axe and get laid every day guaranteed 100%' made me cringe. This was different, and about a thousand times better. Whoever came up with this - props to you. Give them a promotion. **(From Youtube (Axe, 2017))**

4.3 Support of the social issue in comment

56 comments came in support of the social issue presented in the campaign, or 22,7% of all supportive observations. The comments illustrated various reasons for supporting the social cause, e.g., some could relate to the issue due to personal reasons. In contrast, others expressed the cause highlighting the matter as a societal concern. Besides, several commenters elaborate on why these issues are essential by emphasizing problems and flaws in today's society. Some commenters interpreted the stance positively (i.e., a stance on inclusion), whereas others viewed it as a stance against a negatively loaded value (i.e., a stance against hate). The following examples aim to illustrate the nuances within the category support of the social issue in the comment:

> Thought you were a great organization to begin with. Thank you for your stance on inclusion, love, tolerance, etc. **(From Youtube (Airbnb, 2017))**

> Thank you Airbud for taking a stand against hate! Silence is violence. (From Youtube **(Budweiser, 2017))**

> Well done, #flysas! This should remind us all how diverse, resourceful and beautifully colorful our world is and how great source of inspiration that can be for human progress. Last but not the least, this all comes back to their brand purpose. Amazing work! 👏 SENODK **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020))**

The number of comments supporting the social issue in this specific category indicates that the cause is slightly more supported than the brand in a comment. However, several comments inside the "general support" also prove that the cause is indeed the most relevant factor mentioned in a comment. Likewise, the cause seems to drive the comment responses among both the supporters and the non-supporters, and often come with an attitude towards the advertisement, supporting or criticizing the campaign.

This shed light on **RQ2** on in which manner the likeability of the cause present in the woke campaign affects consumer's overall liking of the advertisement alongside to support or criticism. An attentive analysis showed that some commenters showed that this response depends on the congruence between the issue and previous beliefs. When they are more consonant, this impacts positive attitude and support to the campaign, which is consistent with prior research (Samo et al., 2018). The perceived relevance of the cause is connected with the positive response in some cases and agreement with previous studies (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). Among non-supports, the cause can also be relevant, but their values about the stance were in dissonance with the campaign, as a source of criticism, sometimes, followed by intent to boycott.

4.4 Support of the brand in comment

A similar number of commenters, 54, are supportive of the brand in various degrees, or 21,9% of the supportive group. To be sure the commenters were specifically supporting the brand, clear statements of support had to be present. Some express their support by defending the brand and by answering other critics in the comment field. Others show gratitude towards the brand and for taking a stand. For example:

> Ooh... now that all the Orange Hitler supporters are boycotting Bud, that means there's more for me! 🍺😊 cheers! #ImWithBud #BudIsMyBuddy **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> Well done, SAS! You are an example to everyone. **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020))**

> i love you AXE, if someone would've made a commercial like that a few years ago my teenage life would be much better, thank you **(From Youtube (Axe, 2017))**

4.5 Promising boycott of the brand due to the advertisement

Inside the non-supportive sample (499 comments), a total of 116 commenters state an intention to boycott the brand due to the advertisement, which represents 23,3% of the

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group or 16% of the entire sample (746 comments). This result answers the **RQ3** showing that consumers are inclined to boycott the brand's products and services if these brands offer public support to a cause in a woke campaign, taking a controversial stance. A detailed analysis is shown in Table 5:

Boycott analysis		
Variable	**Sum**	**%**
Support of the conservative viewpoint	21	18,1%
Support of the leftist viewpoint	0	0,0%
Questioning the historical facts	0	0,0%
Questioning the trustworthiness in the advertisement	8	6,9%
Questioning the reasoning in the advertisement	7	6,0%
Questioning the relevance of the advertisement for the target group	2	1,7%
Questioning the logic between the product and the cause	1	0,9%
Questioning the corporate credibility	1	0,9%

Table 5. Boycott analysis
*dataset boycott: 116 comments

A total of 21 commenters, 18,1% of the boycotters, exhibit a conservative viewpoint represented by a statement in favor of specific politicians (e.g., Trump) or political party (e.g., Republicans), or criticizing the leftist perspective of the campaign. Also, 6,9% of the commenters with an intention to boycott often question the trustworthiness of the campaign, and 6% inquire about the reasoning in the advertisement. Some commenters just stated boycott through the statement: *Go woke. Go Broke*. Others elaborated their reasons, showing the intention of a boycott combined with a political viewpoint, skepticism about authenticity, or the advertisement's argument, which are illustrated by the following comment examples:

> The people who drink your beer are hard working Americans who voted for Trump. NEVER buying a Buttwiper beer ever again. **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> Buh bye Gillette. Been using your razors refills for 25 years and your clear gel deodorant 10ish years. You lost me forever with this offensive woke BS. My best is supporting companies that don't push PC rubbish. **(From Youtube (Gillette, 2019))**

> Goodbye SAS, I now want to use an airline that is proud to be Scandinavian. Norwegian with its Scandinavian writers and artists adorned the aircraftbody. **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020))**

4.6 Questioning the trustworthiness in the advertisement

The most questioned factor in the advertisements is trustworthiness, totalizing 87 commenters, or 17,4% of the non-supportive group. Only 38 of these commenters are classified politically, and they are judged in support of the conservative viewpoint. Several commenters label the campaigns as "hypocritical" or "propaganda." They also claim the companies have a hidden political motivation or agenda. For example:

> Only Joseph Goebbels could come up with this kind of propaganda. **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> This coming from the same company that makes razors for men and women, and charge more for the women's to be pink? I though hair was hair and men and women are equal? What a corporate hypocrisy. **(From Youtube (Gillette, 2019))**

> Unbelievable... just unbelievable. This is pure provocation. Best of luck with your finance for 2020 - you're gonna need it. **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020))**

4.7 Support of the conservative viewpoint

In total, 81 commenters present a conservative viewpoint. From this amount, 78 commenters, 15,6% of the non-supportive group, do not support the campaigns, the brand, or the social cause. To be considered conservative, the comment has to plainly state a critic against liberals or leftist parties or show disapproval with the campaign because it can be considered a direct critic to a Republican politician (e.g., Trump). Besides, commenters who depreciate leftist social justice causes (e.g., feminism) are also labeled as conservative. The examples below illustrate the different beliefs:

> The funny thing is, companies like this really do not care at all about peoples' rights. They're just manipulating the viewers emotions for their own personal profit, and when your audience is filled with liberals and "progressives", it's like shooting fish in a barrel. **(From Youtube (Airbnb, 2017))**

> <Gillette are bigger losers than the Democrats!> **(From Youtube (Gillette, 2019))**

> Another piece of anti-Trump propaganda......I hope your profits drop like a rock.....GOD BLESS AMERICA! **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> Just advertise your putrid body spray and save the feminist propaganda for some nickle and dime women's studies course. **(From Youtube (Axe, 2017))**

Three intriguing exceptions represent conservatives that also support the campaigns. In two of the comments, the political viewpoint is in favor of a conservative party or politician, and the messages also approve the commercial. The remaining comment criticizes feminism with swearing but mentions that the video is better than the one from Gillette. Since woke campaigns show a leftist angle, when the commenter expresses a strongly negative position using bad wording against the cause, he or she is regarded as conservative instead of politically neutral. As the exceptions show:

> I'm a republican and I love this commercial there's nothing wrong with it the left is saying we said stuff that never happened **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> This is more of an example of the American dream than anything to do with Trump who i support. i loved this commercial! **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> better than the Gillette ads that's outright a feminist shiet. **(From Youtube (AXE, 2017))**

4.8 Questioning the reasoning in the advertisement

The second most questioned item is the advertisement's reasoning, with 77 commenters, or 15,4% of the non-supportive group. The commenters either question or disagree with the argumentation presented in the advertising (e.g., questioning the claims). Examples of this are illustrated below:

> Goes to speak to woman →" Not cool bro " So I guess we can't talk to women any more... I can't understand why we have to marginalize women like that Gillette! Isn't that a counter intuitive solution to this serious matter you brought up? Please make another video to explain! **(From Youtube (Gillette, 2019))**

> "Nothing is special about your culture, actually you don't have a culture at all - But everyone else does. oh, and you never contributed anything to the world, you stole everything. ..please give us your money" **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020))**

> We can't all belong. Or accept, when they do not do the same in their own home country. Sorry but its the brute fucking truth. We've been bending over because of democracy and ive fucking had enough of it. **(From Youtube (Airbnb, 2017))**

4.9 Purchase intention from brand

The intention of purchase from the brand is identified when the commenter communicates a clear intent to purchase because of the social justice advertisement.

8,9% (22 comments) of the supportive observations express an intention to start buying, continue to buy or purchase more than before. Several of the commenters express a clear intention to purchase due to shared values, more specifically due to the company standing up for what the commenter refers to as "right." Others applaud the brand and express intention to purchase as of showing courage to elevate controversial topics. A more thorough analysis was made, and the results are shown in Table 6:

Purchase intention analysis		
Variable	Sum	%
General support of the advertisement and social issue in comment	7	31,8%
Support of the advertisement in comment	12	54,5%
Support of the brand in comment	12	54,5%
Support of the social issue in comment	7	31,8%
Support of the conservative viewpoint	0	0,0%
Support of the leftist viewpoint	2	9,1%

Table 6. Purchase intention analysis
*dataset purchase intention = 22 comments

Among the commenters who say they will buy more, more than half of the observations are expressing support of the advertisement (54,5%) and support of the brand (54,5%). 31,8% state their support to the social issue, and also 31,8 % leave a brief general supportive comment. 9,1% of these comments can be classified as supporting the leftist viewpoint, and any was labeled as conservative. As the following examples illustrate:

> When I drink a Budweiser for the first time tonight while watching this commercial. I know I will be drinking the tears of small minded individuals who are too lazy to do any research and too sensitive to leave the bubble that keeps them safe at night. It will be glorious. **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> Wow! Quite brave and refreshing commercial in these times of rising nationalism. I love the video! And I will fly SAS even more from now on 😋 **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020))**

> Great ad! We've haven't used Airbnb before when we travel...which is often.....we will from now on. Thank you for the message about what really makes America great! **(From Youtube (Airbnb, 2017))**

4.10 Questioning the corporate credibility

33 commenters (6,6% in the non-supportive group) questioned the companies' corporate credibility. Several commenters base their skepticism on previous knowledge

on actions of the companies and emphasize the hypocrisy of taking a stand on a cause while simultaneously breaking protocols in related areas. As the examples show:

> This coming from the same company that makes razors for men and women, and charge more for the women's to be pink? I though hair was hair and men and women are equal? What a corporate hypocrisy. **(From Youtube (Gillette, 2019))**

> Of course a Euro company, like InBev, would make an ad to trash the USA. **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> Most of your customers don't pay taxes on their rentals which puts hotels and motels at a disadvantage who pay extra rates and taxes. Does this make your business unethical? **(From Youtube (Airbnb, 2017))**

Although most of the commenters in this category were in the non-supportive group, one comment was judged to be supportive of the advertisement. This observation demonstrates that the commenter likes the advertisement but evaluates the company's management of public criticism as questionable. As illustrated:

> SAS, you acted very cowardly taking away this ad. It's a very good ad, so why listen to those offended by it. It's coward to take it away... Are you afraid to loose customers? Money rules. **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020))**

4.11 Support of the leftist viewpoint

A lower number of comments show support of the leftist viewpoint, just 18 of 746. From this amount, 13 are among supporters (5,3% of the supportive group). The majority of comments do not clearly express a leftist viewpoint to ensure accuracy. A comment in favor of a cause is not necessarily from someone with leftist political ideology. To ensure a comment is leftist, a statement of criticism should be made towards the Right-wing as indicated by the following:

> A dead spiral, paranoia from the right makes more terrorists. Get over yourself. I support AirBnB on this. **(From Youtube (AirBnB, 2017))**

> Praise to Budweiser. Have the courage to piss off these mindless hordes of alt right internet trolls. **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> Lol people are upset because this is an immigrant story loosely based on the creation of the company that created this beer? Wow, y'all are sensitive. You people want to call it "anti-trump", but fail to realize that it's more "pro-inclusion" than anything else. So that means you

guys are "anti-inclusion" which makes sense, since most of you guys voted for Trump. **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

The leftist viewpoint is also present in five non-supportive comments that are purely political and make jokes about the conservatives. However, there is no evidence of support of the commercial, brand, or cause. These exceptions are exemplified by:

Figures that Trump supporters would be made up of hateful creatures. All the right-wing does is hate hate hate. Their mentality is what causes them to live miserable lives… **(From Youtube (Airbnb, 2017))**

Lol, alt-righters are like "this commercial doesn't express enough hate". **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

4.12 Questioning the relevance of the advertisement for the target group

Only 18 comments, 3,6% of the non-supportive category, are questioning the relevance of the advertisement for the target group. The comments in this sample evaluated the campaign as unfavorable for its segment. In the consumers' views, the segments are related to demographics (e.g., gender), political orientation, and other beliefs that are offended by the campaigns, as shown by the examples below:

What an odd marketing gimmick. This is the same company that had done a good job of knowing who their base consumers were. Did they forget who drinks Budweiser? **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

This add is very poorly thought out. It is anti-masculine male. Who is their demographic? **(From Youtube (Axe, 2017))**

4.13 Questioning the historical facts

A low number of comments, 9 comments (1,8% of the non-supportive group) clearly questions the historical facts presented in the advertisement. Some of the commenters claim that the story portrayed is wrong; some state it is dishonest, whereas some plainly present the facts they consider correct in contrast to what is observed. For example:

Adolphus Busch was educated and came from a rich family. When your world view becomes this disconnected, do you change your mind? No, you rewrite history. **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

4.14 Questioning the logic between the product and the cause

One of the elements that aroused fewer questions in the observations was the logic between product and cause, with only 10 commenters, or 2% of the non-supportive comments. To be considered part of the category, the comment should question what the coherence between the service or product and the cause is, as exemplified by:

> Since when does renting someone's house for a week become a commercial about race and religion? **(From Youtube (Airbnb, 2017))**

> agree with the sentiment. do NOT agree with the sentiment being used to sell cancerous petrol-smelling garbage for spraying all over yourself **(From Youtube (Axe, 2017))**

4.15 Gender, "male roles," stereotype: Gillette and Axe

One of the central themes in two of the social justice advertisements selected is "Gender, *male roles*, and stereotypes." The common topic is used to allow for a proper comparison between campaigns, controlling, to some extent, for this variable. Besides, Gillette and Axe are also brands in the same category within the male toiletries market. Gillette is the most rejected campaign, with 99% of non-supportive comments against only 20% in the Axe sample (Table 3). To examine the main differences between the results for the campaigns, further analysis was made, illustrated in Table 7:

Gender/ "Male roles"/ Stereotypes								
	Gillette				Axe			
Variable	Supportive (2)		Non-supportive (198)		Supportive (79)		Non-supportive (20)	
	Sum	%	Sum	%	Sum	%	Sum	%
General support of the advertisement and social issue in comment	2	100%	0	0%	66	83,5%	0	0%
Support of the advertisement in comment	0	0%	0	0%	7	8,9%	0	0%
Support of the brand in comment	0	0%	0	0%	17	21,5%	0	0%
Support of the social issue in comment	0	0%	0	0%	13	16,5%	0	0%
Purchase intention from brand	0	0%	0	0%	2	2,5%	0	0%
Promising boycott of the brand due to the advertisement	0	0%	60	30,3%	0	0%	1	5%
Support of the conservative viewpoint	0	0%	20	10,1%	1	1,3%	4	20%

Support of the leftist viewpoint	0	0%	0	0%	1	1,3%	0	0%
Questioning the historical facts	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Questioning the trustworthiness in the advertisement	0	0%	19	9,6%	0	0%	3	15%
Questioning the reasoning in the advertisement	0	0%	15	7,6%	0	0%	2	10%
Questioning the relevance of the advertisement for the target group	0	0%	10	5,1%	0	0%	1	5%
Questioning the logic between the product and the cause	0	0%	3	1,5%	0	0%	3	15%
Questioning the corporate credibility	0	0%	20	10,1%	0	0%	0	0%

Table 7. Gillette and Axe results
*dataset Gillette= 200 comments │ dataset Axe= 99 comments

While Gillette has only 2 general supportive comments, Axe has 79 commenters supporting the campaign. Within Axe's supportive group, 66 express general support (83,5%), 17 praise to the brand in the comment (21,5%), 13 support the social issue (16,5%), 7 support the advertisement (8,9%), and 2 comments mention purchase intention (2,5%). All the percentages take into consideration the comments from Axe's supportive group, in total, 79. The small support to Gillette came from brief statements, such as "Perfect." In contrast, the commenters supporting Axe focus on the cause, expressing gratitude for the campaign, and use the message to mention that the campaign is better than Gillette's commercial. Some commenters also talk about the brand's repositioning. For example:

> Very impressed on your new message and focus. Be proud of what you are doing now it's more than just a product. **(From Youtube (Axe, 2017))**

Among the non-supportive comments in the Gillette's campaign, 20 commenters (10,1%) make questions about the corporate credibility and address criticism to some of Procter & Gamble's practices. For instance, child labor, testing on animals, unsustainable use of palm oil in products, and charging women more for shaving products (i.e., "pink tax"). On the other hand, no comment refers to corporate abuses in Axe's observations. Moreover, in Gillette's commercial, 19 of the non-supportive comments (9,6%) question the trustworthiness of the advertisement. For example, the

commenters show skepticism about using the clip with the American political commentator Ana Kasparian inside the campaign. In contrast, significantly fewer commenters question the trustworthiness in Axe's campaign, only 3 comments in the respective non-supportive group (15%). All the percentages are related to the non-supportive groups from Gillette (198 comments), and Axe (20 comments).

Still considering the non-supporters, in Gillette's commercial, 15 commenters (7,6%) inquire about the reasoning in the video (e.g., a man touching a woman's shoulder being connected to sexual harassment). In Axe's campaign, just 2 comments (10%) complained about the arguments used. Furthermore, Gillette has 10 non-supportive comments (5,1%) asking about the relevance of the advertisement for the target group. In contrast, in Axe's campaign, only 1 non-supportive commenter (5%) asking about it. Also, the logic between the product and the cause seems as not a relevant factor since only 3 commenters questioned it in each campaign.

In the political aspect, 20 of the non-supporters (10,1%) clearly express conservative viewpoints in Gillette's observations, whereas, in Axe, there were only 4 of the non-supporters (20%) classified as conservative. Finally, one significant difference between both advertisements is related to the boycott intention. 60 commenters, or 30,3% of the non-supportive observations in Gillette, claim the intention to boycott the brand due to the advertisement. In Axe, just one comment showed the same attitude, as exemplified:

> The commercial did a great job raising brand awareness. Men are now looking for the Gillette brand and making sure they don't buy it. **(From Youtube (Gillette, 2019))**

> Yeah, another brand in the bin. You people don't seem to understand how much damage political activists in advertising do to your brands. We vote with our wallets, bye Axe. We will never meet again. **(From Youtube (Axe, 2017))**

4.16 Immigration, "open borders": Airbnb, Budweiser, and SAS

The second central theme in which three of the advertisements englobe is immigration and "open borders." The advertisements for SAS, Budweiser, and Airbnb contain messages encompassing multiculturalism, inclusion, immigration, and acceptance. The common topic allows for comparison; however, the companies' products or services are by very different natures. The analysis showed that Airbnb is the campaign with the highest

frequency of non-supporters, 72%, followed by SAS with 65%, and Budweiser with 54% (Table 3). To examine the similarities and differences between the advertisements, the following tables 8 and 9 were created for further analysis:

	"Open borders" / Immigration							
	Airbnb				**Budweiser**			
Variable	Supportive (38)		Non-supportive (99)		Supportive (82)		Non-supportive (97)	
	Sum	%	Sum	%	Sum	%	Sum	%
General support of the advertisement and social issue in comment	27	71,1%	0	0,0%	4	4,9%	0	0%
Support of the advertisement in comment	6	15,8%	0	0,0%	71	86,6%	0	0%
Support of the brand in comment	9	23,7%	0	0%	18	22,0%	0	0%
Support of the social issue in comment	11	28,9%	0	0%	21	25,6%	0	0%
Purchase intention from brand	1	2,6%	0	0%	15	18,3%	0	0%
Promising boycott of the brand due to the advertisement	0	0%	2	2,0%	0	0%	29	29,9%
Support of the conservative viewpoint	0	0%	22	22,2%	2	2,4%	30	30,9%
Support of the leftist viewpoint	2	5,3%	3	3,0%	10	12,2%	2	2,1%
Questioning the historical facts	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	4,1%
Questioning the trustworthiness in the advertisement	0	0%	31	31,3%	0	0%	30	30,9%
Questioning the reasoning in the advertisement	0	0%	24	24,2%	0	0%	4	4,1%
Questioning the relevance of the advertisement for the target group	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	4,1%
Questioning the logic between the product and the cause	0	0%	3	3,0%	0	0%	0	0%
Questioning the corporate credibility	0	0%	8	8,1%	0	0%	3	3,1%

Table 8. Airbnb and Budweiser results
*dataset Airbnb= 137 comments │ dataset Budweiser= 179 comments

"Open borders" / Immigration				
	SAS			
Variable	Supportive (46)		Non-supportive (86)	
	Sum	%	Sum	%
General support of the advertisement and social issue in comment	35	76,1%	0	0%
Support of the advertisement in comment	11	23,9%	0	0%
Support of the brand in comment	10	21,7%	0	0%
Support of the social issue in comment	11	23,9%	0	0%
Purchase intention from brand	4	8,7%	0	0%
Promising boycott of the brand due to the advertisement	0	0%	24	28,2%
Support of the conservative viewpoint	0	0%	2	2,4%
Support of the leftist viewpoint	0	0%	0	0%
Questioning the historical facts	0	0%	5	5,9%
Questioning the trustworthiness in the advertisement	0	0%	4	4,7%
Questioning the reasoning in the advertisement	0	0%	32	37,6%
Questioning the relevance of the advertisement for the target group	0	0%	3	3,5%
Questioning the logic between the product and the cause	0	0%	1	1,2%
Questioning the corporate credibility	1	2,2%	2	2,4%

Table 9. SAS results
*dataset SAS= 131 comments

Since an exception rule was used for Budweiser, the majority of the supportive comments for this campaign were categorized as in "support of the advertisement" specifically. There had to be more evidence in the comment to ensure that the commenter perceived the political message. As a result, only 4 comments (4,9%) were categorized as "general support of the advertisement and social issue" for Budweiser, whereas 27 comments (71.1%) for Airbnb, and 35 comments (76,1%) for SAS. All the percentages are calculated within their supportive groups, i.e., Airbnb (38 comments), Budweiser (82 comments), and SAS (44 comments). On the other hand, Budweiser has 71 comments (86,59%) in which the commenter is supportive of the advertising, whereas SAS received 11 comments (23,91%) and Airbnb only 6 comments (15,8%). While in SAS and Airbnb campaigns it appears like the political element and the message is captured by the commenters, some of the positive comments for Budweiser only refer to the storyline, as exemplified by:

> I like the commercial it is a story of a man that made his dream come true it is not political at all.It is fucking stupid that people are drawing lines that are not there it is just a story of a man the made his dream come true.Nothing more nothing less. **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

The frequencies that the commenter is supporting the brand are similar for all the three advertisements, with 23,7% (9 comments) for Airbnb, 22% for Budweiser (18 comments), and 21,8% for SAS (10 comments). The same similarity is observed for the support of the social issue, with a slightly higher percentage of supporters in Airbnb directly mentioning the social cause, 29% (11 comments), in comparison with 25,6% for Budweiser (21 comments), and 23,9% for SAS (11 comments). The following comments illustrate the support of the cause concerning the theme:

> as someone who's family included german immigrants and irish immigrants (who at the time were NOT welcome) it's nice to see this! Big ups, budwiser. **(From Youtube (Budweiser, 2017))**

> I absolutely love this spot. It reflects deeply the sense of traveling and the sense of being a real traveler without imposed borders. High five to SAS and to the great minds behind this advertisement ❤️✈️ **(From Facebook (SAS, 2020))**

Still in the supportive group, a more significant difference is observed concerning purchase intention, with just 1 commenter (2,6%) in Airbnb's commercial expressing an intention to buy, 4 commenters (8,7%) in SAS, and 15 commenters (18,3%) in Budweiser's video. Besides, concerning political viewpoints, Budweiser has the highest number of commenters with a clear leftist viewpoint, 12 comments, 10 in the supportive group (12,2%). Several of the leftist commenters are identified by referring to their opponents as "isolationists" and "butt-hurt" or "triggered" conservatives. Airbnb has only 2 commenters with a leftist viewpoint in the supportive group (5,3%) and 3 leftist commenters in the non-supportive group (3% of the non-supportive group). The commenters left orientated that are non-supportive were already explained in the previous category (4.11). SAS has no commenters showing a clear leftist standpoint.

Within the non-supportive group, the analysis of the political viewpoint shows that Budweiser has 30 commenters judged as conservative (31%), and Airbnb has 22 comments (22,2%) labeled as conservative. On the other hand, SAS has only 2 comments (2,4%) judged to favor a conservative angle. The percentages are related to

the non-supportive groups, i.e., Airbnb (99 comments), Budweiser (97 comments), and SAS (86 comments). Besides, some non-supporters also threaten to boycott. Airbnb has only 2 commenters stating about boycott (2%), but 29 commenters (30%) promise boycott on Budweiser, and 24 commenters (28,2%) on SAS.

The number of commenters questioning trustworthiness is relatively high for Airbnb and Budweiser inside the non-supportive category, with 31 comments (31,3%) and 30 comments (31%). In both comment fields, strong language is often used to pinpoint the lack of trustworthiness. Several commenters define the advertisements as "Marxist," or "SJW garbage." One commenter even describes this type of campaign as "pro-Isis ads," and some transfer these negative attitudes to the brand itself by calling them "fascists" and "rubbish beer." The number of comments questioning the trustworthiness is low for SAS, with 4 commenters (4,7%). On the other hand, many commenters are questioning the reasoning in the SAS video, with 32 comments (37,7%), which is the highest number among the three campaigns. In comparison, 24 comments (24,2% of the non-supportive group) are questioning the same in the Airbnb campaign, and only 4 comments (4,1% of the non-supporters) in Budweiser.

Among the three campaigns, the highest number of commenters questioning the corporate credibility was observed in Airbnb's comment section with 8 comments (8% of the non-supportive category). Finally, the category of historical facts was not so prominent in the results, with 5 comments related to this variable in SAS (5,9%) and 4 comments questioning the same in Budweiser (4,1%). No commenter questioned the historical facts in the messages to Airbnb.

5.0 Discussion and Managerial implications

A considerable number of prior research in the advertising field examined consumer reactions to controversial advertisements in the presence of different types of appeal (Aaker & Bruzzone, 1985; Vézina & Paul, 1997; Dahl et al., 2003; Chan et al., 2007; Parry et al., 2013; McIntyre & Sobel, 2017). Nevertheless, research related to social justice campaigns is still nonexistent, even though famous brands have used this strategy more. This study focuses on consumers' reactions to different woke campaigns with mixed responses, revealing some insights about the efficiency of these

advertisements among consumers and the implications for brands. The current findings reveal that a substantial number of commenters are non-supportive to this advertisement and that the disapproval levels vary (Table 3). This content analysis found evidence that the likeability of the cause alongside the brand's stance plays a significant role in the valence of consumers' responses, being the main factor related to support or criticism, and impacting the overall liking or disliking of the advertisements. Furthermore, the study found evidence that the perception of the campaigns can impact prior brand likeability. The study also reveals that political viewpoints can affect advertisements' perception, with more adverse reactions among conservatives. Moreover, factors such as persuasion tactic knowledge influence consumers' responses.

The cause appears to drive the comment responses among both the supporters and the non-supporters. Several of the supportive messages indicate a personal connection and favorability to the cause, complimenting the brands for the stance. This evidence lends support towards earlier research, which found more favorable reactions if the cause is compelling to consumers (Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). Furthermore, many of the supportive comments praised the advertisement alongside not only the social issue but also with the brand, showing that brand likeability in various degrees also plays a role in these dynamics. This result is consistent with previous literature relating brand liking with positive outcomes, such as favorable attitudes (Nguyen et al., 2013). Some supportive consumers indicate an intense connection with the brand, showing loyalty or positive word-of-mouth defending the brand from other commenters. This high level of engagement was found in Batra et al. (2012) findings of brand love. Moreover, among the non-supporters, the cause also stimulates the majority of the commenters. They argue about the cause, how it was portrayed, and its use in campaigns, exhibiting a negative attitude towards the brand (e.g., dislike) because of the advertisement. In light of this association, brand managers should research their target segments and which social issues they feel more connected, thus reducing unfavorable reactions.

It was not observed any commenter that appears to change its previous values and beliefs regarding the cause because of the woke advertisement, however, in some cases, a swift in prior brand attitude occurred depending on the valence of consumers' attitude towards the woke campaign, e.g., dislike the advertisement related to a change to

dislike also the brand. This finding is consistent with Mackenzie et al. (1986), which state that consumers will reach a balanced state by liking the advertisement and the brand or disliking both, and this is sustained by research that found how the agreement with the message arguments can impact on brand attitude (Lord et al., 2013).

Many commenters endorse the social justice campaign or disapprove through good reasoning; however, it appears as the non-supporters have more sophisticated argumentation. Consumers in favor of the advertisement have more emotional arguments supporting their viewpoints, for instance, mentioning feelings, religion, and more regularly than non-supporters telling personal stories related to the causes. Although emotions were predominant, some commenters brought facts, e.g., a commenter talking about the immigration roots in the U.S. Among the non-supporters, some emotions were used in small comments related to political viewpoints, boycott, or product criticism. However, in general, they have better arguments and use facts. For instance, they counter-argue the campaigns, e.g., pointing out the difference between legal and illegal immigration. Considering these facts, it appears as the non-supporters demonstrate high felt involvement, which influences in their cognitive effort to comprehend and elaborate responses, evidence that supports Celsi & Olson (1988).

Still among the non-supporters, several consumers provide arguments beyond the scope of the social justice campaigns questioning the trustworthiness or reasoning by using their prior knowledge about the brand, corporate history, persuasion tactics, or the cause to interpret and respond to the woke campaigns. Usually, adverse reactions were related to the attribution of the corporate actions to extrinsic motives, distrustful about its motivation with the advertisement (Leonidou and Skarmeas, 2017). This evidence validates past research on the knowledge structures used by consumers to understand and *cope* with persuasion attempts (Friestad and Wright, 1994). The PKM model seems like one of the relevant mechanisms that can explain why consumers with different persuasion tactic knowledge may comprehend and react differently to the same social justice campaign. Since the message acceptance and the receiver's reaction are relevant factors related to persuasion (Shelby, 1986), this study indicates that the woke tactic backfired within a large number of consumers, reducing its persuasion power. Managers must maximize the congruence between the campaign and the brand

to diminish the potential backlash of well-informed consumers questioning its reliability.

Another noteworthy finding is related to how political viewpoints can impact the perception of the woke advertisements, with 96% of the commenters identified as conservatives being non-supportive to the advertisement. The liberals were less easily identifiable, and few exceptions were categorized as non-supportive, but actually, they were purely political comments without mentioning rejection of the campaign. This result is consistent with previous advertisement research with a political element indicating that political viewpoints may impact the advertisement, with less positive attitudes linked to conservatives (Harben & Kim, 2008). Furthermore, this evidence supports Samo et al. (2018) that related more congruence between beliefs and values and the campaign with more support to the advertisement, and vice versa.

Among the non-supporters, one relevant finding is that almost one-fourth of the group express the intention to boycott the brand due to the advertisement. This result is consistent with previous research demonstrating a higher likelihood of consumers rejecting products or brands associated with irritating campaigns (Chan et al., 2007). Furthermore, approximately one-fifth of the boycotters express a politically conservative viewpoint, and no comment classified as leftist states the same. The avoidance of buying products is considered a political act that supports previous research (Kam & Deichert, 2020). However, this result is inconsistent with prior literature in which the probability of leftist consumers to boycott is higher (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020). One plausible explanation is that since woke campaigns are developed around leftist causes, the likelihood of the message to bother conservatives are higher. Managers should use wisely consumers' data to formulate the best advertising strategy, carefully considering the political viewpoints of its target groups when taking a stance.

The results for the theme "Gender, Male roles, Stereotypes" show that the commenters engaged in counter-arguing and repudiated Gillette's campaign. While Axe's campaign promotes questions about what is acceptable for men, Gillette's commercial states which male behaviors are inadequate. The rejection is consistent with Armstrong (2010), which highlighted how the resistance to advertisements is associated with the

consumers' previous beliefs; thus, indirect suggestions are more well-received by people than advertisements making conclusions. Besides, it seems as Gillette employed excess of provocation in the campaign. This supports previous research that found adverse effects on consumers' attitudes, especially towards highly provocative campaigns (Vézina, & Paul, 1997). Moreover, the suggestive scenes in Gillette's advertisement can be identified by consumers, thus bringing irritation, finding consistent with Aaker & Bruzzone's (1985). Managers should cautiously consider the elements and the degree of provocation used in the campaign to avoid backlash.

Comparing the advertisements within the theme "Open borders, Immigration," it is possible to notice that Airbnb and SAS have a higher amount of comments criticizing the campaigns, with 72% and 65% non-supportive comments. In comparison, Budweiser has 54% (Table 3). The excellent storyline is an element mentioned in the consumers' response that partly omitted the political stance in their vision. This enjoyable and produced story is considered a copy approach that reduces irritation, and it is congruous with previous research (Aaker & Bruzzone, 1985). Considering these insights, not only the provocation level, as well as the use of copy approaches such as a good narrative, are mandatory for a more effective woke campaign.

Conclusion

Overall, this study suggests that a social justice advertisement can attract consumers' awareness alongside a considerable number of adverse responses. In the worst cases, the negative reactions can come as criticism with threats to boycott the brand's products and services. Even though it is risky, it appears as the campaigns may have a persuasive impact among some consumers, enabling a change in brand attitude associated with the overall liking or disliking of the advertisement. Therefore, a carefully designed social justice campaign could be a possibility to reinforce bonds with consumers within the brand's target group if the cause and stance are meaningful for them, as well as to attract new segments. For a woke campaign to be effective, some specific conditions should be taken into consideration by managers, such as a careful selection of a cause and stance by uncovering what are the relevant issues for the targets, but also guaranteeing congruence between the campaign and the brand. Besides, the political

viewpoints of the consumer segments should be aligned with the stance. Moreover, other insights from this research indicate that a high degree of provocation should be avoided, and irritation elements should be considered together with copy approaches to balance and create a more engaging narrative.

Limitations

Although this content analysis derived comprehension regarding consumers' reactions towards social justice advertisements and the implications for managers of brands, it is valuable to observe its limitations. The qualitative research method was selected to be the most suitable for exploring the subject while avoiding social desirability bias. However, there are constraints to what an exploratory qualitative study can reach, influencing the generalizability of the research findings. Besides, the chosen method with an anonymous sample of respondents extracted from different video campaigns inhibited the collection of more specific demographic information. Furthermore, the lack of prior research connected explicitly with the topic restricted the literature review and discussion sections to previous research related to the theme; therefore, more investigation is indispensable to confirm and extend the current findings.

Directions for future research

More investigation is indispensable to confirm and extend the current findings. Extensions of this work could continue in several strands. Some results related to the theme of immigration in this study show that among the advertisements within this group, the ones related to services, i.e., Airbnb and SAS, have a higher amount of comments non-supportive to the campaigns. Future research should investigate the role of product categories in the efficiency of woke advertisements. Moreover, both services are used by the middle and upper-class, but the limitations of the data do not allow this analysis. Future investigations should shed light on how the brand user profile and other demographics can impact consumers' responses to this campaign. In this study, there was no clear evidence that the country of responders plays a significant role in the consumer's reactions, but future studies should also examine cross-cultural differences related to woke campaigns.

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Appendix 1

Platform	Source	From	Title	# of views	# of comments	# of likes	# of dislikes
Youtube	Gillette	13-01-19	The Best Men Can Be	33.614.933	457.881	810.000	1.500.000
Youtube	AXE	16-05-17	is it ok for you guys…	814.910	734	7.000	508
Youtube	Airbnb	05-02-17	We accept	5.145.714	1.331	5.200	3.700
Youtube	Budweiser Canada	31-01-17	Born the Hard Way	1.844.853	2.947	9.000	5.700
Facebook	SAS	12-02-20	SAS - What is truly Scandinavian?	325.000	13.000	**Reactions** Thumbs up: 4.6 k Angry face: 6.1 k Hearts: 2.3 k Laughing: 429 Crying: 136 Surprised: 44	