

'Pouring politics down our throats': political CSR communication and consumer catharsis

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‘Pouring politics down our throats’: Political CSR communication and consumer catharsis

Georgiana Grigore & Mike Molesworth

Abstract

Purpose – *This chapter theorizes the outrageous consumer response that may follow the communication of political corporate social responsibility.*

Methodology/approach – *We consider two recent cases (Starbucks’ offer to hire refugees and Pepsi’s appropriation of protest movements in an ad) and how consumers-citizens reacted when these corporations communicated political issues.*

Findings – *By drawing from psychoanalytic concepts, we illustrate how consumers’ outrage, expressed in angry social media comments, and in the creation and sharing of memes, is cathartic of unconscious repressed matter: the realization of their own powerless and the domination of corporations. We further note how these expressions of outrage may be understood to result from defense mechanisms such as denial, displacement or more complex sublimation that help consumers maintain a position of passive domination by corporations.*

Research limitations – *Like all psychoanalytic applications, our interpretation represents only a plausible metaphor that can explain the ‘irrational’ behavior of consumers. Positivist traditions of CSR theorization may demand further causal studies to confirm the ideas we express.*

Practical implications and originality – *Our study is an original exploration of what underlies consumer responses to political CSR. These cases could inform academics and practitioners working in the business and society arena asking them to re-evaluate whether and how political CSR should be communicated, and the implications of the rapid diffusion of messages in social media that include mocking parody and offensive brand comments.*

Introduction

The case for political CSR is made on the basis that global corporations have become separated from national and international regulation, yet in their various activities implicated in the most pressing political issues (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). The responsible corporation therefore takes their citizenly position within global politics seriously, using their influence to help address the world’s problems through the more ambitious societal claims for CSR. Yet observers remain suspicious that corporations may not use their political power wisely (Rodrick, 1997). In this chapter we consider the issue of what constitutes effective political CSR communication and in doing so, consider a counter-intuitive role for such communication.

We consider two examples of recent political CSR from global corporations who have spoken out about political issues in order to influence society. On the face of it, Starbucks’ intervention in the plight of refugees and Pepsi’s presentation of the resolution of political protest seem quite different. The former might capture the corporation taking political responsibilities seriously by speaking out and acting in defense of refugees; the later suggests political CSR at its most cynical and instrumental as various protest movements are co-opted to sell sugary drink.

But what they have in common is an apparent outrage at their activities, played out online in furious social media activity, satirical memes and/or calls for marketplace redress (boycotts, app deletion, and public apologies) rather than calls to address the very political power such communication suggests corporations possess. We examine the nature and direction of these moral emotions, noting the potential for them to be cathartic of repressed feelings towards structural aspects of the global political economy rather than just organized responses to specific corporate activity. We further note how these serious issues are diffused through various defense mechanisms (denial, displacement and sublimation). And ultimately from this standpoint we raise the concern that whereas Starbucks's apparently responsible activity resulted in clear corporate damage, Pepsi's failure to implement effective political CSR may have actually achieved effective corporate communication goals by increasing brand awareness whilst leaving issue of legitimacy untouched.

We start with an overview of each case. We then consider the claims made for political CSR, and the possibility that outrage in responses to such activity represent an unconscious desire for catharsis through an analysis of both cases.

Starbucks offers to hire refugees

In January 2017 Howard Schultz, Starbucks CEO, expressed 'deep concern, a heavy heart and a resolute promise' over Donald Trump's ban on US entry for refugees and others in seven Muslim countries (Starbucks, 2017). His widely reported, explicitly political promise was to hire 10,000 refugees from 75 countries where the company operates in the following five years, with a focus on refugees who have served as interpreters for US military (Starbucks, 2017). In the same letter, Howard Schultz also declares that Starbucks aims at "Building bridges, not walls, with Mexico", stating that the company is "ready to help and support our Mexican customers, partners and their families as they navigate what impact proposed trade sanctions, immigration restrictions and taxes might have on their business and their trust of Americans" (Starbucks, 2017). The letter further reiterates the company's established policy that workers eligible for benefits would have access to health insurance through the company, irrespective of the Affordable Care Act is repealed or not. In such statements Starbucks management have stated clearly and publicly that they will defy the US public policy of the Trump administration in favour of their own progressive political agenda.

Starbucks are not alone taking such a political position, even if they are perhaps the most vocal. At the same time other companies such as Alphabet (Google's holding company), Amazon, Ford, Goldman Sachs, Microsoft have expressed concerns over Trump's visa ban (The Guardian, 2017; Fortune, 2017b). For example, Microsoft's president, Brad Smith, said: "we believe that immigration laws can and should protect the public without sacrificing people's freedom of expression or religion. And we believe in the importance of protecting legitimate and law-abiding refugees whose very lives may be at stake in immigration proceedings" (The Guardian, 2017). One Google spokeswoman declares: "We're concerned about the impact of this order and any proposals that could impose restrictions on Googlers and their families, or that could create barriers to bringing great talent to the US. We'll continue to make our views on these issues known to leaders in Washington and elsewhere" (The Guardian, 2017). It would seem that Starbucks are therefore in good company in their political CSR.

However, after Starbucks's statement, there was a backlash on social media where customers were urged to stay away from Starbucks outlets, captured in the symbolic act of showing photos of users deleting the company's app on their phones (Reuters, 2017). In fact,

#BoycottStarbucks was a record topic on Twitter (TWTR, +0.76%) (Fortune, 2017). One person tweets: “100 million people are out of the work force and Starbucks wants to hire 10,000 refugees”, and another one wrote on Facebook: “Upon hearing about your decision to hire 10,000 refugees instead of Americans I will no longer spend any money at Starbucks”. These consumer-citizens made it clear through comments that they would prefer *not* to have a large slice of political propaganda with their coffee order, repeatedly expressing anger and indignation: “Anyone else sick of STabuscks CEO's pushing HIS political agenda through our coffee and down our throats? #BoycottStarbucks”.

Indeed, Credit Swiss analyst Jason West notes that Starbucks seemingly noble decision to hire refugees upset customers and affected sales, diminished the ‘brand sentiment’ and perhaps most significantly, dropped shares down about 2.5% (Street Insider, 2017). Undoubtedly Starbucks would claim they were doing good. Their act was also explicitly political. The result, however, was a backlash with obvious corporate damage.

Pepsi protest ad

A few months later, at the beginning of April 2017, Pepsi launched an ad that depicted Jenner Kendall – a reality TV star and model - joining a street protest. As a crowd of protestors goes past brandishing placards asking us to ‘join the conversation’, Jenner abandons her modelling gig (symbolically handing her blond wig to a black assistant) to approach a line of policeman and offers one of them a can of Pepsi. The image of Jenner approaching the line of policemen referenced a photograph of Ieshia Evan, who stood in front of an armoured riot police during Black Lives Matter protest in 2016 (The Guardian, 2016, 2017). In the Pepsi ad though, the policeman opens the can, drinks from it, smiles at his colleague, and the crowd cheers at the peaceful resolution of whatever the crowd were protesting (which remains unclear).

The Pepsi ad was immediately heavily criticized as people felt that it was offensive to those politically active citizens who are actually attempting to effect change all over the world, without the help of either sweet beverages or supermodel reality TV stars (Wired, 2017) and especially for appropriating the ‘pain and struggles’ of the Black Lives Matter Group (NME, 2017). Again, Pepsi are not the only company to appropriate political issues in their ads. Indeed just two weeks later, and no doubt aided by the Pepsi controversy, Heineken more subtly suggested that political and social differences might be better solved over a drink than through public policy avoiding any political reference or symbolism. The response to Heineken’s efforts has been positive, but Pepsi is not the only company who that has been angrily mocked for attempting to explicitly exploit social movements and political protests (The Guardian, 2017). For example, Lyft was also ruthlessly parodied when the CEO described the company as ‘woke’, a term used by African Americans to describe social awareness of discrimination and injustice (The Guardian, 2017b).

The boldness of Pepsi’s co-opting of visual symbols of resistance movements and activism to sell beverages prompted outrage and backlash on social media with memes rapidly produced and circulated millions of times within days of the ad launch (The Guardian, 2017). Tweets include statements like: “I can't decide what I hate the most [about the ad]. There’s so much to choose from”, or “this is everything wrong with our culture in 30 seconds. may sound like an overreaction, but it’s not. every frame of this ad is poisonous”, or “...a perfect example of what happens when there's no black people in the room when decisions are being made.” Bernice King, the daughter of Martin Luther King Jr. joined the dispute posting a photo of her father and adding “If only Daddy would have known about the power of #Pepsi” (The Guardian, 2017).

However we may pay particular attention to other observations such as “the protest signs in the Pepsi ad are hilarious. They're so meaningless and generic”, and from comedian Frankie Boyle “Normal ad, sell Pepsi. Terrible ad, we talk about it, sell more Pepsi. No escape from consumption. Buy tickets to my show to find out more”(all tweet examples from The Poke, 2017 and Bazzar, 2017). Pepsi co-opts political issues, but actually makes no meaningful political point. The result, it seems is *successful* brand awareness.

Initially Pepsi defended the ad, stating that it “reflects people from different walks of life coming together in a spirit of harmony” (The Guardian, 2017; Pepsi, 2017) but then quickly released a revised statement saying that the company “was trying to project a global message of unity, peace and understanding”, and apologising for ‘missing the mark’ (CIPR, 2017; Pepsi, 2017; The Guardian, 2017; Wired, 2017). They also apologised to Kendall and subsequently removed the content from their online channels and apparently cancelled any further use of the video (CIPR, 2017). Ardi Kolah, author of ‘Improving the Performance of Sponsorship’ sums up the backlash by suggesting that the apology misunderstands why people were outraged, and that the ad was an “error of judgement”, “not showing solidarity with anyone,..., in fact denigrating what people have been doing. It shows insensitivity with what is going on in the world” (CIPR, 2017).

The controversial Kendall Jenner ad brought Pepsi to its lowest consumer perception levels in nearly 10 years (Brandindex, 2017), however the market share of the company actually increased slightly following the controversy. Unlike Starbucks, this misguided and possibly ridiculous political intervention appeared to do the brand little immediate harm. More intriguingly the excess of ‘mistakes’ in the ad, has led to suspicions by some that it was in fact a deliberate subversive ad (LA Times, 2017), with the company capitalizing value from the considerable negative publicity. Indeed, the ad was viewed at least 1.3 million times in two days (NPR, 2017), and Pepsi’s mentions on social media were up more than 7,000% the day the ad debuted (Brandwatch, 2017) being brought up more than a million times across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (LA Times, 2017). To add to this line of argument, Eric Schiffer, the chief of Reputation Management Consultants says that the net effect of the ad was positive as the ‘world’s talking about it’ and he evaluates that the company got between \$300 million and \$400 million in free media coverage out of the controversy (LA Times, 2017).

Political CSR

“We live in an age where brands are expected to speak out on social issues. Whether it’s poor working conditions in factories, global warming or President Trump it is not uncommon for brands or their senior executives to take a stand on a social or political issue” (CIPR, 2017)

Both our examples speak to the recent and growing involvement of brands in social and political issues. Recent studies have done much to highlight the new roles for corporations in society, in particular how corporations are taking on responsibilities that were traditionally ascribed to governments (Abländer & Curbach, 2015) and so becoming important political actors in a global world (Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007). These studies describe the quasi-governmental responsibilities of corporations, introducing concepts such as ‘political CSR’ (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011) or ‘corporate citizenship’ (Matten and Crane, 2005) in the arena of business and society.

The largely neo-liberal global economy has created such blurring of responsibilities between private and public sectors, where corporations become like governments (Abländer & Curbach, 2015) and with citizen-consumers playing their part in this too, as they are now expected to take on responsibility for addressing corporate wrongdoing by punishing corporations with their anger and contempt (Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2013), and presumably also brand boycott (Klein, Smith, & John, 2004). The rise of globalization, and subsequent corrosion of democratic political sovereignty, has led to significant social changes, including individualism, migration, and emergence of new identities (Scholte, 2005) that pose new challenges to the legitimacy of corporate involvement in politics. The result is that corporations are now expected to voluntarily contribute to society beyond business or law boundaries (Abländer & Curbach, 2015). In short, CSR now has an unavoidable political dimension that corporates must negotiate (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011).

Although Rousseau's (1998) social contract established that society is constituted through a voluntary contact amongst its citizens that give legitimacy to an elected body, global corporations are neither subject to national government controls, nor citizen of any state (quite deliberately). Where corporations are presented as citizens then, it is only because the national law ascribes them citizenship rights on behalf of *actual* citizens. But in the same time corporations now seem to grant citizenship rights to others through intervention in policy (education, environment and social care) that would otherwise be the role of government (Abländer & Curbach, 2015). Hence Matten and Crane (2005) have ascribed 'surrogate citizenry' to corporations similar to the authority of the state to take on responsibilities for its citizens (Hegel, 1998).

There something unsettling in the idea that an entity may either act as citizen, or take on a government role to suit its ambitions. This paradox prompts us to inquire whether actual citizens might accept that corporations should have any voluntary involvement with politics, or whether political actions undertaken by corporations are seen as legitimate. To put it another way, how might citizens react to being confronted with the political domination of global corporations? Although the political in CSR is now widely acknowledged as inevitable (Russo & Perrini, 2010; Sacconi, 2006; Weyzig, 2009), the response to such developments by consumer-citizens has not been much explored.

According to Scherer and Palazzo (2011, p. 901) "political CSR suggests an extended model of governance with business firms contributing to global regulation and providing public goods. It goes beyond the instrumental view on politics in order to develop a new understanding of global politics where private actors such as corporations and civil society organizations play an active role in the democratic regulation and control of market transactions". Political CSR proposes organizations as inevitably political players once they operate outside national and international legislative regimes (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). Kaul et al. (2009) note that in the globalized work, states or other international institutions are unable to regulate economies alone or offer global public goods and care. Corporate political actors must come to fill this void. On one level, we might therefore see these interventions as responses to calls that corporations must be politically responsible (notwithstanding the obvious instrumentalism by degrees in these activities). On another level however, this might also require an alignment of the political activity of the corporation with the political beliefs of their primary stakeholders (for example liberal attitudes to immigration, or otherwise in consumer groups, free movement of people as a principle of international business understood by shareholders, etc).

In our two case studies, Starbucks and Pepsi, we see companies acting as quite different political actors. In line with the calls for political CSR, Starbucks seem to be taking responsibility

for a serious political issue: refugees. They volunteer their global power to alleviate the plight of at least some of these. And they are using their global voice to proclaim support and raise awareness. In short, they seem to be acting as a responsible political actor, exactly in line with normative theoretical claims. Yet, in doing so, they become embroiled in politics of employment and immigration that create outrage, and even their supporters seem to do little to defend them in their more instrumental desire to gain publicity by speaking out on political issues. In contrast, Pepsi did no more than mix several aspects of recent protests (race, gender, religion) for promotional purpose, making no explicit political claims for any of them other than a clearly absurd suggestion that they can be resolved by a sugary drink. Yet, the outrage here is different. It is on a larger scale and more humorous, but does little to negatively impact the share value of the corporation. How then, might we account for these consumer-citizen responses and their impact on the brand?

Could it be that these interventions result in a cathartic release by citizens who suddenly find a target for pent up, possibly repressed, or partially repressed anger at aspects of the political economy (both the power of corporations and public policy that seems to favour their views over citizens). Understanding the answers to these challenging questions is important in making sense of the nature of such outrage and the implications for the development of political CSR initiatives and their communication. In the following section, we outline a psychoanalytic framework that allows us to explain the unconscious level of outrage, and why people express emotions on social media in the way they do.

Psychoanalytic repression, sublimation and displacement

There has been a return to psychoanalysis in organization studies (Fotaki, Long, & Schwartz, 2012), marketing theory (Cluley and Desmond, 2015; Molesworth, Grigore, & Jenkins, 2017) and corporate social responsibility (Crowther, 2014; Crowther & Seifi, 2015; Grigore & Molesworth, 2015), where authors especially turn to the work of Freud, Lacan, Berne or Žižek to understand ‘irrational’ exchanges in the market, relational dynamics or economic activities. Psychoanalysis and related ideas of unconscious, repression or other defense mechanisms are now back on research agendas, as they provide useful tools for understanding the complex psychologies of contemporary organisation and of consumer-subjects (Cluley and Desmond, 2015). Our interest here is in how ideas from psychoanalysis may help us to understand the responses to the activities of the corporate citizen, and especially the recent communications from Starbucks and Pepsi. We start with ideas about how consumer-citizens necessarily defend themselves against aspects of the political economy in order to both function effectively in society and so that they remain passive to the domination of powerful societal actors (global corporations). We then consider what happens when those very corporations surface or access unconscious matter, recognizing that psychoanalysis reminds us that in such circumstances there is a need to deal with this unwanted knowledge through catharsis.

Rationalised discourse on political CSR and corporate citizenship remains ironically blind the social arrangements at the heart of Marxist-Freudian critiques, instead preferring normative solutions to the surface consequences of globalized capitalism. In political CSR, the global corporation represents the *solution* to negative aspects of capitalist arrangements that disempower governments and their citizens, if they can be persuaded to act responsibly (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011). Yet, established complaints of the inevitable alienation of capitalist relations discount such possibility, instead noting that society prefers to, indeed *must* repress these problems (for

example see Marcuse, 1964, 1966). To understand how citizens respond to corporations' political activity we first need to understand this repression.

People find ways to unconsciously ignore unpalatable aspects of themselves, others or reality (Mellor & Schiff, 1975), working hard to keep things at distance, in order to continue activities or behaviors that they find unethical, shameful or self-destructive, but want to carry on doing (Cluley, 2014). This process is called *repression*, and requires pushing away uncomfortable or painful information (stimuli, ability to react different, ability to solve a problem) from consciousness by 'willed forgetting' (Billig, 1999). For Freud, repression was a central concept in psychoanalysis, where all other ideas are built on this 'foundation-stone' (Cluley, 2014). For example, in 'Civilization and Its Discontents', Freud (1929) explains how civilization becomes a source of unfulfilled desires that must be dealt with. Civilization is therefore built on ideals of control, beauty, or order and for expression of intellectual skills as a *sublimation* of otherwise destructive drives in people. *Sublimation* represents a mature defense mechanism against socially unacceptable impulses – violence, sexual desires, domination of others - converting them into meaningful socially accepted actions that work towards achieving these ideals. Indeed, over time these processes can permanently change the darker human impulses into societal achievements.

However, in his synthesis of Marx and Freud, Marcuse (1966) notes that there are actually two forms of ego-defenses in society. The first is a necessary aspect of civilized society that follows Freud's recognition of the need for *sublimation* in art, business and other acceptable *displacements* of otherwise destructive libidinal drives. However, for Marcuse (1966) there is also an extra, or *surplus form of repression* that is required for individuals to remain dominated by the forces of capital. He illustrates with an example of a new car. Consumers recognize car ownership as desirable, the barer of status and the source of pleasure – the necessary sublimation of sexual drives – but they also recognize that automobile corporations have manufactured things this way. Further, they have done so to ensure their continued profit and despite negative consequences for consumers, workers and the environment. The knowledge of how the individual is both controlled as worker and consumer might result in resistance to such domination (including through art and literature that would represent the first type of repression and remain consistent with Freud's original narrative). Instead for Marcuse (1966) the individual finds ways of 'not knowing' that allow them to continue to enjoy the positive aspects of their work and spend lifestyle whilst also being dominated.

Marcuse (1964) further elaborated this failure to imagine both critique and alternatives as 'one dimensionality'. In 'One-Dimension Man', he defines *repressive desublimation*, noting that "the progress of technological rationality is liquidating the oppositional and transcending elements in the 'higher culture'". Marcuse suggests that repressive desublimation strips individuals of the energy necessary for social critique, replacing such possibility with the more instant and seductive products of consumerism as 'false needs'. He sharply promotes the 'great refusal' as the opposition to such methods of social control, arguing that consumerism traps consumers in 'unfreedom', where they behave irrationally when buying and enjoy material things, and ignore the waste or environmental destruction, or the psychologically damaging impacts of their consumption actions (Marcuse, 1964).

Similarly, Fromm (1955) notes a move from 'being' to 'having' where aspects of existence for the individual are displaced onto material goods, and further where non-material aspects of life are understood as if they may be possessed. This *denial* that people should contemplate more on 'being' not 'having' in all aspects of their lives leads to a complete lost of inner selves (Fromm, 1976). The outcome is the same as for Marcuse: a consumer culture that is

maintained through the repression of both destructive, but also critical and transformative knowledge. More recently, Žižek (2009) further illustrates the process with the example of meat. Consumers enjoy the cheap and easy access to the globalized meat market, but also know that such production involves considerable violence, exploitation and suffering of the animal sources. Consumers know, but don't want to know as knowing would mean the painful realization of animal suffering, so don't know in order to allow the comfortable consumption of meat. Of course the stakes are much higher when such processes apply to people and the planet.

Together these persistent and compelling critiques of contemporary global corporate activity and resulting consumer culture suggest that neo-liberal societal structures can only be maintained through acts of repression by consumers that first civilize, but then pacify the worker-consumer.

Cathartic outrage as defense against knowledge of corporate power

The problem, however, is what happens when consumers are asked to consider that which has been repressed? How do they respond to the surfacing of knowledge about the domination of capitalist structures?

The communication of political CSR does just this. It potentially draws attention to the negative aspects of the global corporation, its power, its instrumentalism, its excess of control over the lives of citizens everywhere. It forces on citizens knowledge that the corporation is a powerful political actor, even though it is also beyond the power of the government they have elected. Political CSR, when communicated, therefore potentially brings the necessary repressed matter of neo-liberalism to the surface and it makes people aware of what they don't want to be aware of: the corporate domination of society. Starbucks, in seems, can enact an immigration and employment policy, irrespective of elected government policy; Pepsi, can even bring political protest to a halt just through its fizzy drinks, delivered by a reality TV star. In Marcuse's (1966) terms, this is to bring the negative counter to the positive offer (of cheap, satisfying drinks) to the fore. And for the consumer's psychology, this must be dealt with through processes of 'defensive responses'. As Freud explains, defense mechanisms work at keeping information, thoughts, and impulses *out of* consciousness, in some cases by distorting (minimizing or exaggerating) reality, in order to protect one's sense of self by 'managing' conflicting demands of id and super-ego (Hoyer & Steyart, 2015). There are various defenses through which pain or discomfort is unconsciously modified: repression, denial, reaction formation, rationalization, sublimation and projection (Freud, 1985).

What we observe in the consumer-citizen's responses to both companies making political statements are defense mechanisms. We see *denial*, for example in statements like: 'no, Pepsi did not mean any harm, they've made a mistake', when others reveal that Pepsi's campaign was subversive, capitalizing value from negative publicity. We also see denial in loyal customers statements that they 'don't care, they just love Starbuck's coffee'. We see *displacement* when instead of saying 'I'm not going to buy Pepsi any longer' or boycotting Pepsi retail outlets, consumers vent anger in an online forum, in a tweet, or Facebook post, but direct that anger at the advertising team that made the ad, and not at the social and political system that might allow a corporation to make such outrageous claims. We also see displacement in the angry exchanges between consumers as some defend Starbuck, declaring their loyalty, and other direct their discontent that those actions and not the brand. Consider in particular the act of deleting the Starbucks app, literally taking out anger on the Smartphone screen rather than, say, the global headquarters where political decisions are made.

Perhaps most significantly we may witness *sublimation*, where the anger at the domination of the corporation becomes a joke, transformed into a meme, or a socially acceptable form of protest that leads to laughter rather than anger or violent protest. Perhaps we might more accurately classify engagement with such activity as Marcussian repressive desublimation however. Not only do these instantly accessible memes allow consumers to parlay initial anger into ongoing humour, but they do so in a way that provides the desired publicity off which the brand feeds and from which the online platform can monetize ads. Millions of views, likes and responses all combine to generate advertising revenue for online platforms such as Facebook and Google as they help to share and disperse the initial shock of the corporate act. A further result however is the restoration of comfortable surplus repression. If we can laugh at, shout at, and criticize the power of the corporation we can again convince ourselves that they do not dominate us. Our discomfort at the surfacing of surplus repression has successfully been dealt with through cathartic release. In short, it is difficult to interpret the response at a meaningful refusal of corporate domination, and easy to recognize it as a continued achievement of capitalist structures.

Looking at consumers' responses, and how these become an opportunity for satire, humorous memes and parody, the comfortable and uncomfortable truth about corporations, their negative and positive side, their responsibility and irresponsibility can be brought together into one. Consumers therefore manage their ambivalence towards the corporations (the realization that they creating goods in society, but also awareness of their domination), by making negative pleasurable, the corporation is whole again. Taken together these allow corporations to continue with the domination of the individual. They all restore the Marcussian surplus repression, hence they are cathartic. Anger or outrage, when shared with other online users, instead of directed at the companies or their claims, helps citizens keep the corporation in its place. One may even say: 'These communications reveal that corporations are powerful, way too powerful, but instead of facing my powerless in this situation, I become angry online. Online I can be powerful, and the corporations are powerless. And having achieved this, I can now forget about my powerlessness and their domination over me'.

If we compare the responses to both Starbucks and Pepsi, we note that both result in cathartic anger, a release of tension on social media, but Pepsi is potentially more successful (their market share increased, visibility) because their ad is undirected, confused, and also it makes no specific political claims. Hence they may become easily ridiculed. Pepsi doesn't quite bring the detail to the surface (although the ad is full of symbols that have potential to open doors to repressed matter), and through the imitate release emotional release seen online, the surplus of repression is restored. Starbucks, on the other had, is perceived as being serious in their claim to hire refugees, and so they are seen as important political actors drawing attention to their power in society in a more direct way that makes it more challenging for defense mechanisms.

The implications for political CSR, is that the increasingly popular corporate efforts to communicate their political power will unavoidably bring to surface the repressed matter in the citizens, in a way that they might find uncomfortable (as that knowledge is intentionally forgotten). Putting aside the legitimacy of Marxist-Freudian critiques of capitalism, we might argue that that our analysis shows is that when corporations become political actors they make their power seen, so they need to be careful in how they communicate this new role to citizens. However, what we might also recognize that that CSR has emerged exactly because the surplus of repression is becoming harder and harder to sustain as the power of global corporations grow. Hence, we see the rise of various anti-globalisation and anti-corporation movements (Chou, 2015; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002). We might therefore suggest that catharsis is increasingly necessary and by deliberately surfacing corporate political power in ways that can easily be dealt

with through catharsis, the project of globalization is actually furthered. And here is the paradox in our illustrations. Assuming that society is not yet ready for the big refusal and subsequent dismantling of the domination of global corporations like Pepsi and Starbucks, political CSR might be reinvented to include mechanisms of catharsis as domination is revealed to consumers. Regardless of the legitimacy of claims that the Pepsi ad was deliberate in its purpose to create outrage, the campaign shows us how this might be done and indeed is in contrast to reports that citizens are reluctant to engage with political communication online (for example see Jackson, Scullion & Molesworth, 2013), even as that reluctance remains consistent with our broader argument. Starbucks, alternatively, is a reminder that corporations might take care when they inadvertently reveal their political power to consumers. Of course the possibility of the cynical manipulation of repressed anger through the invitation to create online memes also reminds us that the corporation must consider new responsibilities in the digital age (see Grigore, Molesworth, & Watkins, 2017).

Conclusion

Political CSR represents a response to a disturbing realization that citizens have lost political power to the global corporation who must now act as global citizen even as they distance themselves from government controls and externalize their costs. For most this situation may be distant, hard to grasp and if Marcuse is right, repressed as a reality that cannot be faced if the apparent benefits and pleasures of our consumer culture are to be enjoyed. Yet, in responding as political actors (through both direct political statement and use of political motifs in advertising) corporations also draw attention to this dilemma, bringing to the surface the fear of disempowerment that citizens want to ignore. Their subsequent outrage therefore represents a cathartic release of this ill defined and hard to articulable truth.

In our examples Pepsi's approach, although superficial, seem to do less harm because citizens ridiculed and mocked the powerful brand in a spontaneous and cathartic festival of inversion that released repressed matter, but also silently confirmed the dominant power of the global corporation. In doing so, they also generated considerable brand awareness with the suggestion that as long as apparent political communication in ads cannot be directly associated with an aspect of the brand (and so may only be laughed at) such glib political messaging provides release for consumers and publicity for the brand

Starbucks were less successful because they present the problem that their power is more concrete and so difficult to deal with. Here difficult to deal with aspects of the citizen's relationship with corporate power are surfaced, but cannot easily be laughed off. The result however is not quite the activist and transformational hostility we might expect, but at worst the deletion of an app, the strongest political statement a consumer can now make against a corporation they disagree with.

So where does this leave political CSR? We hesitate to recommend the Pepsi challenge to political awareness, even though after a full evaluation other corporations may reflect that there was little harm and considerable value in the awareness generated. The risk is that should other corporations seek publicity this way the festival value will diminish, leaving only a jaded consumer cynicism. Given the backlash against Starbucks, we might further caution brands not to pour politics down consumers' throats.

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