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Corporate citizenship: Challenging the corporate centricity in corporate marketing

Sophie Esmann Andersen [a], Trine Susanne Johansen [b,*]

[a] Department of Management, Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University, Denmark
[b] School of Communication and Culture, Arts, Aarhus University, Denmark

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how corporate citizenship challenges the notion of corporate centricity underpinning the corporate marketing discipline. Theoretically, the argument is developed with reference to the concept of corporate citizenship and cultural branding theories. Methodologically, the study applies a discourse analysis to Instagram posts and comments associated with Bodyformuk's cultural brand campaign #bloodnormal as an illustrative case of corporate citizenship. By focusing on the interplay between the micro-processes of individual consumers' brand interactions and macro-level cultural discourses, the study shows that a) users hold active agency in rearticulating the corporately conveyed cultural discourses and, hence, claims of corporate citizenship; and b) the brand actively uses these user-driven counter discourses as source material for continuously rematerializing corporate citizenship. The study contributes to the corporate marketing literature by highlighting the challenges of corporate centricity when the brand becomes part of a politized discourse and enacts corporate citizenship.

1. Introduction

Stakeholder pressures are increasingly challenging corporations to engage in social and political issues. Global brands such as Nike and Dove have managed to leverage their strong brand platforms to communicate messages about diversity, inclusion, and gender equality, thereby gaining an activist voice in pushing forward topical movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. The strategic value of a purpose-driven brand is evident: A global survey on 474 executives reports that a purpose, inspiring both a company and stakeholders, provides benefits to the local and global society, drives employee satisfaction, affects the organization's ability to transform, and helps increase customer loyalty (Harvard Business Review, 2015). Accordingly, brand activism is on the rise (Moorman, 2020) and is increasingly considered a prominent topic in the academic literature (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019). However, the implications of the political ideologization of brands and corporations remain to be addressed within the corporate marketing discipline.

This study explores how the integration of a political, ethical, and socially responsible mindset—articulated as corporate citizenship—into corporate marketing necessitates a rethinking of the notion of corporate centricity underpinning the corporate marketing discipline. Corporate marketing is a holistic, integrated view on marketing incorporating a number of corporate-level concepts, such as corporate identity, corporate culture, and corporate image (e.g. Balmer, 1998; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Balmer, 2009). With the corporate-level focus, attention shifts from addressing consumers as the only, or primary, audiences for marketing efforts to addressing all relevant stakeholders (Balmer, 2006; Illia & Balmer, 2012). The interest in stakeholder relations is paired with heightened awareness and recognition of the organization's position in and responsibilities towards society, that is, an ethical/CSR-orientation (Balmer, 2011; Balmer, Powell, & Greyser, 2011; Hildebrand, Sen, & Bhattacharya, 2011; Powell, 2011; Leitch, 2017).

The role of ethics/CSR in corporate marketing is perceived in multiple ways: as related to the corporation's context, that is, its political, economic, social, technological, ethical, and legal environment (Balmer, 2009; 2011); as an underlying premise for ensuring 'a congruent, coherent corporate identity' (Hildebrand et al., 2011: 1354) and unifying the disparate identities of a company (Balmer, 2009); or as a separate discipline under the heading of ethical corporate marketing understood to be a corporate philosophy seeking to form stakeholder relationships (Balmer et al., 2011; Powell, 2011). Podnar and Golob

* Corresponding author at: School of Communication and Culture, Jens Chr. Skous Vej 4, Building 1481, 8000 Aarhus C, Denmark.
E-mail address: tsj@cc.au.dk (T.S. Johansen).

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(2007: 335-336) argue that corporate marketing must encompass CSR as a foundation for stakeholder management: 'It should have a place in the identity of the company, it has to be embraced by the employees and be part of the corporate culture. It should be transparently and clearly communicated to reflect in the corporate reputation and corporate brand'. This is supported by Leitch (2017) suggestion that ethics and CSR may potentially have significant, negative effects on stakeholder perceptions of corporate identity if they are not attended to in a timely and appropriate manner. CSR is accentuated as a strategic instrument affecting and affected by stakeholders as it offers corporate benefits by fulfilling stakeholders' ethical expectations (Podnar & Golob, 2007). Acting and behaving in a socially responsible manner is not to the detriment of the corporation's bottom line, but a means to enhance corporate profits. Incorporating ethics and CSR into corporate marketing emphasizes the prominence and strategic aim of an ethical mindset and suggests that responsible, ethical corporate behaviour is not only related to questions of corporate identity and culture or to questions of context and stakeholder relations.

The current articulations of CSR and ethics in corporate marketing advance two related challenges and a derived research gap, which this study takes as its point of departure. Firstly, the inclusion of an ethical mindset into corporate marketing calls for a need to rethink the corporate centricity underpinning the corporate marketing discipline. Secondly, the current instrumental articulation of CSR in corporate marketing does not take into consideration the extended political roles and responsibilities taken by corporations (Crane, Matten, & Moon, 2008), articulated through, for example, brand activism (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019; Moorman, 2020), political CSR (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Scherer, Rasche, Palazzo, & Spicer, 2016), and corporate citizenship (Crane et al., 2008).

In relation to the first challenge, corporate marketing suggests that the corporation is the creator and producer of (corporate) brand meanings, as its character and culture underpin the covenant which is articulated through communication in the form of controlled messages (cf., e.g. Balmer, 2006; Balmer & Greyser, 2006). This assumption is mirrored in the view of CSR/ethics as a premise in ensuring a coherent identity (Hildebrand et al., 2011: 1354) or as a way of creating unity (Balmer, 2009) to secure favourable stakeholder responses by aligning culture, identity, and reputation. This line of thinking within CSR falls within the functionalist, business-centric trap identified by Gond and Matten (2007), where the corporation is seen as the focal point. In this view, communication represents a transferral of meaning from organization to stakeholders, privileging corporately controlled strategies and messages while ignoring the co-creative capabilities and active agency of consumers and other collaborative stakeholders, a focus that has been emphasized elsewhere (cf., e.g. Vallaster and von Wallpach (2013) discussion on multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation). Drawing attention to CSR as a negotiated concept rethinks CSR beyond the functionalist trap and suggests that CSR is a socio-cognitive construction (Gond & Matten, 2007). Accordingly, attention is redirected from questions of corporate regulation and strategic impact towards understanding how CSR is practiced among diverse social actors. Within this CSR perspective, it can be argued that ethical corporate marketing strategies can only be realized if the corporation enters into dialogue with stakeholders to dismantle its self-centred focus.

In relation to the second challenge, Crane, Matten, and Moon introduce three perspectives on corporate citizenship (cf. Crane & Matten, 2010: 75): A limited view which equates corporate citizenship with corporate philanthropy (cf. Carroll, 1991), an equivalent view which equates corporate citizenship with CSR (cf. Maignan & Ferrell, 2001), and an extended view which acknowledges the notion of corporations taking on extended governmental responsibilities. Here, ethical behaviour is not just a question of an altruistic or a strategic approach to CSR activities, but of rearticulating the foundational understanding of the role of corporations in society as active political actors and societal change agents. The extended approach is closely related to the concept of political CSR (cf. Scherer et al., 2016) in so far as both concepts a) incorporate business activities 'that turn corporations into political actors, by engaging in public deliberations, collective decisions, and the provision of public goods or the restriction of public bads in cases where public authorities are unable or unwilling to fulfil this role' (Scherer et al., 2016: 6) and b) adopt a critical society-centric approach to study this changing role of business in society (Morsing & Roepstorff, 2015). Being a political actor is therefore not exclusively reserved to conventional corporate political activity and the influence of politics through lobbying (cf. Lawton, McGuire, & Rajwani, 2013) but is also shaped outside governmental walls. The extended approach to corporate citizenship, therefore, has far-reaching consequences, for example, with regard to the distribution of power, democracy, and the commercialization of society (e.g. Ritzer, 2000). Therefore, the extended approach raises questions of a more fundamental ethical character, beyond matters of instrumental business benefits and strategic performance as currently articulated within corporate marketing (Podnar & Golob, 2007).

The reason for drawing attention to these two challenges in the current paper is that notions of the corporation as a controlling, regulating, and focal entity still dominate in the corporate marketing literature despite its ethical perspective and relationship idea. This raises particular concerns since CSR and corporate citizenship not only manifest themselves as strategic value, but also reflect increased corporate power and societal impact (cf., e.g. Crane & Matten, 2010). These challenges point to a gap in the existing corporate marketing research when it comes to a) recognizing the changing communicative affordances resulting from an ethical mindset and b) expanding the ethical mindset to include extended corporate citizenship. In light of these two challenges and their associated gap, this study explores how an extended view on corporate citizenship, involving attention to micro-level processes of citizenship negotiation, necessitates rethinking the notion of corporate centricity in corporate marketing.

The study's point of departure is the international feminine hygiene brand, Bodyform, and its recent cultural disruptive brand campaign #bloodnormal.[1] The campaign culturally resonates with current feminist movements and female activists advocating women's rights as well as the right to be a woman, presuming that the tabooing of menstruation is an illustration of female repression. As such, the brand can be said to adapt the source material on offer by a social movement and to repurpose the movement's quest to challenge a dominant societal logic (Holt & Cameron, 2010). Therefore, the brand acts as a champion of corporate citizenship by espousing an underlying ethical philosophy that extends beyond a mere product-orientation. Based on a discourse analysis of #bloodnormal and the associated user comments on the Bodyform UK Instagram account, this study provides insights into how cultural discourses, and active consumer agency in rearticulating and countering these discourses, affect the realization of corporate citizenship.

The study's contribution lies, first, in illustrating the actual micro-level processes of *how* consumers can be seen to hold active agency in realizing corporate citizenship as intertwined in multiple dichotomies produced and reproduced in discourse and, thus, emerging from cultural conversations—and second, in offering insights that show what happens when the corporation is not the main voice in articulating (corporate) brand meaning. Accordingly, the study contributes to developing an alternative to corporate marketing's privileging of corporately controlled message and meaning (Balmer, 1998; 2001; 2009; 2011; Balmer & Greyser, 2003; 2006). The contribution stems from the

[1] The Bodyform brand is known by diverse country-specific brand names, including Nana (France), Libresse (the Nordic countries), Nuvenia (Italy), Saba (Central America and Mexico), and Libra (Australia and New Zealand). This study is delimited to the UK Bodyform brand, since we are not interested in pursuing any local, global, glocal, national, or cross-national differences in or across the different country-specific brand campaign articulations.

identification of key issues and challenges that may arise if companies fail to abolish their corporate centricity while at the same time laying claim to a position as a political mouthpiece for new socio-cultural agendas. In short, it highlights the importance of recognizing CSR as a social construct and suggests that the relationship-based philosophy and ethical mindset of corporate marketing can only be realized by recognizing and acknowledging micro-level discourses among consumers and other key stakeholders. The study, thus, points to how stakeholders not just appropriate corporately designed and controlled messages, but constantly interact with and negotiate meaning, hence co-creating how the corporation enacts and realizes its citizenship.

Thirdly, the study contributes to the ongoing debate on the role of business in society (e.g. Hussain & Moriarty, 2018; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; 2011) and the call for greater democratic accountability for corporations (Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; Moon, Crane, & Matten, 2005). Corporate openness towards and inclusion of user-driven cultural discourses in enacting corporate citizenship are vital to re-establish the democratic ideals that may otherwise dilute as corporations take on a leading political and ideological position in the market. Accordingly, an alternative path to democratic accountability goes through communicative or conversational accountability which requires rethinking the corporate centric approach in corporate marketing and acknowledging the active, co-creative capabilities of stakeholders.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 establishes the theoretical framework and introduces the concepts of corporate citizenship and cultural branding, arguing that the latter is a means for corporations to enact the former. Section 3 outlines the study's methodology, including an introduction to the case and case context, data collection, and analytical procedure. Section 4 accounts for the key findings, which are subsequently discussed in relation to the theories of corporate marketing and corporate citizenship. Section 5 provides concluding remarks, limitations, and future research.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework outlines the extended role of corporations as theorized in the corporate citizenship literature and the role of cultural branding as a means for corporations to claim and enact citizenship.

2.1. Corporate citizenship and the governing role of business in society

The notion of corporate citizenship has, thus far, not been explicated in the context of corporate marketing. However, as outlined in the introduction, the stakeholder-orientation of the corporate marketing philosophy has led to a growing emphasis on addressing societal and ethical issues and responsibilities (Balmer, 2011; Balmer et al., 2011; Hildebrand et al., 2011; Powell, 2011; Leitch, 2017). As pointed out by Balmer et al. (2011: 2), 'An implicit feature of corporate marketing is that organisations should be mindful of their societal obligations'. When organizations take on such societal obligations, they can be said to enact their corporate citizenship.

Corporate citizenship originates from the politicized discourses of CSR (e.g. Andriof & McIntosh, 2001) and suggests a reconceptualization of the role of business in society: To gain its license to operate (e.g. Demuijnck & Fasterling, 2016), the corporation is expected to comply with the basic principles of good citizenship—to act as a good corporate citizen (Maignan & Ferrell, 2000; 2001). Arguing that the state inhabits a diluted role as the only guarantor and protector of citizenship in liberal societies, Matten and Crane (2005) suggest an extended view of corporate citizenship. This view reframes corporate citizenship away from the notion that the corporation is a citizen in itself and towards the acknowledgement that the corporation administers certain aspects of citizenship for other constituencies (Matten & Crane, 2005: 173). In administering citizenship rights, the corporation enacts different roles. Relying on Marshall's widely accepted categorization of individual rights (Matten & Crane, 2005), these roles include a providing role of social rights, an enabling role of civil rights, and a channelling role of political rights, all of which have conventionally been granted and protected by state and governments. The main point in the extended view is, thus, that the corporation not only adapts to and complies with the existing norms, rules, and laws (as a means to meet the ethical and moral expectations from stakeholders), but also sets its own standards for society to adopt and stakeholders to follow. Accordingly, corporations become co-creators of their institutional environment (Scherer et al., 2016), and stakeholders are reconceptualized as citizens, whose rights, privileges, and obligations stem from the corporate arena of citizenship (Crane et al., 2008).

Corporate citizenship has conventionally addressed issues of social, civic, and political rights and mainly manifested itself as, for example, community investment and corporate volunteering programs, diversity efforts, public policy engagement, and NGO partnerships (cf. Crane & Matten, 2010: 74). However, as argued by Crane et al. (2008), a new stream of research has evolved around the phenomena of 'cultural citizenship' (e.g. Vega & van Hensbroek, 2010; Stephenson, 2001; 2003). Cultural citizenship addresses new ways in which cultural identities alongside various struggles based upon identity and difference, including sexual, racial, ethnic, diasporic, ecological, technological, and cosmopolitan identities (cf. Isin & Turner, 2002), have become yet another key element in constructing political communities and, accordingly, articulating corporate citizenship. Following this, it is possible to argue that newer approaches to cultural brand management are a means for corporations to lay claim to and enact citizenship.

2.2. The cultural brand as critical, ideological, and transformative

Within corporate marketing, branding is naturally associated with the organization as an entity as explicated in the notion of the corporate brand, also referred to as the covenant—a promise made to consumers and other constituencies by the company (e.g. Balmer, 2006; Balmer & Greyser, 2006). The brand is seen as an outward expression of inward, shared traits, personality, and culture (cf., e.g. Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Balmer (2001) highlights how the corporate brand finds its roots and sources in the organizational subcultures. Looking at culture as an internal organizational phenomenon sets corporate marketing apart from the assumptions and principles of cultural branding which suggests looking for branding source material in surrounding wider shared cultural practices rather than in internally anchored organizational personality traits. Moreover, whereas branding within corporate marketing has an explicit focus on the organizational level, cultural branding has the potential to remove, or transgress, the boundary between product and corporate as the material used in articulating the brand promise is sourced outside of the organization, thus releasing or relinquishing the brand from product- and firm-based characteristics or traits.

Central to cultural branding's understanding of the brand as rooted in wider cultural practices is the notion that brands are increasingly assigned civic responsibilities. Brands perform social roles as, for example, citizens (Willmott, 2003), activists (Stoeckl, 2014; Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019), or citizen-artists (Holt, 2002) by engaging in societal issues through cultural disruptive brand strategies (Holt, 2004; Holt & Cameron, 2010). Consequently, the brand becomes a carrier and provider of ideological and cultural ideas that extend beyond the brand itself (Arvidsson, 2005). As Schroeder (2009: 124) points out, 'brands themselves have become ideological referents'. Such metaphorical articulations of brands indicate an ideological turn in brand management that, to some extent, mirror the political turn in CSR and have instigated growing interest in brand activism (cf., e.g. Manfredi-Sánchez, 2019).

Holt (2002) proposes, from a socio-historical perspective, that brand paradigm and consumer culture are related dialectically. A brand paradigm refers to the particular set of axiomatic assumptions and principles that underline how companies build their brands (Holt, 2002: 79). Such assumptions and principles have changed over time in a

dialectical exchange between consumer culture and branding. As counter movements, in resisting dominating market cultures, contribute with new content for innovative market strategies, they become the very dynamic force that keeps market sovereignty alive (Holt, 2002).

Counter movements thus act in opposition to brand and market dominance, and companies take ownership of the values and principles driving these movements as new principles and schemes for building their brands, thus defining the new branding paradigm, which new counter movements subsequently will react against. Holt and Cameron (2010) introduce the notion of the cultural brand strategy which takes its point of departure in disrupting socio-cultural anomalies and propose that brands take on an ideological—or political—standpoint by playing, and taking the cultural lead in, the role of 'citizen-artist', thus gaining their kudos in fore-fronting social change. A cultural brand can therefore be characterized as critical, ideological, and transformative: *critical* because it represents a critical voice of dominant cultural norms and social conventions; *ideological* because it represents alternative visions and ideas of a better world; and *transformative* because it aims to make social change. As Holt (2002: 88) suggests, 'Brands will be trusted as cultural source materials when their sponsors have demonstrated that they shoulder civic responsibilities'. Tapping into or repurposing alternative ideologies, myths, and cultural codes rooted in social movements or subcultures that actively advocate and seek social change by disrupting dominant societal and cultural ideologies is one way of acquiring such source material (Holt & Cameron, 2010).

The political and ideological underpinnings of the notion of the cultural brand offer a relevant offset for understanding corporate citizenship and provide an empirical context for studying how active consumers (citizens)—as key stakeholders—contribute to the enactment and realization of corporate citizenship.

3. Methodology

In studying the interplay between the micro-processes of individual consumers' brand interactions and macro-level cultural discourses, a reflexive methodology is employed (Alvesson & Kärremann, 2007; 2011). A reflexive methodology suggests that empirical material can act as a resource in inspiring new theoretical developments 'through the active mobilization and problematization of existing frameworks' (Alvesson & Kärremann, 2011: 4). Therefore, researchers are asked to consider 'the ways empirical material can be used to facilitate and encourage critical reflection: to enhance our ability to challenge, rethink, and illustrate theory' (Alvesson & Kärremann, 2007: 1265). The present study seeks active mobilization of the practices and processes of cultural branding as a particular form of corporate citizenship to highlight the challenges of corporate centricity that citizenship enactment imposes.

Rooted in reflexivity which forefronts the role of language in the construction of social reality, the analysis draws on a discourse analytical tradition, emphasizing the constitutive power of discourses in shaping and framing human thoughts, identities, interactions, and behaviours (Parker, 1992; Philips & Hardy, 1997). Informed by previous discourse-driven work within corporate branding (Motion & Leitch, 2002; Leitch & Motion, 2007; Leitch & Davenport, 2007), the study is inspired by Foucault's (1972; 1980; 1982) concepts of discourse, power relations, and subjectivity. Thus, the analysis is built around how objects and subjects are constructed in discourses. Discourse is defined as 'a system of statements which constructs an object' (Parker, 1992: 5). The definition suggests that discourses not only *describe* things, but also *do* things (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; cf. Austin, 1975) in the sense that they 'make sense of the world for its inhabitants, giving it meanings, that generate particular experiences and practices' (Philips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004: 636). According to Parker (1992: 6), discourses are organized in texts as 'tissues of meaning', suggesting that the aim of a discourse analysis is to show *how* these layered tissues of meaning are configured and *do* things, including their functions in constructing subjects and subjectivities (cf. Foucault, 1972). This suggests that brands can be conceptualized and analysed 'within the context of the discourses within which they operate' (Leitch & Davenport, 2007: 53).

Given an interest in the individual consumer as a point of departure for studying micro-level brand interactions in combination with macro-level cultural discourses, the analysis draws specifically on the notions of subject positions and positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990). Whereas the former refers to possible social locations which either allow or restrict the emergence of particular ways of being, the latter refers to the discursive processes by which subjects are located in discourses. The availability and uptake of subject positions in discourse give rise to different kinds of selves and possibilities of subjective experiences. Thus, by studying the reflexive and interactive strategies by which the brand as well as the consumer either is positioned or positions herself/himself/itself and others within different discourses, it is possible to understand how different identities come into being by means of the discursive resources made available. In such a process, the voicing of counter discourses—discourses that are produced in counter points to existing dominating discourses—becomes relevant (Foucault, 1980). The notion of counter discourses allows for recognizing the dialectic processes by which discourses come into being which forefront the consumer as active and participatory in the meaning making process.

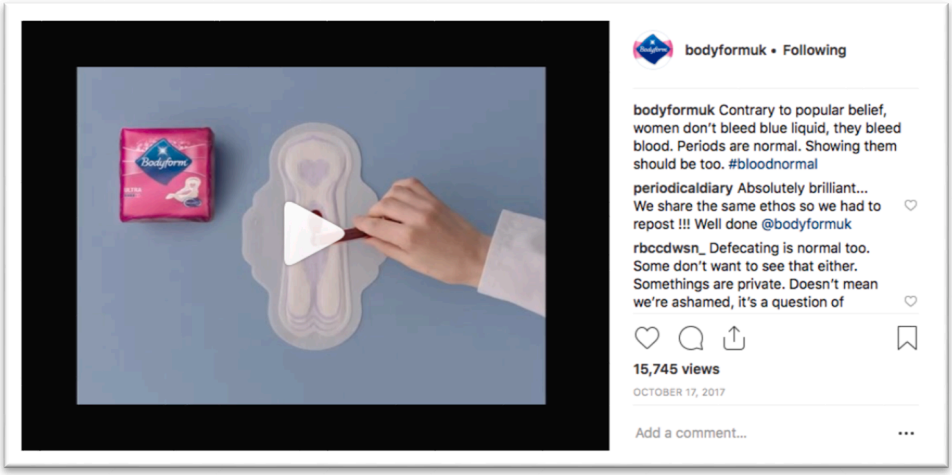
3.1. Case context and data collection

The study is purposively centred on the international feminine hygiene brand Bodyform and, more specifically, the recent cultural disruptive branding effort, #bloodnormal, aimed at de-stigmatizing and de-tabooing menstruation by asserting that bleeding is normal. Launched in October 2017, the campaign material problematizes the common use of blue liquid to represent menstrual blood in advertising, arguing: 'Periods are normal. Showing them should be too' (see Picture 1 in Section 4.1.). Prior to the launch of #bloodnormal, the Bodyform brand had started to take a political or ideological turn earlier that year in connection with the International Women's Day, though not as a full-fledged campaign. Moreover, the political aspect was visible in the 'Red.Fit' campaign from 2016. The campaign showed women getting bloody scrapes while playing sports and ended with the tagline: 'No blood should hold us back'. The 'Red.Fit' campaign initiated the move towards a normalization of the natural bodily response of bleeding but without specifically mentioning menstruation or menstrual blood.

The case has been purposively selected (Morse, 1991) for several reasons. Firstly, it exemplifies how a cultural approach to brand management functions as a means for a corporation's citizenship claims as part of ethical corporate marketing. Ethical corporate marketing is said to promote 'mutually beneficial exchange relationships with customers and stakeholders' and exchange that 'occurs through the provision of ethically orientated brands, services and products that meet and are mindful of current and future societal needs' (Balmer et al., 2011: 8). Accordingly, relational exchanges occur at the brand level. Furthermore, corporate citizenship is constructed in the exchange between not only customers, but also other stakeholders in the context of concrete brand encounters. As the analysis demonstrates, the #bloodnormal campaign moves beyond the product-customer dyad as it explicitly addresses and engages not only the product's customers (i.e. menstruating women) but also other stakeholders (conceptualized as consumers as well as wider publics or citizens).

Secondly, the case represents something as (relatively) simple as menstruation.[2] Despite this thematic innocence, the campaign has

[2] In referring to menstruation as a relatively simple issue, we are approaching it from within the Western context that frames the campaign. We recognize that in different, non-Western contexts, menstruation is a source of female oppression and control, for example, in many places, girls are not allowed to go to school when menstruating. 'Relatively simple' thus implies that issues of a more politically sensitive nature exist where fundamental rights are potentially compromised.



Picture 1. Screen dump of the initial Bodyformuk Instagram post that kickstarted #bloodnormal (186 comments), Oct 17/2017 (Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/BaWbKRoHLVF/?taken-by=bodyformuk).

provoked reactions and complaints among viewers, arguing that the depictions of menstruation blood are 'disgusting' as well as 'offensive and inappropriate' (quotes from BBC, 18.09.2019).[3] Analysing the extant cultural and ideological dynamics and exchange between the brand and its various stakeholders in the context of a very low-interest product-category, which shows the brand's ability to gain a strong political and ideological voice, forces us as researchers to reflect on the challenges that may emerge when more fundamental political rights and democratic processes are at stake when administering corporate citizenship rights. In other words, the case brings matters to a head.

The #bloodnormal campaign was launched across many media platforms, including the brand's website (www.bodyform.co.uk) and its social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (BodyformChannel). Out of these, the Instagram account has the most extensive use of and reference to #bloodnormal. To avoid data overload and to allow for an in-depth discourse analysis, the collection of empirical material is delimited to Bodyformuk's Instagram posts with the explicit use of #bloodnormal and the user comments to these posts. The study adheres to fundamental research and researcher ethics in data collection within digital ethnography and netnography (e.g. Kozinets, 2010). The empirical material comprises 31 posts, which have gained from zero to 186 user comments; in total, 358 user comments are identified. However, more important than the number of posts and comments is the richness of the material which includes a comprehensive multimodal text corpus of images, movies, emoticons, and written words as they appear in their natural setting, that is, where consumers naturally interact with the brand and brand-initiated messages. The information richness of the case accounts for a third reason for choosing the particular case.

It can be argued that a limitation of the study is its confinement to a single campaign. However, as the study is qualitative in nature, it does not seek to generalize to other cases or contexts. Its aim and value lie in exploring the challenges and boundaries that are formed in connection with this specific campaign, and thus, it offers insights into situated exchanges based on in-depth analysis of micro-processes to shed light on cultural discourses and counter discourses of corporate citizenship. In line with the reflexive methodology (Alvesson & Kärremann, 2007: 1266), empirical material can be considered as a dialogue partner—rather than a mirror or a judge—in developing theory, for example, by offering insights that can problematize existing ideas and frameworks and suggest potential new paths. The objective is not generalization, but problematization in the form of shedding light on challenges in the current articulations of corporate marketing made visible by the specific empirical focus.

The merits of qualitative research can be evaluated based on trustworthiness and authenticity (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Trustworthiness is a question of addressing whether or not methods are applied to ensure that the research process has been carried out correctly and transparently, while authenticity relates to respecting the voices and viewpoints of those being studied. A discourse analysis does not focus on apparent content and content structures in empirical materials (cf. the so-called factist approach to qualitative analysis, Alasuutari, 1995) but aims to analyse empirical materials as linguistic expressions and how they shape different versions of reality. In other words, the empirical materials are not descriptions of reality, but specimens of interpretive practices (Alasuutari, 1995). Accordingly, one way to ensure quality of the analysis is to keep an analytical sensitivity towards the variability of interpretations as a means to gain insights into the interpretive conflicts in play (Parker, 1992). To ensure the variability and authenticity of the analysis, both authors a) analysed the empirical material with a focus on identifying different discourses independently from each other; b) evaluated each identified discourse taking the point of departure in Foucault's notion of contextual triangulation, which states that an important criterion for the existence of a discourse is that it is used across different contexts and that it can be applied in handling a variety of themes (Talja, 1999); c) synthesized the analysis into one strong and believable storyline that included a variety of identified interpretive practices; and finally d) authenticated the quality of the storyline by providing a rich amount of examples from the empirical material (cf. Potter & Wetherell, 1987). We explicate the steps taken to further enhance the trustworthiness and transparency of the study in the analysis process below.

3.2. Analytical procedure

The analysis draws on the discourse analytical tradition as outlined above and is structurally inspired by Davies and Harré (1990) and Willig (2014) in a three-stage procedure.

First, the discursive and counter constructions of menstruation (as the object of the campaign, cf. the campaign's explicit focus on 'blood', #bloodnormal) were identified to understand the underlying assumptions and functions of these constructions. Focus was placed on how different juxtapositions of oppositions relate to each other and form chains of equivalences. Each of these chains gives identity to particular

[3] The Australian industry regulators received more than 600 complaints from viewers who found the campaign inappropriate: the highest number for any advertisement in 2019 (BBC, 18.09.2019).

discourses of menstruation and thereby reveals underlying and explicit assumptions of how menstruation is perceived and talked about. Identifying basic binary oppositions between 'blue liquid and red blood', 'public belief versus Bodyform UK', 'they versus us', and 'men/boys versus women/girls' allowed for the outline of the dominating discursive and counter constructions. The first analytical step revealed a hegemonic, institutionalized discourse and its counter discourse and, thus, showed how the brand by means of actively challenging the hegemonic discourse enacts citizenship. The next step evolved around the question of what such discourses and counter discourses 'do'.

Second, the subject positions that are made available by the discursive and counter constructions were identified alongside how these positions either facilitate and enable or limit and constrain what can be said and done from within these positions. Here, two opposing subject positions were identified: whereas the institutionalized position places women in an oppressed position, its counter discourse empowers women as, for instance, symbolically visualized in the flexed bicep emoji.

These two initial stages of the analysis provided a cultural opening of the campaign by enabling the identification of the basic cultural narrative that runs through the campaign and how it disrupts dominating cultural discourses. However, rather than merely concluding how the campaign, by normalizing menstruation, empowers women, the analysis also sought to shed light on how the empowered subject position is negotiated by explicating the different articulations of 'the red blood' and its symbolic status. Accordingly, the third, and final, analytical stage addressed how discursive and counter constructions of menstruation and their contingent subject positions make available possible ways for consumers, or users, to interact with the brand and for the brand to continuously enact its citizenship.

4. Findings

The analysis reveals how the brand's disruption of a hegemonic cultural discourse is empowering in so far as the counter discursive articulation of menstruation allows women to re-represent themselves and be part of society without feeling shame. However, such re-articulation of what women are is equally contested and opposed, and users constantly create new alternative counter discourses that resist and challenge the brand's claim to empowerment of women. It can be argued that these constant oppositions and counter discourses are vital in ensuring that political, cultural, and social premises are not defined by economic and corporate power but are continuously formed through conversations with relevant stakeholders. In addition, active user agency is a basic condition for corporate citizenship and a means to re-establish the democratic values that may otherwise be compromised as companies enter the political arena. Therefore, there is a potential need to rethink the corporate centricity that governs the corporate marketing discipline.

Inspired by the idea of the semiotic square (cf. Greimas, 1983), the findings are summarized in Fig. 1. The idea behind the semiotic square is that meaning emerges within a system of contrary, contradictory, and complementary relations. However, in contrast to its original structuralist source where the concept of meaning is static, the figure is conceptualized from within a dynamic situated context in which meaning continuously emerges and re-emerges by virtue of its own internal antithesis. Accordingly, the positions in the figure are dynamic and constantly evolving.

The figure emphasizes that discourses not only replicate but also create the world and mark the contours for subjects' options and positions in the world (cf. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Davies & Harré, 1990). The figure illustrates that the cultural counter discourses articulated by the #bloodnormal campaign are both empowering, compared to the dominating oppressing discourse, and constraining in so far as the campaign represents yet another (idealized) template for women to fit into. Users do not automatically buy into this new imagery of womanhood, but they constantly oppose and resist it, causing new counter discourses to emerge, which the brand then takes as a point of departure for taking new cultural action.

The analysis which has led to these insights is explicated below. The analysis takes its point of departure in a dichotomy articulated in the first and last (at the time of writing) posts posted by Bodyformuk using #bloodnormal and the comments generated by these two posts. As the analysis unfolds, additional posts and comments are included to advance the complex intertwinement and processes of articulations of cultural and counter discourses and the positions they make available for the brand as well as users.

4.1. The construction of menstruation as a cultural token of womanhood

Building upon an archaeological analysis (Foucault, 1972) of the use of #bloodnormal, it is possible to identify a predominant articulation of menstruation in the male/female dichotomy in which 'boys', articulated as an abstract 'they' (Picture 2), equally represented the 'popular belief' (Picture 1), which again is suggested to represent the underlying threat to an equal and 'educated' society (Picture 2), where women have the right to be women.

By means of the equivalent uses of 'they' and 'men/boys', 'the popular belief' symbolically links a male construction of menstruation to 'the blue liquid' (Picture 1) as an alienated and alienating replacement of the actual menstruation blood. [4]It is this particular male construction of menstruation that the brand aims to disrupt by stating that 'bleeding is normal', hence #bloodnormal. Accordingly, showing blood (Picture 1) is a symbolic action towards rearticulating the discourse of menstruation. Fig. 2 illustrates the two chains of equivalences (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) and discursive juxtapositions, which produce the Bodyformuk counter discourse to the dominant male 'way of seeing' (Foucault, 1980) menstruation and the subject positions they each make available:

Following these discursive productions of menstruation, it is possible from one perspective to argue that #bloodnormal is a culturally liberating (and female empowering) brand strategy, reclaiming menstruation as a cultural object and symbol of women. This position is supported by several user comments and becomes particularly pronounced as a male Instagram profile voices his opinion. [5]The quotes below in Fig. 3 illustrate how the female user (kimberrome) draws on a gendered discourse, using gender as a reason for shouting down a male user (sebastianvasallo), thereby supporting reclaiming menstruation as a particularly and exclusively female construct:

Therefore, what constitutes the counter discourse of menstruation articulated by Bodyformuk? Looking broadly at the posts, there is what might be labelled a stereotypical feminine and aestheticized representation of menstruation represented by means of an overemphasized use of the colour red (e.g. a red flower and red background (e.g. Oct 17/2017)), conventional feminine symbols (e.g. an excessive use of the colour pink (e.g. April 27/2018, June 8/2018) and red hearts (Sep 12/18, Aug 1/2018)), and an aestheticized symbolic expression of menstruation (e.g. use of the #periodart and partnering with female artists (cf. Aug 31/2018, July 19/2018, March 27/2018, and Oct 17/2017)). The use of the conventional feminine symbols to metaphorically

[4] The campaign does not relate to the fact that the use of the blue liquid originates from the brand's (and its competitors') marketing of the products. What is interesting here is not WHO originally replaced the blood with the blue liquid, but rather WHAT the blue liquid has come to represent (i.e. a symbol of the oppression of women) and that this representation of women is not anchored in the advertising industry (as a visual rhetorical strategy) but in a culturally (and male) defined discourse.

[5] The authors are aware that online user profiles may be fictitious. The name of this particular profile is a male's name and, most importantly, the other users interact with the user as a male – and thereby enact a male/female contradiction.

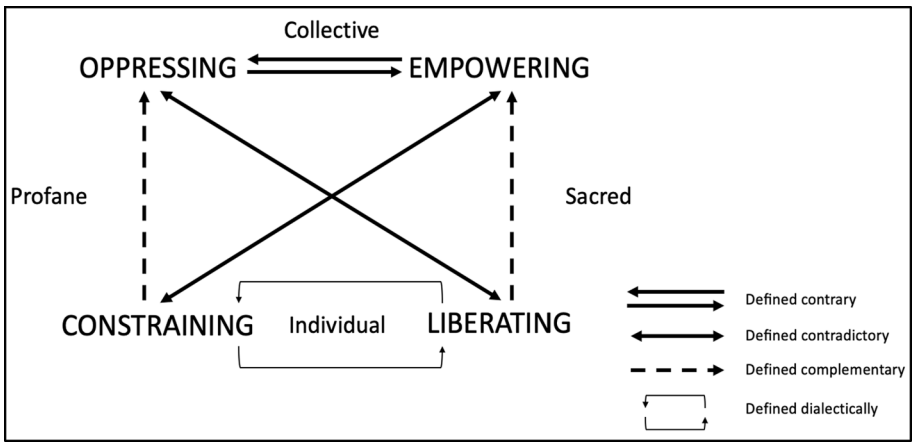
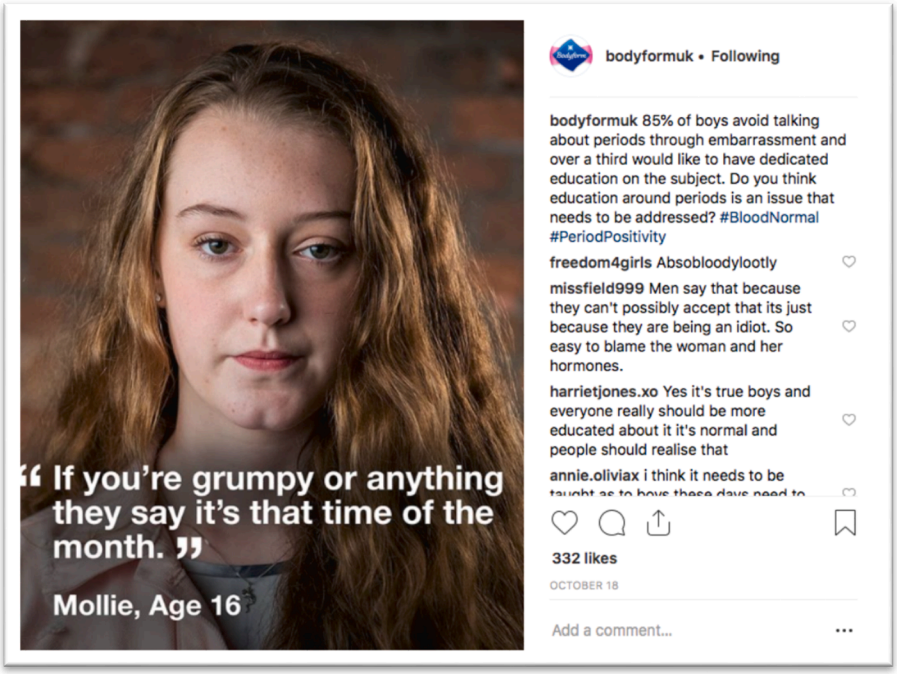


Fig. 1. The dialectic construction of cultural discourses (source: Authors).



Picture 2. Screen dump of the latest Bodyformuk Instagram post (14 comments), Oct 18/2018 (Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/BpEZ4r-n7Uj/).

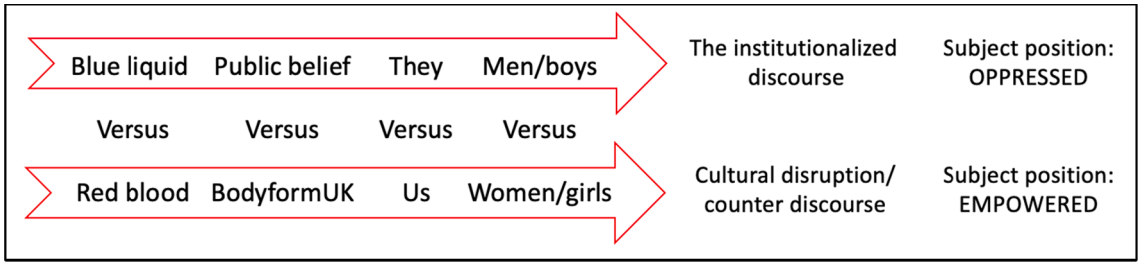


Fig. 2. Juxtaposed chains of equivalences and the subject positions they make available (source: Authors).

represent the menstruation blood functions as a rhetorical strategy to rearticulate menstruation as a female antipole to the blue liquid. This is further emphasized by an articulation of the counter discourse of menstruation as an empowering discourse, exemplified by images that define women qua their monthly bleeding (e.g. Dec 19/2017, April 27/2018) (cf. Picture 3). Therefore, menstruation and the expressive display of the act of bleeding (cf. Oct 17/2017, Dec 15/2017, and July 19/2018) become an empowering cultural symbol, a sacred token of womanhood. More importantly, menstruation becomes a definition of the female identity (cf. Picture 3) or, as stated by Bodyformuk ‘it’s what makes us special’ (Sep 12/2018).

The cultural elevation of menstruation is explicitly articulated as the

sebastianvasallo: Shit is brown why not put a little of that on the toilet ads, no one is that concerned about periods or the blood they consist of it's a question of taste. I don't see how pushing a bloody excreeted substance to the forefront is any way helps feminism 😂👌

(...)

kimberrome: @sebastianvasallo blood is not the same thing. No period, no opinion.

sebastianvasallo: @kimberrome lol if i have to see some nasty shit on tv you best believe ill have an opinion 😂 you silly lady

kimberrome: @sebastianvasallo so cute you think you have that right. Awe.

Fig. 3. Quotes from Instagram user comments to the initial Bodyformuk post, cf. Picture 1 (Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/BaWbKRoHLVF/?taken-by=bodyformuk).

new normal (cf. #bloodnormal) while at the same time creating an idealized subject position for the female consumer, a position created in the image of the brand's counter cultural position and referred to as 'a badass werewolf hunter' (June 7/2018), a cartoon character who draws visual similarities to the female superhero Wonder Woman (see also Oct. 24/2017). Thus, the female consumer is depicted as one who embraces menstruation and celebrates it as the essence of empowered womanhood. This empowered position is accentuated, supported, and exemplified by Bodyformuk's as well as the users' frequent use of the emoticon 'flexed biceps', connoting strength and power. The counter cultural discourse promoted by Bodyformuk thus creates a female 'weness' or sisterhood, a shared gendered identity which contradicts hegemonic male representations of the female identity.

However, not all female users identify with the brand's aestheticized elevation of menstruation as the defining symbol of female identity and accept the imposed identity template. On the contrary, they resist being represented by such discourses. The construction of the sisterhood identity is, thus, not only culturally liberating and empowering, enabling women to be women with a red capital W, but also constraining as it articulates new standards of womanhood for women to fit into. Following this, alternative constructions of complex counter discourses emerge—discourses that resist not only the original male defined discourse that positions women as oppressed, but also counter discourses opposing the counter discourse, thereby rearticulating alternative versions of womanhood.

4.2. *Cultural counter discourses and re-articulations of womanhood*

The user comments on the #bloodnormal campaign reveal alternatives to the male/female dichotomic representation of menstruation as outlined above. Two main user-driven counter discursive configurations, each of which dialectically relates to the dominating discourses in complex layers of meanings, can be identified. The first user-driven counter discourse directly opposes the sacred articulation of menstruation by comparing menstruation and menstruation blood with faeces, urine, sweat, and other forms of human bodily waste and is exemplified by the quotes shown in Fig. 4 below:

The articulation of this first user-driven counter discourse is based upon a non-acceptance of the whole premise of the Bodyform campaign, arguing that menstruation is neither a taboo nor a stigma. Rather, the reason for not showing the blood is because it compares to faeces, supported by the fact that other advertisements for hygiene products (toilet paper, diapers etc.) do not depict the actual bodily waste either. The establishment of the first counter discourse, thus, draws on other commonly accepted and culturally established conventions. Fig. 5 compares the two contradicting discursive articulations of menstruation:

Following this, the first user-driven counter discourse articulates menstruation as adhering to the private and individual sphere and establishes a dichotomy between on the one hand the body as a private psychical construct (i.e. a body that produces human waste) and the body as a cultural phenomenon (i.e. the body as a carrier of cultural meaning) on the other hand. In other words, the counter discourse deconstructs the ideological idea of the campaign, claiming that there is no

Picture 3. Screen dump of a Bodyformuk Instagram post, April 27/2018 (0 comments) (Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/BiE-HmvndRf/).

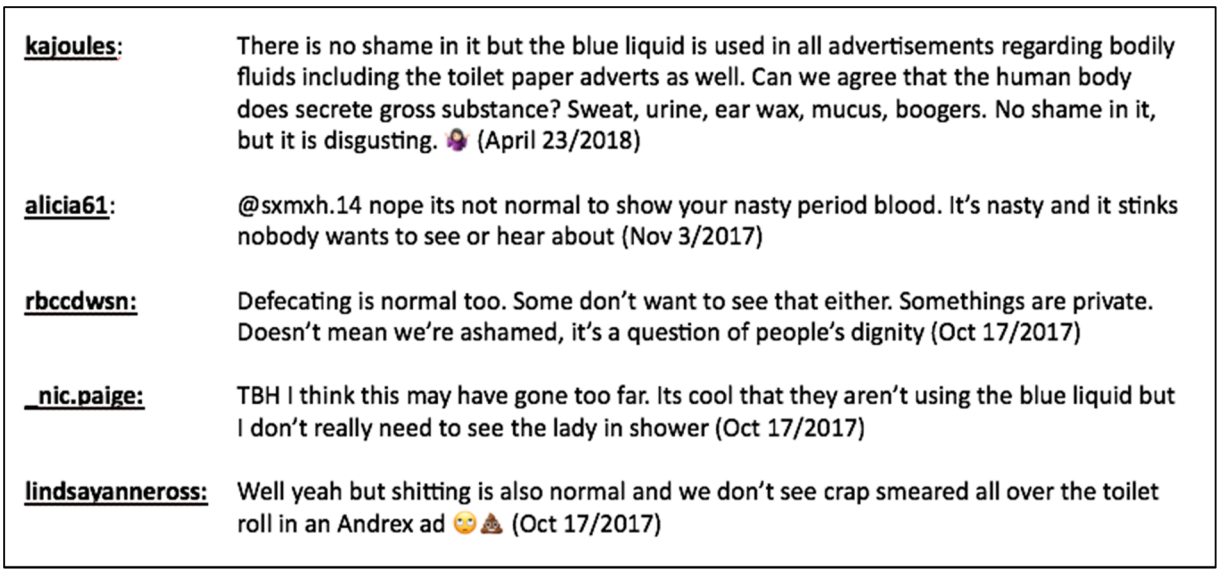


Fig. 4. Quotes from Instagram user comments, configuring counter discursive articulation no 1 (Source: https://www.instagram.com/bodyformuk/).

social issue to address and hence that the campaign merely represents an example of failed activism. The latter is exemplified by the selection of the quotes below (see Fig. 6):

As the quotes suggest, the brand and its explicit display of menstruation and the act of bleeding are identified as '[feminism] Gone too far […]' and 'feminism' (cf. Fig. 6). The quotation marks enclosing 'feminism' suggest that the user distances himself/herself from the concept, not accepting it as a valid construct. The first user-driven counter discourse repudiates the articulation of the blue liquid as a symbol of male dominance. The symbolism of the blue liquid is de-culturized, and this configuration is concurrently used to expose the feminist project. Rather, feminism becomes an invective to mark and ridicule the (non)issue of women's rights.

Contrary to the first counter discourse, the second user-driven counter discursive configuration rests upon an acceptance of the premise of the male tabooing and stigmatizing of menstruation. However, at the same time, it opposes the aestheticized articulation of menstruation, claiming #bloodnormal to idealize menstruation and literarily paint a too rose-coloured picture. The second user-driven counter discourse is exemplified by the quotes shown in Fig. 7 below:

As the quotes imply, this discursive configuration suggests that the campaign does not tell the 'truth' about menstruation, and, hence, it misrepresents women. The dichotomy between these counter discourses of menstruation is depicted in Fig. 8.

Fig. 8 illustrates how the normalization of menstruation goes through an aestheticized discourse, while at the same time this aestheticization becomes a non-normalisation of menstruation, in so far as it is transformed into an idealized discourse. Moreover, the figure shows that both of these discourses are resisted by users.

The female subject position made available by Bodyformuk's discursive articulation of menstruation is claimed to retain the woman in a male gaze as suggested in the comments on how the campaign portrays a stereotypical (and conventionally sexualized) female beauty standard (cats.abode, Oct 17/2017). Accordingly, the campaign is accused of not giving voice to women and reinforcing male dominance, as exemplified by the quote below (Fig. 9):

In the quote, the authenticity of the campaign is questioned, and with this follows an implicit questioning of the authority of Bodyformuk to represent a legitimate position from which to speak about women's rights. The second user-driven counter discourse thus positions Bodyformuk as supportive of a male ideology that simultaneously disables the possibility for Bodyformuk to represent a legitimate and active advocating position in the women's rights movement. Such a position is reserved for the woman herself. Accordingly, this second user-driven counter discourse and repositioning attribute the woman's special competences and abilities in voicing women, thus supporting the male/

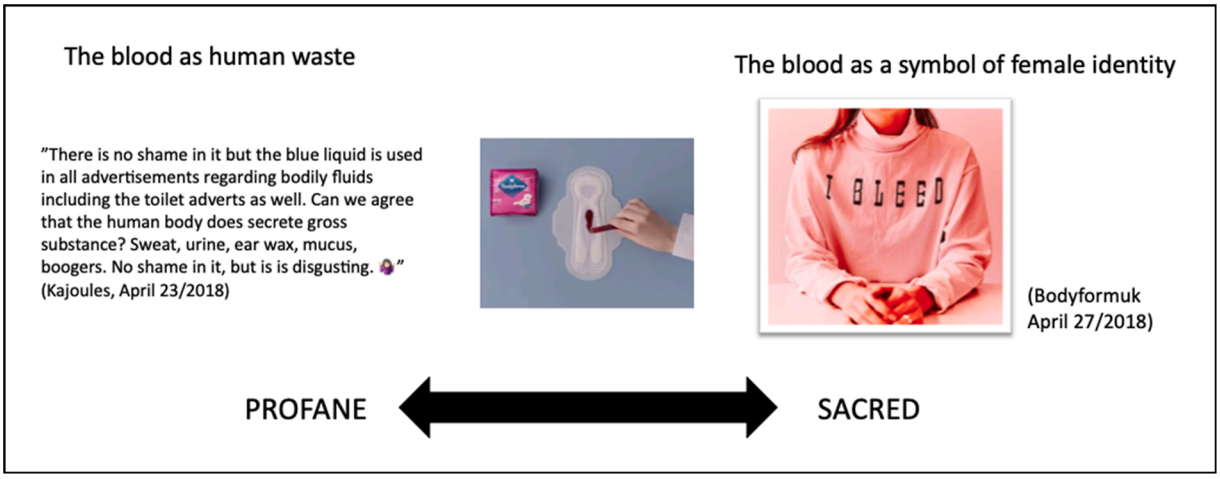


Fig. 5. Juxtaposed discursive articulations of menstruation as profane versus sacred (source: Authors).

abisharpless: @abigaillyfk (...) Showing blue liquid on period adverts has nothing to do with "shame" or it being "taboo" (Nov 3/2017)

aquariusfoot: I'm sorry but it was blue water not to "limit women" or "alienate periods" (Oct 17/2017)

betholiviaa: We are all aware that periods are completely normal. And fully aware that we bleed. That does NOT mean it needs to be shown. It's a matter of taste. This does not need to be shoved in everyone faces. I'm thinking 'feminism' has a role in thus. 😓🙄 (Oct 17/2017)

betholiviaa: @elizabeth.sarah that's fucking disgusting. And feminism these days is not normal. It's way to far. I'm a girls girls. Trust me. But these days it's absolutely ridiculous (Oct 17/2017)

the_real_terp_noir: Gone too far with your feminism (Oct 17/2017)

Fig. 6. Quotes from Instagram user comments, articulating 'feminism' (Source: https://www.instagram.com/bodyformuk/).

pinkkrown: What they showed is not nearly as graphic as what women go through every month. Even the shower scene didn't show too much (Oct 17/2017)

voiceofnothing: Contrary to popular sanitary pas brands, women often bleed with a lot more carnage than a trickle of red food colouring 🤔😂 This as doesn't portray a 'normal' period. Period. (Oct 17/2017)

cats.abode: And all women are white, size 6 and are also hairless too 🤔 (Oct 17/2017)

chloegwebb: ya, i don't think any woman finds periods this relaxing. as soon as the first cram hits, ya fucked for a week (Oct 17/2017)

Fig. 7. Quotes from Instagram user comments, configuring counter discursive articulation no 2 (Source: https://www.instagram.com/bodyformuk/).

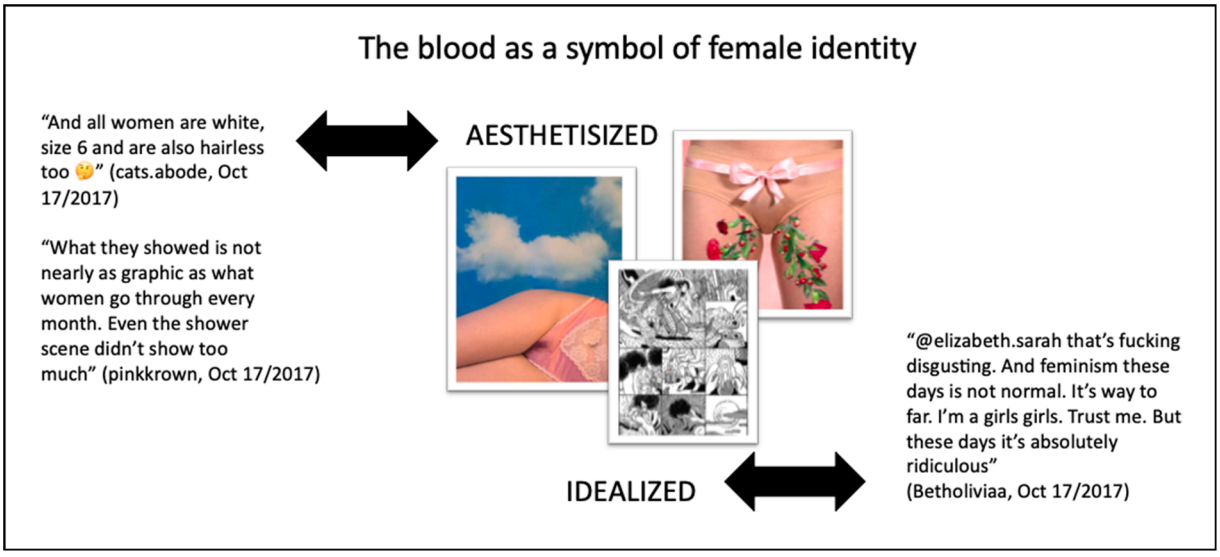


Fig. 8. Resisting Bodyforms's construction of menstruation as a symbol of an anesthetized and idealized female identity (pictures from https://www.instagram.com/bodyformuk/ March 27/2018, June 7/2018, and Aug 31/2018) (source: Authors).

female dichotomy and the 'no period, no opinion' rhetoric. It insists on an extraordinary, sacred articulation of the woman. However, rather than elevating women through an aestheticized imagery, the second user-driven counter discourse provides an alternative subject position for women to inhabit, which equips the woman with the right to be who she wants to be. As a result, womanhood is rearticulated as being more than just defined in opposition to men, but rather as a diversity of ways of being.

4.3. The emergence of corporate citizenship in cultural conversations

The analysis shows that the discursive constructions of menstruation and the subject positions they offer are configured within a complex set of dichotomies. Especially prominent is the male/female dichotomy, as a dominating contradictory relation which all other discourses and counter discourses build upon as either enabling or constraining. The perception of the male/female dichotomy as either enabling or constraining gives rise to new dichotomies of sacred/profane and individual/collective. It can be argued that this complex system of dichotomies, discourses, and counter discourses is what gives rise to and culturally feeds corporate citizenship.

Drawing on Holt (2002), the study shows the dialectical processes by which ideological brand meanings are constructed and negotiated in everyday life. The campaign is a continuous evolution of discursive articulations, re-articulations, and counter discourses: the campaign's initial primary focus on menstruation (as a cultural symbol of womanhood) changes over time to adopt a broader focus on the female body. By mapping out how Bodyformuk uses #bloodnormal in relation to other hashtags, we see a shift in focus with the introduction of #bodypositivity and #bodypositive. With this follows a new visual representation of the female body (including the natural female hair growth, cellulite, rolls of fat etc.) that disrupts the campaign's own used stereotypical imagery of the sexualized female body. Therefore, the brand's voicing of new alternative discourses and disruption of cultural conventions emerge in a dialectic interplay between Bodyformuk and users' resistance and articulation of counter discourses, which are used by Bodyformuk as cultural source material for enacting, realizing, and materializing corporate citizenship. This suggests that citizenship continuously develops in dialectic conversations with and within culturally circulating conversations.

5. Discussion and implications

The analysis of Bodyformuk's culturally disruptive #bloodnormal campaign has brought with it two key insights:

(a) users (whether customers, consumers, or mere social media trolls) exhibit active agency in resisting and opposing the corporately conveyed cultural discourses and, hence, claims of corporate citizenship;
(b) the brand actively uses these user-driven oppositions and counter discourses as source material for continuously rearticulating and rematerializing corporate citizenship.

From a corporate marketing perspective, this study challenges the corporate centricity inherent in the discipline by providing empirical insights into the micro-processes by which users oppose and renegotiate brand meaning in cultural discourse, ultimately providing new strategic materials for the brand to evolve. In other words, corporate citizenship is not constructed by means of organization-initiated corporate branding and marketing activities alone, but continuously emerges and re-emerges in ideological and politically driven cultural conversations. Culture is not restricted to the internal workings of an organization, as suggested in corporate marketing, where culture is associated with organizational identity and personality (e.g. Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Instead, culture permeates, changes, and is influenced by shared organizational and societal practices, ideologies, and systems of meaning.

According to the meaning transfer model introduced by McCracken (1986), cultural meaning is transferred onto consumers through media and advertising systems. Thus, in consuming corporate communication, cultural values are reproduced and transferred onto consumers' everyday living. Such notion of cultural transmission installs cultural discourses as a hegemonic factor suggesting that brands and consumers are mere carriers, or reproducers, of cultural values and beliefs and, thus, are secondary actors in larger cultural value systems. However, as argued by, for example, Thompson and Haytko (1997), consumers are active participants in shaping culture, for instance, by opposing or resisting dominant cultural values. Correspondingly, the notion of the cultural brand suggests the brand as an active participant in challenging dominating cultural values (e.g. Holt & Cameron, 2010). The analysis of the #bloodnormal campaign emphasizes the active agency of both brands and consumers in shaping cultural values. Cultural discourses are not merely transferred onto or reproduced by consumers, but are actively negotiated in complex processes within which new cultural (counter)discourses continuously emerge. Both the brand and consumers interact with the discourses in complex dialectical processes from which new discourses take shape. This builds on the dialectical model of brand paradigm and consumer culture (Holt, 2002). However, the study shows that the dialectical processes are not (only) paradigmatic in nature and historically developed over decades but are present here-and-now in culturally circulating conversations.

Such dialectic interplays are vital in realizing and enacting corporate citizenship to ensure that political, legal, cultural, and social conditions, rights, and opportunities are not determined by corporate power and business strategies but are constantly formed and evaluated in a dialogue with relevant stakeholders. Accordingly, active user agency is a fundamental premise for corporate citizenship and a means of re-establishing the democratic ideals that are diluting as corporations take on extended political roles and responsibilities.

The study thus contributes to the ongoing debate on the role of business in society (e.g. Hussain & Moriarty, 2018; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007; 2011) and the call for greater democratic accountability for corporations (e.g. Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; Moon et al., 2005). While a limited and equivalent view on corporate citizenship (Matten & Crane, 2005) poses demands on companies to comply with the rules and regulations and to ensure that the rights of the involved stakeholders are respected in their relationship with the company (e.g. Brenkert, 1992), an extended view on corporate citizenship (Matten & Crane, 2005), where the company takes on a governing role in social, legal, civil, and cultural issues, poses demands for greater democratic responsibility and accountability. In deliberate democracies, governments are democratically elected and therefore constantly held accountable for their actions (Hussain & Moriarty, 2018). However, as companies assume an extended political role, the democratic premise is waived and replaced by basic market forces. With the rise of marketized democracies, individuals 'vote' with their money and either punish (e.g. boycotts) or reward (e.g. carrot mobs) companies for their (political) actions. The political consumer (e.g. Stigzelius, 2018) exercises his/her

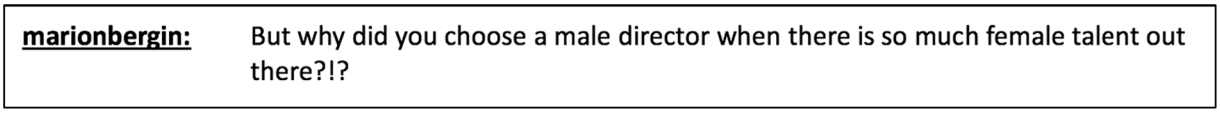


Fig. 9. Quotes from Instagram user comments, questioning the honesty of the campaign (Source: https://www.instagram.com/bodyformuk/).

power through consumption. Accordingly, the democratic principles of equality are replaced by a market-based selection of who has access to influence.

Hussain and Moriarty (2018: 519) argue that because of fundamental democratic compromises, corporations should not be allowed access to the political arena and should, thus, be deprived of their extended political role as administers of social, civil, and legal rights. Rather, political acts and voicing of political discourses should be led by political NGOs and other groups that meet the standards set out for a politically representative organization. Based on the analysis of the #bloodnormal campaign, it may be possible to argue for an alternative path to a redistribution of power. The study shows that a pro-active and dialogue-based approach also gives access to democratic processes and allows users to participate in the creation of new discourses and articulations of social and cultural values. Such notion of the practice of stakeholder agency through communication resonates with Palazzo and Scherer's communicative approach to democratic accountability (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). The authors advocate that corporate policies are regulated by the free and rational deliberation of citizens, and to ensure that corporate activities are subject to democratic review, they suggest a multi-stakeholder deliberative process (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006). Such process unfolds as a multi-stakeholder dialogue, which proceeds as a complex communicative process of accountability, thus suggesting, with reference to Habermas' notion of communicative power, 'a revolutionary concept of societal integration' (82). However, while Palazzo and Scherer adhere to a Habermasian democratic ideal of communication and dialogue as consensus-making, the study shows that conflicts and discursive counter strikes also give stakeholders access to review and affect corporate activities. A path to democratic accountability could go through communicative accountability: As companies take a political stance, they must be willing to listen to possible critical, opposing, and resistant voices outside the corporate boundaries and to integrate such voices in their discursive practice of corporate citizenship. Refusing or failing to integrate stakeholders' articulations into their political discourses may be fatal for companies and the role of business in society, or as argued by Habermas, the democratic discourse requires 'willingness to decentre one's own perspective' (Habermas, 2013: 375, quoted from Scherer et al., 2016: 282). This does not mean that companies only reactively position themselves politically in the market and merely react when critical stakeholders oppose their actions or when a social phenomenon becomes part of the culturally circulating conversations. Rather, the study shows (as also argued by Holt & Cameron, 2010) that a company needs to constantly bring itself into play as a political actor; however, such ideological position does not find its source material in corporate identity or inherent organizational personality traits, but it manifests itself in a dialogue with culturally circulating conversations. The company must speak with an activist's voice and disrupt dominant hegemonic discourses while at the same time avoiding providing yet another (corporately defined) hegemonic discourse. In other words, as an active political actor, the company must view itself as an active co-creator of the political, social, and cultural agenda. The keyword here is co-creator (cf. Scherer et al., 2016). Therefore, there exists a potential need to rethink the current dominant corporate centric approach underpinning the corporate marketing discipline to avoid corporate citizenship becoming strategic acts of corporate good doing without considering the public good (Scherer et al., 2016) with far-reaching consequences not only for corporate reputation and stakeholder relations but also for fundamental questions about who defines societal values. Consequently, the role of an active political actor is not a static position; rather, corporate citizenship is an emergent process that develops and constantly redefines itself pari passu with social change and societal transformation.

From a corporate marketing perspective, a persistent question arises: What are the implications of the corporate centricity inherent in the discipline being challenged by the extended political role of companies? To address potential implications, we take our point of departure in the most recent additions to corporate-level concepts, namely, context and custodianship (Balmer, 2009; 2011). Context—the interface between the organization and its environment—is seen as crucial to meet the need to end 'corporate marketing myopia' (Balmer, 2011: 1330) by allowing organizations to 'embrace an institutional, stakeholder and societal/CSR orientation', a need that is further explicated with the notion of ethical corporate marketing (Balmer et al., 2011; Powell, 2011). As the study shows, a societal and ethical orientation calls for an ideological/political articulation as well. With the important addition of context, corporate marketing reflects the societal embeddedness of businesses. However, as illustrated in the study, business and society are not two separate entities; in other words, you cannot take the business out of society—or the society out of business. This suggests that society is more than a context within which the organization exists and from which it is clearly demarcated. Instead, society must be considered as an active co-player (and possible opponent) that constantly interacts with the brand and its users, co-shaping opinions, meanings, and relations, and thus as important source material for building strong brands which consumers can relate to and engage with. The study of the #bloodnormal interactions shows the business-society intertwinement at the level of the brand, by illustrating at the micro-level how the brand uses topical societal conversations as source material for creating strong stakeholder relations and for constantly moving the brand forward and keeping it relevant.

The second aspect relates to the perception of managerial roles and responsibilities and perhaps more fundamentally to the understanding of what it means to manage per se. Conceptualized as custodianship (Balmer, 2009; 2011), corporate marketing management is ultimately seen as residing with senior managers who are assigned the responsibility for overseeing and orchestrating the continuous aligning and re-aligning of the other corporate-level concepts. In articulating custodianship as an internal organizational practice reserved for senior managers, corporate marketing potentially ignores or downplays the need to curate wider societal and cultural conversations, also those related to ethics and responsibility. However, the study exemplifies how the brand is intertwined in micro-conversations outside the formal boundaries of the organization. Therefore, it is possible to argue in favour of expanding the notion of custodianship to include wider practices of curating conversations with and amongst consumers and other stakeholders, an understanding which, in turn, suggests a democratization of managerial responsibilities. In addition, it points to acknowledging the intricate and complex intertwining of organizational level concepts in the interplay between macro-cultural discourse and micro-conversational practices when it comes to managing corporate marketing.

6. Conclusion: Limitations and future research

This study aimed to explore how corporate citizenship challenges the notion of corporate centricity underpinning the corporate marketing discipline. Based on a short review of current approaches to CSR and corporate citizenship in corporate marketing, the study takes its point of departure in two challenges: a) the inclusion of an extended view on corporate citizenship in corporate marketing calls for a need to rethink the corporate centricity underpinning the corporate marketing discipline; and b) the current instrumental articulation of CSR in corporate marketing does not take into consideration the extended political roles and responsibilities taken on by corporations. Framed by the theories of corporate citizenship and cultural branding, Bodyform's cultural disruptive campaign #bloodnormal has been studied as an illustrative case of the extended political role of corporations, thus empirically substantiating the propositions set forth theoretically. By focusing on the interplay between the micro-processes of individual consumers' brand interaction and wider macro-level cultural discourses, it has been illustrated how corporate citizenship is negotiated in culturally circulating conversations and, thus, continuously emerges in dialectic

processes of production, reproduction, and counter production of new and existing discourses. These insights were subsequently discussed in relation to the notion of democratic accountability and in relation to a potential need to rethink corporate centricity. In order not to compromise the fundamental human rights and equal access to democratic processes, companies need to acknowledge the discursive complexities and dichotomies constructed by, with, and around their practice of corporate citizenship. Accordingly, companies need to shift the focus in their corporate citizenship activities to be receptive and responsive to users' cultural conversations. In other words, conversational or communicative accountability is a prerequisite for democratic accountability. This suggests that corporate marketing and cultural brand management become a question about strategically considering how user articulations tap into and repurpose cultural discourses and ideologies and appropriate these as source material to continuously enact and rematerialize corporate citizenship.

Building empirical substantiation based on a single case has its obvious limitations: all other cases are not similar to Bodyform and #bloodnormal, nor is the single case used to develop a theoretical construct per se. On the contrary, insights into the specificity of the particular case and its contextual uniqueness contribute to the theoretical area where the case is inscribed and point to the potential consequences of these insights. Whereas the analysis does not lend itself to generalization, causality, and objectivity claims, its strength lies in the opportunity of in-depth understanding of the specific, empirical discursive processes. Thus, it functions as an inspiration for facilitating and encouraging critical reflection (Alvesson & Kärremann, 2007).

It is the particularities and uniqueness of the case that have led to its selection. In the paper, it is argued that if a case rooted in something as relatively unharmful as menstruation can help understand how companies and brands should interact with and listen to culturally circulating conversations in realizing and enacting corporate citizenship in order not to compromise fundamental democratic processes, greater attention should be paid to cases which touch upon issues of a more profound political nature. This study could mark the beginning of a conversation on corporate citizenship and its implications for corporate centricity within corporate marketing. Therefore, it is relevant for future research interested in extending and continuing the already growing interest in the increased political roles assigned to businesses in society and the requirements posed by such roles in connection with democratic accountability. One possible avenue for further explorations could be cases where critical political issues are at stake. Access to data can be a potential hindrance for such research (e.g. self-censorship or imposed censorship), which adds another layer of complexity to the idea of conversational or communicative accountability and thus stresses the importance of continuously exploring how democratic accountability can be ensured—also through and in (corporate) marketing initiatives.

Although the study has taken its empirical point of departure in the demarcated arena of an online brand campaign and related user comments, the particularities of studying cultural conversations on social media (specifically Instagram) have not explicitly been addressed. However, as social media technology is said to rest on basic democratic principles (cf. Fuchs et al., 2010), one suggestion is for future research to specifically study the use of social media and social technologies as platforms for the negotiation of ideologies and democratic exchange and thus to explore both the potentials and limitations for social media in securing democratic processes.

Finally, the conclusions suggest that future research should focus on the consequences of moving away from a corporate centric approach to corporate marketing. This leads to a number of questions for potential exploration: How can we reconceptualize or develop the dimensions of the different corporate level concepts in theory and practice including the new concept of corporate citizenship? What are the implications for the relationships between the concepts of replacing a corporate centric approach with a society-oriented one? How should communication be articulated to reflect the society-oriented approach? That is, if communicative accountability is a fundamental aspect of democratic accountability, then communication is different from, or more than, mere transmission of corporately defined messages.

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Sophie Esmann Andersen (Ph.D.) is Associate Professor at the Department of Management, School of Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University, Denmark. Her research areas include strategic communication, brand management and corporate social responsibility. Her research has recently been published in Journal of Business Research, Journal of Business Ethics and Journal of Marketing Communication.

Trine Susanne Johansen (Ph.D.) is Associate Professor at School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, Denmark. Her research areas include strategic communication, brand management, organizational identity and corporate social responsibility. Her research has recently been published in Journal of Marketing Communications, Corporate Communication: An International Journal, and International Studies of Management and Organization.