

Resisting Black Friday: REI and Patagonia's Stances on Consumerism

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Abstract

As consumers' expectations for brands to take stances on social and political issues continues to grow, the trend of corporate social advocacy (CSA) is important to consider. This study examines two campaigns from outdoor retailers REI and Patagonia against "Black Friday" consumerism on the day after Thanksgiving. Through the lens of CSA, this qualitative case study explores company press releases, social media regarding the campaigns, and traditional media coverage. Individual user comments left on Patagonia's and REI's Instagram posts regarding the campaigns also were studied to determine how the campaigns were received. The findings shed light on the reaction of consumers when companies take stances on social issues that seem to risk their existence as businesses, and the importance of alignment between corporate goals and CSA.

I. Introduction

Businesses have been involved in the shaping of politics and social movements for decades. While much of this activity has been hidden from the public in the past, the recent rise in social media has made the political and social stances of businesses increasingly visible (Edman, 2010; Gaines-Ross, 2017). In 2017, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg took a public stance against President Trump's first executive order limiting immigration to the United States, writing on his Facebook page, "We should also keep our doors open to refugees and those who need help. That's who we are" (Wong, 2017). Along similar lines, Merck CEO Ken Frazier reacted to Trump's response to the tragedy in Charlottesville by resigning from the president's Manufacturing Jobs Initiative and stating, via the Merck Twitter page, "America's leaders must honor our fundamental values by clearly rejecting expressions of hatred, bigotry and group supremacy, which run counter to the American ideal that all people are created equal" (Gaines-Ross, 2017).

Not all political stances come from the voice of the CEO; Nike built a campaign in support of NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick's protest of the national anthem. The athletic retail giant received widespread support for the campaign despite its controversial nature (Boren, 2018). Meanwhile, a study from APCO Worldwide found 90 percent of consumers expect brands to be "involved in taking on society's most pressing concerns" (APCO, 2018). Similarly, a study from Porter Novelli/Cone found that 90% of Generation Z believes companies must address social and environmental issues (Porter Novelli /Cone, 2019).

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As companies continue to face rising pressures to comment on divisive political and social issues, corporations' engagement in these areas, especially when the issues lack direct relevance to companies, is important to consider (Dodd & Supa, 2014). While some corporations take stances that could alienate stakeholders, others take stances that seem counterintuitive to the success of business overall. In 2019, outdoor retailers REI and Patagonia took stances against consumerism by continuing their campaigns against Black Friday sales following Thanksgiving. For businesses, taking a stance against Black Friday can mean risking major profits and disenchanting consumers who look forward to the national day of shopping. This study will compare the two campaigns and evaluate social media reaction in order to determine the importance of these types of campaigns as a type of corporate social advocacy (CSA).

II. Literature Review

This literature review details relevant corporate social advocacy literature, the history of Black Friday, the movement against Black Friday, and corporate branding against Black Friday.

Corporate Social Advocacy

In recent years, corporate advocacy regarding social issues has been discussed in academic literature as a subset of corporate social responsibility, or CSR. CSR has been defined as the relationship between business and society (Snider, Hill, & Martin, 2003) and involves organizational operations that connect back to greater societal economic, ethical, legal, or philanthropic concerns (Kim & Reber, 2008). CSR initiatives are also designed to portray a company as responsive to the needs and concerns of society (Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006). CSR is viewed as strategic to an organization, and "rational managers of business firms invest in CSR initiatives as long as they earn extra profits" (Palazzo and Scherer, 2010). When used as a CSR strategy, CSA serves as a method for businesses to engage with publics on significant issues.

CSA, however, extends beyond CSR into commenting publicly on how social issues should be addressed in the political sphere, as seen through the previously mentioned Facebook and Merck examples in which CEOs used social media to call for a specific course of action on a divisive issue. Whereas CSR as a business strategy addresses social issues that are likely to generate uniformly positive responses from consumers, CSA occurs when a company responds publicly to controversial political topics (Dodd & Supa, 2014). While CSR may include supporting a cause to garner positive public support, CSA frequently involves taking sides on political issues that tend to be more controversial (Clemensen, 2017). For example, while most agree on the overall importance of protecting the natural world, the solutions for doing so can be vastly different depending on political perspectives, which seem to be increasingly widening.

CSA typically involves corporate engagement in social issues to advance a public good or cause deemed important to a corporation; however, the extent to which corporations can actually serve as advocates for social issues or public policy is the subject of much debate. While corporations may appear to be acting for the public good, Dutta (2019) argues that this demonstration of commitment to the public interest is typically aligned with the organization's profit maximization. Through narratives of serving democracy, "development and public good are often paradoxically co-opted within efforts of community relations and CSR to strategically achieve goals of privatized organizational effectiveness" (Dutta, 2019, p. 53).

Indeed, in many cases, corporate advocacy can and has been used by businesses and industry trade groups to maintain the status quo for business, including reducing the potential for government intervention in corporate activities (e.g., Cutler & Muehling, 1989; Miller & Sinclair, 2009; Sethi, 1977; Sinclair & Irani, 2005). Campaigns have been used by American Electric Power to reduce regulations on coal mining and by the American Petroleum Institute to encourage citizens to oppose EPA regulations on GHG emissions (Gaither & Gaither, 2016). These campaigns work to advance corporate goals, all while consolidating power in the hands of "elite local, national, regional and international actors in transnational networks of private profiteering" (p. 53). Corporations also often faces allegations of greenwashing, a term coined by environmentalist Jay Westerveld in 1986 to describe companies that promote their environmentally sound practices while engaging in other damaging behavior behind the scenes. Often, companies create campaigns to promote the good they create for people and the planet as a way to mask their harmful activities. A classic example can be found in Chevron's People Do campaign, which "showed Chevron employees protecting bears, butterflies, sea turtles and all manner of cute and cuddly animals" (Watson, 2016).

Corporate Motivations for CSA

CSA in more recent years has involved commenting publicly on government policy and social issues that may not have direct relevance to business objectives and corporate goals. CSA may involve either supporting or countering government policy and social movements; unlike CSR, corporations engage in CSA with the understanding that it likely will not be well-received by all stakeholders. Gaither, Austin, and Collins (2018), for example, found that Dick's Sporting Goods' CSA on gun control following the Parkland, Fla., school shooting was undertaken despite the fact that corporate executives expected "polarized reactions" and potentially negative sales impacts. This lack of direct and obvious relevance to the company, coupled with the potential for divided response among stakeholders, may heighten skepticism among stakeholders regarding corporate motivations for engaging in CSA.

Research on CSR, meanwhile, suggests initiatives are best received by stakeholders when the actions a company takes align with the values of the company. Ellen, Webb, and Mohr (2006) investigated how consumers respond to CSR initiatives that are attributed to be values-, stakeholder-, strategic-, or egoistic-driven. Values- and stakeholder-driven motivations lie on opposing ends of a spectrum: "consumers will evaluate CSR efforts more positively when they are driven apparently by corporate values and more negatively when they are in response to stakeholder requirements" (p. 150). Similarly, strategic- and egoistic-driven motivations are opposites, since "attributions related to typical strategic goals of getting and keeping customers are inherent in the existence of a firm as a social actor and are widely accepted," while "attributions such as taking advantage of a cause or nonprofit have negative, egoistic connotations and are not likely to be widely accepted" (p. 150). Their findings suggest CSR initiatives that are viewed as being driven by values and strategic motivations, both of which would be internal to the company rather than being imposed by external factors, tend to garner the most positive response among consumers.

Ellen, Webb, and Mohr's findings have not been examined within the context of CSA; however, Korschun et al. (2016) studied how consumers respond when companies take a stance on divisive political issues when the company is seen as being values-oriented versus results-oriented. The authors defined values-oriented companies as companies that presented themselves as making decisions and acting based on stated values (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, L.L. Bean, Starbucks, and Whole Foods); whereas results-oriented companies are driven by the goal of achieving marketing objectives. ExxonMobil, which states in its "guiding principles" that the company continuously achieves "superior financial and operating results while simultaneously adhering to high ethical standards" (ExxonMobil, 2018, para. 1), was referenced as an example of a results-oriented company. Their findings suggest not taking a stand in regard to a social issue may be more problematic for some companies than even taking a stand with which consumers disagree, depending on how values-oriented the company is perceived to be. Korschun et al. (2016) found that abstention on a controversial issue (versus taking a stand) resulted in lower purchase intentions for companies that were perceived to be guided by values. The authors concluded that public response to a company's political stance was mediated by perceived corporate hypocrisy relative to what type of company consumers perceived them to be—values-oriented or results-oriented (Korschun et al., 2016). Korschun et al. (2016) and Ellen, Webb, and Mohr (2006) together suggest the need for the motivations of CSA to be investigated to see if alignment of the advocacy with a company's values affects the response of consumers.

Values Fit and Consumer Response to CSA

The question of what political or social issue to take a stance on is important for corporations to consider. Aside from the perception of consumers of the orientation of the company, whether it be values-driven or results-driven, for example, the mission and goals of the corporation may mediate how consumers react to their stances. While conventional wisdom may suggest that some consumers are likely to react negatively toward corporations' stances on political and social issues, new research shows that consumers respect companies that take stances on issues that align with their stated corporate values (e.g., Dodd & Supa, 2014; Gaither, Austin, & Collins, 2018; Korschun et al., 2016). Outdoor retailers, for example, may be best suited to take stances on social and political issues related to the protection and preservation of the natural world.

Black Friday and Its Backlash

Macy's was the first store in the United States to advertise for post-Thanksgiving shopping in 1924,

during the Thanksgiving Day Parade; however, the day after Thanksgiving did not become known as Black Friday in the United States until the late 1950s. As large crowds of consumers ventured into downtown Philadelphia for the weekend to watch the Army-Navy football game, the police started referring to the day as Black Friday due to the chaos created from the influx of people. The shopping craze on the day between Thanksgiving and the traditional Army-Navy game continued to gain popularity in the 1970s and 1980s (Daly, 2019). Today, Black Friday has become so popular as to spill over into Thanksgiving Day itself, with stores opening the evening of the holiday and deals continuing online over the weekend and into Cyber Monday. The growing craze surrounding the holiday has received considerable backlash. In Canada in 1992, the first Buy Nothing Day was organized to protest Black Friday and the ideals of consumerism (Shearer, 2018). Since the first Buy Nothing Day in 1992, the movement has spread to 65 other nations.

While individuals and nonprofits have supported the movement against Black Friday, it has been rare for corporations to oppose the shopping holiday; however, it has become more popular for brands that are concerned with their image in terms of environmental and social responsibility to abstain from participation in Black Friday. In 2019, a group of more than 200 brands in France, united under the slogan “Make Friday Green Again,” pledged to avoid using discounts and instead donate 10% of their Black Friday sales to nonprofits (Paddison, 2019). While this stance against hyper-consumerism may be bold, other corporations go so far as to completely shut down on the holiday, such as REI. While these anti-consumerism stances may seem antithetical to the definition of business, these corporations may be taking a wise stance by tapping into the frustration of their consumers. Rather than joining the chaos of Black Friday, these brands are alternatives (Garber, 2015). As brands continue to take stances against Black Friday, the language in these campaigns, including their goals and motivations, and the consumer response, is important to consider.

Research Questions

This study seeks to address a gap in corporate social advocacy literature regarding corporate campaigns against Black Friday. In order to do so, this study will answer two questions:

1. How does Patagonia’s Gift of Giving campaign compare to REI’s Opt to Act campaign?
2. How have these campaigns been received by stakeholders?

III. Methods

To answer research question one, a qualitative case study of campaign content was conducted. Case studies utilize a theoretical framework to explore multiple sources of evidence rather than single elements of communication, thus allowing for in-depth insight and a look at the phenomenon as a whole (Yin, 2014). Using a case study methodology, this study triangulates multiple data points, including company press releases about the campaigns, social media regarding the campaigns, and traditional media coverage of the campaigns. This case study summarizes the goals, priorities, and features of each campaign, and evaluates the campaigns against the mission statements of the companies themselves. To answer research question two, individual user comments left on Patagonia’s and REI’s Instagram posts regarding the Gift of Giving and Opt to Act campaigns were qualitatively analyzed to determine how the campaigns were received.

The Opt to Act campaign and Gift of Giving campaign were chosen for this study because both campaigns are from outdoor retailers who have interest in protecting the natural world. Although other corporations outside of the outdoor retail space have similar campaigns, these two campaigns were chosen for the study for ease of comparison. The sample for research question one, which included press releases, social media posts, news articles, and each company’s own website detailing the campaign against Black Friday campaign, was collected manually online. The sample for research question two, which involved a qualitative content analysis of user comments on social media from each company relating to each campaign, was collected using a webscraping tool. This sample included comments on pre-campaign and post-campaign posts on REI and Patagonia’s Instagram pages. Of the four posts, 387, 51, 47, and 173 comments were analyzed for a total of 658 comments. Comments were analyzed to determine how consumers reacted to the CSA engagement, including indication of purchase intention and overall perceptions of the company.

This study used the grounded theory method of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1998) to determine themes as they appeared. To answer research question one, texts were analyzed for mentions of goals, specific features to each campaign, and any alignments with the companies' stated missions. To answer research question two, comments were considered units of analysis and were analyzed for the inclusion of themes, including general sentiment (positive/negative) toward the campaign and the company. The web tool exportcomments.com was used to webscrape each of the posts to collect comments. Comments were imported into Excel for ease of qualitative analysis.

IV. Findings

Overview of REI and the Opt to Act Campaign

The origin of REI's 2019 campaign against Black Friday lies in its Opt Outside campaign, which began in 2015. On Black Friday in 2015, the outdoor retailer became the first company of its size to shut its doors in a form of protest. In this first declaration of war on Black Friday, REI was concerned with its employees, noting that it was closing stores and paying employees as if it were a regular workday "so they can do what they love most—be outside" (Nudd, 2015).

In 2019, with a new CEO at the helm, the REI campaign was broadened. In effort to combat the consumerism that fuels Black Friday and its environmental consequences more than just one day a year, the company launched Opt to Act. The year-long campaign features actions individuals can take each day to limit their ecological footprint, kicked off by a nationwide day of action on Black Friday 2019. The Opt to Act campaign hinges on the idea that collective action can achieve more than individual action. The words "Together our action goes further" headline the campaign website (REI, 2020). REI CEO Eric Artz highlighted this goal in the press release announcing the campaign, saying, "As a single company, our impact is limited, but as a community, we can drive change that powers meaningful action beyond our walls [...] As a co-op, we know that many people taking many small steps together can add up to big changes. Collective intention will drive collective impact" (REI, 2020).

The stated mission of REI is "To awaken a lifelong love of the outdoors, for all" (REI, 2020). With the goal of the Opt to Act campaign being to encourage collective action to create positive change through "simple challenges to reduce your impact, get active, and leave the world better than you found it," the company mission statement and campaign goals are aligned. By encouraging individuals to consider their impact on the natural world, REI is in turn working toward its overall mission of awakening love for the outdoors. When people consider how they are hurting the natural spaces they love most, their love and care for the outdoors has the potential to grow.

Features of the Opt to Act Campaign

In order to achieve this goal of inciting collective action, or creating small changes ladder up to bigger changes, REI created a list of 52 activities, one for every week between Black Friday 2019 and Black Friday 2020. The actions include the elimination or replacement of several habits that contribute to ecological footprints, such as using reusable bags or hanging laundry to dry instead of using a dryer. REI has options for website visitors to add these weekly actions as reminders to their calendars or to download a checklist of the options to carry out on their own time.

The Opt to Act campaign also kicked off with a day of action on Black Friday 2019. With all stores closed and no orders processed online on Black Friday, REI paid all of its 13,000 plus employees as if it were a normal workday, and asked members and employees to join one of 11 clean-ups around the country. The clean-ups, coordinated by the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics and United By Blue, were listed as activities to sign up for on REI's website.

REI also considers its own impact as part of the campaign, noting on the Opt to Act webpage, "when it comes to reducing our impact, we know individual choices aren't the whole story. Businesses need to act, too" (REI, 2020). REI goes on to detail the actions it has taken as a company to reduce its environmental footprint, including rethinking the business model, reducing unnecessary waste across the co-op and the industry, and committing to fight for life outdoors every day.

Lastly, the Opt to Act webpage encourages conversation among individuals in order to “stay engaged in the fight for life outdoors” (REI, 2020). The webpage links to REI Conversations, a space in the website for stakeholders to engage in conversation surrounding sustainable living and make suggestions to REI regarding its own sustainability policies.

Motivations of the Opt to Act Campaign

The motivations of the Opt to Act campaign seem to be mixed. Through its solicitation of member feedback and asking what members want the co-op to do next, REI appears to have stakeholder-driven motivations. REI’s concern for its employees also points to stakeholder-driven motivations. Chief Customer Officer Ben Steele shared of the initial decision to close doors on Black Friday in 2015, “To be really transparent, we didn’t know if it would work. We really focused on our employees” (Biron, 2019).

As the campaign grew from Opt Outside to Opt to Act, however, the motivations shifted. As Steele said in an interview with Business Insider: “The next generation of people who love the outdoors may not have an outdoors to love in the same way [...] That’s absolutely an existential risk for our business, but more than that, it’s an existential risk for our purpose and our passion,” (Biron, 2019). Steele acknowledges that the current threat posed to the environment through business as usual is also a threat to REI as a company; with no outdoor life to be lived, there is no need for outdoor gear. This acknowledgement makes the campaign, as an attempt to mitigate against the impending climate crisis, appear to have strategic motivations.

However, Steele goes on to emphasize the campaign as an attempt for REI to lead with its values: “What we’ve seen in the retail space is more and more organizations saying, ‘What does it mean to lead with our purpose? What does it mean to lead with our values?’ Steele said. ‘We’re understanding the power of that and the evolving consumer expectation that organizations need to do more than just sell stuff. [#OptOutside] became a demonstration of that philosophy and that belief,’” (Biron, 2019).

Overview of Patagonia and the Gift of Giving Campaign

Patagonia’s rhetoric against Black Friday started in 2011 with a full-page ad in the New York Times with the text “Don’t buy this jacket” superimposed over one of the company’s iconic Better Sweater quarter zips. For the first time in 2016, the store decided to donate all of its Black Friday profits to grassroots environmental groups working to combat the climate crisis. In 2019, following the launch of its digital platform Action Works, the outdoor retailer decided to use Black Friday as an opportunity to raise funds for the grassroots environmental groups that use the platform. The Gift of Giving campaign kicked off on Black Friday 2019 and ran until December 31, 2019. During this month-long period, Patagonia pledged to match all donations made to environmental grassroots groups on the Action Works platform. By mid-December, \$10 million had been raised on the platform, all of which Patagonia matched.

The stated mission of Patagonia is “we’re in business to save our home planet” (Patagonia, 2020). With this mission in mind, the Gift of Giving campaign seems to align with Patagonia’s values. Rather than just saving the planet, Patagonia is attempting to use its platform to make the connections and money necessary to do so. With the Gift of Giving focusing on monetary donations rather than other kind of support, Patagonia places emphasis on the “business” piece of its mission statement.

Features of the Gift of Giving Campaign

The premise of the Gift of Giving campaign was to raise funds for environmental grassroots groups that Patagonia already supports with its 1% for the Planet grants. All of these groups have access to Patagonia Action Works, a digital platform the company launched in 2018 with the intention of connecting its audience to these grassroots groups to achieve collective environmental action. During the Gift of Giving campaign, donations were made on the platform to a group of choice, either in one’s own name or in someone else’s name as a gift. When donations were made as gifts, the receiver of the gift was sent an email that a donation had been made on Patagonia Action Works on their behalf. This email included a personalized link with space for a note from the gift giver and information regarding the grassroots group of choice (Patagonia Action Works, 2020).

Motivations of the Gift of Giving Campaign

The Gift of Giving campaign appears to be an attempt of Patagonia to extend its sentiment against Black Friday. Vice President of Marketing Corey Bayers shared in an interview with Fast Company that the company has tried to downplay the importance of Black Friday for many years: “We’re actually pretty anti-Black Friday in our planning, but we have the functionality for these donations through Action Works, and we’ve always toyed with this idea” (Beer, 2019).

The press release announcing the campaign also highlighted the company’s feelings toward Black Friday through a statement from CEO Rose Marcario: “Black Friday is often a day when we go out and buy things we don’t really need and give them to people who don’t really want them [...] This year, consider giving to our home planet in the name of someone you love. Give to the tireless, community-based groups who work to save clean water and air in your neighborhoods, our public land treasures, our wild animals and birds, and our wide oceans” (Simpson, 2019). Marcario’s statement emphasizes the work of the grassroots groups rather than individual contribution to environmental action. Rather than giving its stakeholders actions to lessen their environmental impact or to contribute to the formation of strong environmental policy, the Gift of Giving campaign focuses on combating the hyper-consumerism upon which Black Friday thrives through giving an alternative to making commercial purchase as holiday gifts. This dedication to combating hyper-consumerism could be seen as a values-driven motivation; however, since Patagonia is raising money for the grassroots groups that it already supports through its 1% for the Planet grants, the motivation for this campaign could be perceived as stakeholder-driven or strategic-driven.

Overview of Social Media Reaction

Opt to Act Campaign Announcement Reaction

To announce the Opt Outside campaign, REI posted a video on its Instagram page on October 23, 2019, focusing on the environmental impact of single-use plastics and highlighting the campaign as a solution (REI, 2019). After several overwhelming shots of how plastic is used in single-use situations, the video ends by framing Black Friday as the “kickoff” to a year of action.

Overall, the reaction to the video was positive. Several of the comments praised the video and the campaign, through reactions such as: “Best Black Friday P.S.A. I’ve seen yet” or “Love this video! Great job!” Several of the positive comments also indicated a commitment to go outside and abstain from shopping on Black Friday or to stop using single-use plastics, making commitment to REI or solidarity with the campaign sentiment a major theme of the public reaction.

There was some negative reaction to the campaign launch video. These types of comments generally fell into two categories. While some of the comments implied that REI was overstepping its role as a company with this kind of campaign and indicated lack of care for protecting the natural world, others claimed that REI was not doing enough or was being hypocritical to attempt to combat plastic pollution while being such a large contributor to the problem. From these two types of disapproving comments, two themes were derived: individuals who believed REI should do less as a company, and individuals who believed REI should do more as a company. Of the comments questioning REI’s commitment, some even questioned the plastic that was used to create the video, asking “But what did they do with all the trash to make this commercial though?”

Post-Opt to Act Campaign Reaction

After the Opt to Act campaign began on Black Friday, REI posted a picture on Instagram on November 30, 2019, highlighting the cleanup efforts of the day before and promoting the 52-week long Opt to Act plan. The caption of the photo stated: “To everyone who went out and cleaned up this Black Friday—that was just the beginning. Check out The Opt to Act Plan (link in bio) for 52 weeks of sustainable action. #OptOutside” (REI, 2019). Although this post received considerably less traffic than the announcement post from October 23, the overall sentiment was still positive. Several of the positive comments included statements that individuals had participated in the nationwide cleanup on Black Friday or that they would be interested in participating in the 52-week long plan, again indicating the theme of solidarity with REI or the Opt to Act campaign itself.

Only two of the comments on this post indicated negative sentiment. One of these highlighted the hypocrisy of the post itself, showing a plastic bag being used to clean up other plastic items that had been

littered; the other called out individuals for blindly supporting REI without considering the company's own environmental impact.

A common trend among both posts was the company's willingness to reply to comments. REI more often replied to comments with positive sentiment, such as those indicating a willingness to spend time outside or participate in Opt to Act; however, REI did reply to some of the more critical comments asking for suggestions on how to mitigate its own environmental impact. Further conversation was carried out between individuals who tagged each other in the post, contributing to REI's goal of inciting collective environmental action in order to make the biggest change. This willingness to engage in conversation highlights REI's stakeholder-driven motivations.

Patagonia 'Gift of Giving' Announcement Reaction

On November 29, 2019, Patagonia posted a video with graphics detailing the Gift of Giving campaign (Patagonia, 2019). This campaign announcement did not receive as much traffic as REI's Opt to Act campaign announcement; however, the reaction to the post was positive overall. Several of the comments included praise for Patagonia as a company, and many of the comments thanked the company, making gratitude for Patagonia a major theme among public reaction. Several comments were also made by grassroots environmental groups who could receive donations through the campaign, while comments were made by individuals indicating and tagging groups they would be donating to. These types of comments indicated a theme of solidarity with and commitment to the campaign.

Five negative comments were made on the post. Of these five, four were complaints that Patagonia was not partaking in Black Friday sales. One of the comments asked why Patagonia was not supporting charities outside of California, to which Patagonia replied that they were supporting grassroots groups outside of California and that they could all be found on the Action Works platform. However, this comment raises the point that donations could only be made to the platforms Patagonia supports through 1% for the Planet grants, which are heavily located in California.

Post-'Gift of Giving' Campaign Reaction

On December 16, 2019, Patagonia posted another video with graphics on its Instagram page announcing that the goal of raising \$10 million in support of grassroots groups had been reached, and that Patagonia had matched all donations for a total of \$20 million to be donated (Patagonia, 2019). Again, the overall reaction was positive. Many of these included messages thanking Patagonia, and several included gratitude on behalf of specific grassroots groups or initiatives that had been supported through the campaign.

Eight of the comments made indicated negative sentiment. Two of these were implying that Patagonia is doing too much to protect the natural world without enough focus on human lives; one comment, meanwhile, was calling out Patagonia for selling overpriced items yet claiming to be anti-consumerist; another comment claimed that \$20 million was only "a drop in a bucket" and that Patagonia should be doing more; and one called out Patagonia for the greenhouse gas emissions it causes through raising sheep for wool. One of the comments was both positive and negative, praising Patagonia for its efforts but calling for further action to be taken. These negative comments indicate discontent with Patagonia's actions and expectation for the company to do more to make an impact.

Conversation among viewers was also high on Patagonia's posts, with several comments tagging friends. Across both posts, individuals commented that they had donated or that they would donate to a group on Patagonia Action Works in the future. Patagonia was less responsive to the comments on its posts than REI, with only four replies across both posts.

V. Discussion

Both REI and Patagonia have mission statements and reasons for being that indicate it would make sense for them to take a corporate stance against Black Friday. As outdoor retailers, these companies have reason to stand up for the protection of the natural world and stand up against those things that are harming it, such as the hyper-consumerism on which Black Friday thrives. This alignment of values and stance is

crucial to the success of corporate social advocacy, and other companies should consider their own missions and goals before carrying out a similar campaign, rather than just taking advantage of a social movement such as Buy Nothing Day.

While the internal perception indicated that these campaigns were values-driven, it must be considered what these campaigns have done for the betterment of each brand's image. While REI is staying top-of-mind with its stakeholders through its 52-week long action plan, Patagonia received much applause for raising \$20 million for grassroots groups. Examples of corporations taking stances that are truly values-driven may be difficult to determine and requires further study.

While both campaigns claim to be anti-consumerism, it is perhaps unrealistic for a business to be completely against the idea of buying things. While REI chose to keep doors closed on Black Friday and has done so for the past four years, Patagonia has kept its doors open on the day. Even if the company does not offer deals on Black Friday, the fact that Patagonia remains open indicates that the profits from this day must be somewhat important to the company. And while REI may have had its doors closed on Black Friday, it encouraged consumers inquiring about certain items to visit the store on other days through replies to Instagram comments such as, "We're going to have great deals this holiday season, just not on Black Friday."

This is not to say that a company cannot take a stance against Black Friday successfully; both of these campaigns, as indicated through research question two, were widely celebrated by stakeholders on social media. As a true example of corporate social advocacy, campaigns against Black Friday could trigger backlash, so other brands may consider where they could be accused of hypocrisy before launching such a campaign.

Transparency could also be important to the success of these campaigns. While the negative comments in response to REI's Opt to Act campaign called out the company for focusing on the waste created from single-use plastic while being a major contributor to the problem itself, REI is open about its waste output. On the Opt to Act website, REI recognizes its own part in the problem and details ways it is attempting to shrink its own footprint; moreover, the campaign recognizes that change is needed. Rather than condoning its behavior through business as usual, REI conveys one key message in its Opt to Act launch video: "Change isn't easy. Starting is." Patagonia, similarly, attempted to change behavior by giving its stakeholders an alternative to buying holiday gifts to give to "people who don't really want them" (Simpson, 2019). Through their campaigns against Black Friday, neither REI nor Patagonia are claiming to be perfect models of environmentally-friendly businesses; rather, they are taking a stance against hyper-consumerism and encouraging their stakeholders to not only listen, but to act to make change.

As the coronavirus continues to take its toll in the United States, companies will have to rethink their Black Friday models to discourage massive crowds and mass chaos that the day usually generates (Kavilanz, 2020). Companies could turn to REI and Patagonia as models; REI's Opt to Act campaign encourages outdoor activities that can be carried out at a safe social distance, while Patagonia's Gift of Giving campaign allowed individuals to make donations online, from the comfort of their homes.

VI. Conclusion

This study provides insight on the campaigns against Black Friday by two outdoor retailers, Patagonia and REI. The motivations of each company to carry out these campaigns is relevant to their individual missions, shedding light on the importance of alignment between campaign goals and overall corporate goals. The overall reaction to both campaigns was generally positive on social media, with a few comments indicating the hypocrisy of businesses that fuel the hyper-consumerism behind Black Friday taking a stance against the holiday. However, it must be considered that these companies are not taking stances against consumerism in general and are simply using their corporate platforms to enact change that will ultimately be necessary to the survival of their businesses. Other corporations may consider how they can use their own platforms to enact similar change.

This study was conducted over the course of one semester and the four-month time frame limited the extent of examination and the number of campaigns that could be studied; therefore, two prominent campaigns of the outdoor retail space were chosen for ease of comparison. Only one platform, Instagram, was chosen to represent public response to the campaigns in order to limit the number of comments. This

study was also conducted in midst of the coronavirus pandemic, which brought numerous challenges. Future research could consider similar campaigns of other corporations and how they might differ from businesses that are not heavily reliant on the protection of the natural world. This research may also investigate public response to these campaigns across other platforms.

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