BRAND LATITUDE

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation addresses the topic of brand latitude, defined herein as *a public entity's capacity to deviate from category norms or to transcend the normal function of a brand without incurring adverse responses from the public*. The study of brand latitude is important because modern managers use brands to achieve much more than greater market share relative to similar competitors. Established brands are often leveraged to facilitate entry into new product categories, gain attention for social causes, and attract talent, among other uses. While managers hope every branding effort to be successful, these non-standard uses of brands may be received positively, negatively, or indifferently. This dissertation explores both the brand attributes and styles of approach that can lead to increased brand latitude. The first essay integrates various streams of literature to develop the concept of brand latitude, including predicted antecedents and outcomes. Additionally, potential moderators of these main effects are considered, including choice of narrative voice (first-person vs. third), a characteristic of the message. Essay 2 is an empirical investigation of both brand attributes (good character, innovativeness, altruism) and characteristics of the controversial message (use of first-person vs third-person narrative voice) as antecedents of brand latitude.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF ESSAYS

This dissertation is comprised of two essays that address the topic of brand latitude, defined herein as *a public entity's capacity to deviate from category norms or to transcend the normal function of a brand without incurring adverse responses from the public*. The study of brand latitude is important because modern managers use brands to achieve much more than greater market share relative to similar competitors. Established brands are often leveraged to facilitate entry into new product categories, gain attention for social causes, and attract talent, among other uses. While managers hope every branding effort to be successful, these non-standard uses of brands may be received positively, negatively, or indifferently. The present investigation explores both the brand attributes and styles of approach that can lead to increased brand latitude.

The first essay is a conceptual paper that integrates various streams of literature to develop the concept of brand latitude. The essay first conceptualizes brand latitude. It next proposes brand-level antecedents and outcomes of brand latitude, which are based on a thorough review of multiple literature streams that discuss situations when brands are given more latitude to deviate or to transcend their traditional role as signals of functional brand attributes. Additionally, potential moderators of these main effects are considered, including choice of narrative voice (first-person vs. third), a characteristic of the message.

The second essay is an empirical examination of the aforementioned framework in the context of controversial political advocacy by brands, an emergent and understudied topic. Note that while Essay 1 is devoted to a discussion of how brand attributes relate to brand latitude, Essay 2 considers both brand attributes (good character, innovativeness, altruism) and characteristics of the controversial message (use of first-person vs third-person narrative voice) as antecedents of brand latitude. A consideration of message characteristics is useful in this context because individuals judge the appropriateness of a brand's engagement in controversial advocacy both by their prior knowledge of the brand's attributes and by the nature of message delivered.

CHAPTER II

ESSAY 1:

BRAND LATITUDE: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

**Contribution Statement**

The present research seeks to (1) introduce brand latitude and define it, (2) highlight the importance of brand latitude in the study of brand strategy, (3) identify its various manifestations, and distinguish it from related constructs, (4) integrate parallel tracks of research related to brand latitude, and (5) outline an agenda for future research. To this end, the proposed research will carefully identify and synthesize relevant literature following established, reproducible procedures. The final outcome of the research will be an integrative view of the current state of knowledge in this research area, including insights into research findings, gaps, and potential future research directions.

## Introduction

Brands have long played a critical role in firms' efforts to achieve marketplace success. Most notably, the signaling properties inherent in established brands have allowed many successful firms to charge price premiums and/or increase sales volume relative to less-well-branded competitors. The rise in prominence of user reviews, social media and other electronic forms of word-of-mouth have led to a dramatic shift in how information about brands is shared. Whereas information in pre-internet era marketplaces typically flowed in one direction—from firms to the public—information now flows freely among audiences for the company and brand, greatly increasing the complexity of the sphere of communications in which firms must operate.

Rather than being discouraged by this seeming loss in control stemming from the democratization of information, firms have been emboldened as they find ever more creative ways in which to leverage their brands. For example, established brands of today are often leveraged, supported by collateral communications, to ensure success when entering a new product category or making a political stand. While some such efforts are well-received, others fall flat. Ultimately, the success or failure of these various brand leveraging efforts depends on the public's evaluation of both message and messenger. The present research (Essay 1) is a conceptual evaluation of how attributes of the brand (the messenger) may relate to increased leveragability.

While traditional concepts of brand health such as brand equity certainly play a role in the palatability of brand leveraging efforts, they fall short of explaining why the

public appears to allow some brands to be leveraged more freely in terms of what they can do and say. Consider, for example, two U.S. beer brands, Budweiser and Ninkasi. While the more prominent of the two, Budweiser, certainly enjoys many benefits associated with having high brand equity, it is less clear that the brand has capacity to be leveraged beyond that afforded to another brand. Budweiser departed from standard ad fare with its 2015 Super Bowl ad associated craft beer with hipsters, a contemporary subculture in the U.S., whom the ad then proceeded to mercilessly mock. Not only were craft brewers unphased by this negative attention, but some gleefully played along with the criticism. What many would consider to be a low equity brand, Ninkasi, a craft beer based in Eugene, Oregon, released a video called "Brewed the Easy Way," and introduced a new beverage called "Easy Way IPA." Both were plays on Budweiser's "Brewed the Hard Way" campaign that derided local craft breweries and their customers. While it is difficult to ascertain all factors involved, it is clear that Budweiser has since lost its position as "the king of beers" (Snider 2018).

Defining Brand Latitude

Based on the logic that the properties of the messenger, or brand, can predict success in these situations, we introduce the concept of brand latitude. In defining brand latitude, we first examine definitions of its component words, "brand" and "latitude" independently. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or

services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors." This definition, though useful, does not fully express the meaning of the term as it is used in the literature. First, a brand is often manifest in other features besides those listed in the AMA definition (Wood 2000), such as musical tunes. Second, brands encompass much more than visual artifacts that are presented by the firm, and third, a brand can represent things other than goods and services. For example, a brand can represent a firm, a non-profit, a government agency, or a celebrity (Thomson 2006). In actual use, brands have come to represent "nothing more or less than the sum of all the mental connections people have around [the brand]" (Brown 1992; White 2000). Based on this conceptualization, we can simplify the definition of a brand to be a mental representation of a public entity or object. This concept of a brand is also sometimes referred to as brand image, defined by Keller (1993, p. 3) as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in memory." Note that this definition describes a brand from a purely public perception, and does not address an alternate use of the term, "brand," in which it is used to describe elements of a corporate communications strategy.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines latitude as "freedom of action or choice" (Merriam-Webster 2018). In their work examining advertising flexibility, Barone and Jewell (2013), discuss a scenario in which brands with certain characteristics have more "license or latitude to employ strategies that deviate from category norms without the penalty" relative to other brands. Rather than focusing solely on deviations within advertising contexts, we consider all brand deviations. We justify this broader

conceptualization by reasoning that attributes that lead to flexibility in one area of strategy should spill over into other areas of strategy. Nike, the sports apparel giant, for example, has been rewarded for deviations in various areas (e.g., social justice campaigning (Abad-Santos 2018), banned Air Jordans (Gibbs 2018)) and forgiven for its transgressions (e.g., sweat-shop labor, sexual discrimination; Townsend 2018). Our observation is that Nike seems to have a general dose of brand latitude, rather than simple advertising flexibility. Our broad conceptualization helps explain cases such as Nike. We also take this a step further by saying that a brand with high latitude may not only deviate by behaving unexpectedly, but may also transcend the normal function of a brand. This is done, for example, when a consumer brand becomes a trusted platform for promoting political and social change. Thus, we define brand latitude as *a public entity's capacity to deviate from category norms or to transcend the normal function of a brand without incurring adverse responses from the public*.


Need for a Conceptual Frame


Why are some brands able to do more while others are severely punished for any departure or misstep? The focus of the current research aims to help answer this question by developing a conceptual model of brand latitude, its outcomes (brand leveragability and brand resilience) and its potential antecedents. In our investigation of the potential antecedents of brand latitude, we shed light on how specific attributes and behaviors of a brand may give it greater brand latitude, all else being equal.

This research begins with a conceptual examination of brand latitude that integrates various literature streams related to fallout from marketing crises and brand strategy flexibility that have previously been developed only in isolation. Prior research has examined concepts similar to our proposed brand latitude in leadership contexts (Abrams et al. 2018), advertising flexibility (Barone and Jewell 2013), and product-harm crises (see Cleeren et al. 2017 for a review). Yet, no unifying theory has been put forward to integrate the knowledge in this area into a single discussion, and no prior work has considered this capability as a characteristic of the brand to be cultivated.

Generally, the need for a unifying theory is apparent when one considers the likely occurrence of parallel tracks of research examining the same phenomena in different contexts. Managerially, the importance of understanding brand latitude relates to proper valuation of brand assets, full understanding of a brand's strategic capabilities, and a new perspective of the band as a social actor. As a byproduct of this research, we offer a fuller understanding of what a brand is and what brand equity is. It would be unwise, for example, to value two brands equally simply due to their ability to drive sales without any consideration of brand latitude, and therefore, the brand's leveragability and resilience.

**Importance of Brand Latitude in Discussions of Brand Equity**

Kotler and Keller (2012, p. 115) defined brand equity as the "added *value* endowed on products and services." Accordingly, the present research considers brand

equity and brand value to be synonymous, though some scholars have argued

persuasively for their separate consideration (Aaker 2016; Raggio and Leone 2007). In

2018, Forbes.com estimated that the five most valuable U.S. brands each account for

between 9.1% (Amazon) and 35.9% (Google) of the total market value of their respective

firms (Forbes 2018a). These tremendous valuations help to demonstrate the importance

of brands as critical firm assets.

Brand equity is generally measured directly based on the brand's revenue

generating capabilities (sales-based brand equity), as is the case with Forbes (2018b), or

indirectly based on consumer perceptions of the brand (consumer-based brand equity;

Datta, Ailawadi, and van Heerde 2017; see Christodoulides and De Chernatony 2010 for

a review). It is important to note that in either case, the goal of the instrument is to

determine the brand's ability to generate revenue beyond what could be generated by the

same product marketed under an unfamiliar brand (e.g., Goldfarb, Lu & Moorthy 2009;

Keller 1998).

While this past conceputalizations of brand eqity is useful for certain purposes,

this limited view of brand equity is insufficient due to (1) its implication that firms derive

no benefit from owned brands outside of increased sales price and volume, (2) its

inability to address the extent to which a brand may be leveraged outside of its current

primary role (e.g., brand extensions, brand advocacy), (3) its failure to consider the

resilience of said brand equity in the face of some crisis or shift in consumer preferences,

and (4) its failure to address benefits derived from appealing to other stakeholders aside

from consumers (e.g., employees, investors, and non-consumers of the brand in society).

Brand Benefits Other than Sales

First, in order for the revenue model of brand equity to hold up, we must assume that brands are only used to increase sales volume or price. Modern economic theory (Adam Smith 1887) is based on the premise that the purpose of a firm is to create profits. Milton Friedman and others of the Chicago School of Economics take it one step further and argue that working toward any goal other than profits is wasteful and potentially immoral. We argue that though the profit motive may be present, or even central for a given business, it does not preclude firms and their agents from having various other motives, including those that directly conflict with the profit motive. A wealthy founder, for example, having little need for further profits, may wish to focus the firm's excess resources on promoting a cause that is close to the founder's heart.

Rather than focusing on profit-maximization, many great firms have flourished by working to create really great products, delighting customers, or giving back to society as a primary motive. While cynics may see these activities as ultimately profit-motivated, and some may be, there is no reason why they must be. There is certainly no law of nature preventing a brand owner from acting altruistically, or feeling they have a higher calling than simply generating profits. If the agent directing the activities of a firm has motives other than profit seeking, it follows they would hope to leverage their brands to further these goals. Because it cannot be said that the sole, or even primary motive of every firm is to maximize profits, it also cannot be said that a brand's value is solely

derived from its ability to generate sales. This would say nothing of the brand's ability to meet other goals of the firm.

Moreover, by only considering incremental improvements in sales revenue effected by the brand, existing conceptualizations of brand equity imply that no brand equity is present in human brands, non-profit brands, government entities, or political brands. This omission was noted by Faircloth who introduced "nonprofit brand equity" (2005, p. 2) as an answer to this gap in understanding. It is difficult to accept, however, that these various types of brands are different enough to merit their own definition of what a brand is, or what brand equity is. Furthermore, in a dynamic, ever-changing marketplace, a broader conceptualization of brand equity that considers all types of brands is desirable.

Brand Leveragability

Second, we argue that two brands with equivalent revenue generating ability may perform very differently with regards to how freely they may behave in the marketplace. Such freedom is a desirable brand characteristic because it allows brand managers to successfully leverage the brand in unexpected or unique ways without fear of loss in brand equity. Additionally, such brands may be inoculated against future harm from marketing crises which so often beset modern firms. Logically, any discussion of a brand's revenue-generating capabilities without consideration of how the brand could be

leveraged in new ways, is able to address new audiences, or is inoculated against future marketing crises portrays an incomplete picture of a brand's true value.

Similarly, while thorough and appropriate for their time, past conceptualizations of consumer-based brand equity (Aaker 1996; Keller 1993) leave out any discussion of a brand departing from norms. Past conceptualizations of brand and brand equity focus largely on the firm's communications with current and potential customers. This is evidenced even by naming the construct "consumer-focused brand equity" (Keller 1993). The frequency, extent and impact of commentary and action as played out in social media by individuals that may not be current or future consumers (e.g., social issue advocates) could not have been imagined a few decades ago. Because the current environment in which brands must operate is more dynamic due to the speed and democratization of information flows, brand latitude has become an important consideration.

Brand Resilience

Third, we argue that the true value of a brand is determined not only by its ability to increase sales, but also by its resilience. According to Dawar and Pillutla (2000, p. 215), "brand equity is a valuable yet fragile asset." This conceptualization, dominant in the literature, implies that an asset's value can be determined without any consideration of said asset's durability. In contrast, typical valuations of other types of equity fully consider, and heavily weight the durability of the asset in question when determining the amount of equity present. For an example, from an applied perspective, Copulsky (2011)

argues that there are valuable brands and fragile brands. This shows that brand equity is best conceptualized with a stability dimension. Furthermore, we argue that brand latitude is what gives brands stability to weather shifting customer preferences, marketing crises and other problems faced by modern firms. Indeed, any discussion of brand equity is incomplete without an element of latitude.

Benefits Derived from Appealing to Other Stakeholders

Fourth, by conceptualizing brand equity solely based on a brand's revenue generating capabilities, existing conceptualizations of brand equity fail to appropriately consider the benefits brands can derive from appealing to investors, potential employees, the public, or other groups. Some brands, for example, are valuable in large part simply because they attract the best employees. While the effect of the brand on recruitment is typically overlooked (with some exceptions, see Ambler and Barrow 1996), we contend that it does in fact increase the intangible value of the brand, and therefore must be considered when evaluating brand equity. Noting this omission, researchers have proposed consideration of employees (Burmann, Jost-Benz and Riley 2008), volunteers, and donors (Faircloth 2005) as the objects of brand appeals. While these additions are helpful, a reconceptualization of brand equity to include all potential objects and audiences of the brand's appeal could be helpful. During the discussion that follows, we often refer to these various groups as "the public" or "members of the public" as appropriate.

Brand Latitude Helps Provide a Complete Picture of Brand Equity


While brand equity proposes to assess the intangible value of a brand, existing conceptualizations of brand equity (Aaker 1996; Keller 1993) have neglected to include brand latitude or related constructs as part of the model. We argue that brand latitude is critically important to the intangible value of a brand, and therefore an important component of brand equity for at least two reasons. First, brand latitude protects a brand from damage following a marketing crisis because high latitude brands are less likely to be punished for accidental deviations, creating an aspect of durability for the brand. Second, brand latitude enables the use of a brand in new and unexpected ways that allow the firm better meet its various goals. Given that firms often want to leverage existing brands in new ways, and must often deviate from the norm in order to stand out and be noticed, having the ability to deviate is a clear component of brand value. Thus, brand latitude is argued to be a critical component of brand equity that has been largely neglected.

Brand latitude is important to the study and practice of brand strategy because first, it integrates a set of brand topics that were previously considered separately as though they were disparate constructs, causing redundant studies. Integration is a necessary process to arrive at a more sensible view of how members of the public relate to brands. Second, brand latitude brings greater insight to the ways in which brand equity is determined. Beyond the ability to increase revenue through higher sales volume and

price premiums, brand latitude increases the value of a brand by allowing the brand to be leveraged in unexpected ways and to resist damage from negative information about the brand. Third, having the ability to identify brand latitude and knowing what brand attributes have been shown to lead to increased brand latitude enables researchers and practitioners to establish best practices to increase brand latitude in the future.

## Toward a Theory of Brand Latitude

Brand latitude is observed when (a) a brand is given license by the public to deviate from expectations without punishment, or (b) a brand is allowed to transcend its normal expected role as a signal of quality, low price, or other product or firm attributes. In the conceptual development process that follows, we establish a theory base for brand latitude in social deviance theory and examine contexts in which brand latitude is observable. Next, we propose a set of antecedents, including moderators of these relationships, and outcomes of brand latitude to develop a conceptual model (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 Conceptual model of brand latitude
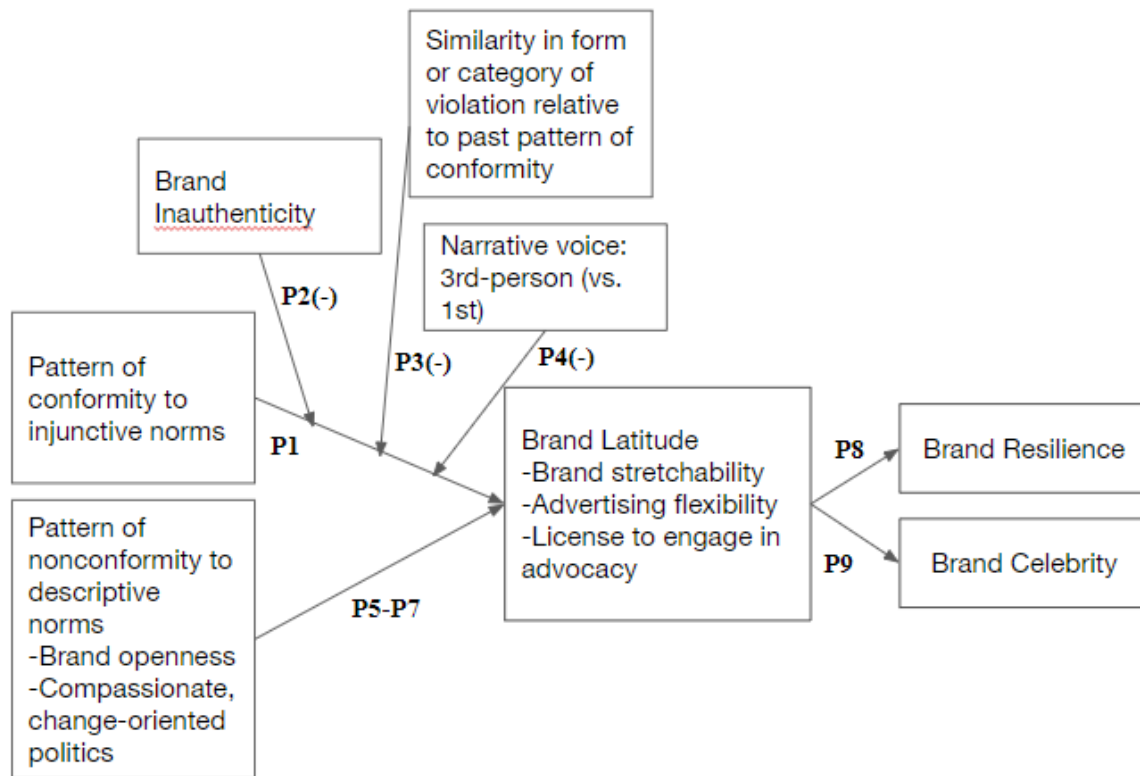
Brand Latitude Gives License to Deviate from Brand Social Norms


People imbue non-human objects, including consumer brands, with various

human-like characteristics (Aggarwal and McGill 2011; Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo

2007). This is evident when we consider that brands are associated with personality traits

(Aaker 1997) and values systems (Torelli et al. 2012). Moreover, consumers form

relationships with brands that bear similarity to relationships between humans, including

their use of social norms as a guide to evaluate the brand (Aggarwal 2004). Social norms

are informal, often unspoken, rules that dictate what behavior is appropriate in a given

time and place. Norms are generally seen as useful because societies use them to regulate conduct in a way that promotes civility and cooperation (Gilovich et al. 2015).

Social norms can be categorized as either descriptive, meaning they reflect what individuals typically do, or injunctive, meaning they dictate what individuals *must* do (Cialdini 1991). While conformity to descriptive social norms is expected, it is not typically enforced, nor is nonconformity to descriptive norms generally seen to be harmful. In contrast, conformity to injunctive norms is demanded, and their violation can cause harm. Violation of injunctive norms often results in punishment, such as ostracism by other group members.

The model in Fig. 1 shows how brand behavior relative to descriptive and injunctive norms influences the development and maintenance of brand latitude. Violations of social norms can be punished (e.g., ostracism; Williams and Sommer 1997), permitted, or even rewarded in some cases, such as when the violation is deemed to be beneficial or superior to the expected behavior (Warren and Campbell 2014). In fact, societies often benefit from positive deviance and rely on it to bring needed change to social structures that have outlived their usefulness (Coser 1962). This positive deviance is exemplified by civil rights leaders, such as Rosa Parks in the U.S. and Mahatma Gandhi in India. These are individuals who were reviled by many for their deviance at the time they took action, but later became known as crucial change agents. In 2006, Rindova, Pollock and Hayward in their work on what makes "celebrity firms" (pg. 60) pointed out that "the processes that lead customers and other stakeholders to evaluate novel, nonconforming actions positively warrant closer attention." Yet, in subsequent

years, there continues to be a lack of empirical investigation into what might make these brand deviations seem more acceptable.

According to expectancy violation theory, individuals take into account the characteristics of the messenger in addition to relational characteristics and situation context when evaluating whether a given communication is a violation of social norms (Burgoon and Jones 1976). Building on this theory, we suggest that members of the public create mental representations of a brand (the messenger) based on various data sources, including observable brand characteristics and past behavior by the brand. They are then able to use these mental representations of the brand together with information about their relationship with the brand and information regarding the situation context to evaluate the appropriateness of a brand's subsequent behaviors.

Members of the public are then able to use prior information they have about a brand, for example, to resist challenges from counterattitudinal negative information (Pham and Muthukrishnan 2002). Given that consumers make use of prior information they have about a brand as part of their process to determine the appropriateness of a given brand behavior, it is logical to conclude that some brands may be able to get away with more deviations than other brands. When reasoning whether a deviation is appropriate, the public may determine it to be acceptable because the brand is known for deviating, the brand has built up enough good behavior credit that it should be allowed some latitude, or for any other reason. The concept of brand latitude relies on the premise that some brands are allowed to deviate more than others, but it does not limit what the

set of possible reasons for granting this latitude though some effort is made to determine what these antecedents of brand latitude might be.

Unexpected deviations by brands may be either intentional or unintentional and can vary by degree, but it is necessary to distinguish the more severe transgressions—those that can lead to marketing crises—from the more innocuous brand strategy deviations that may—at worst—lead to a brand not being taken seriously (though they can also lead to a decrease in brand effectiveness over time). For example, Tesla, the U.S.-based automaker has consistently failed to meet delivery deadlines for new car orders, often making customers wait a year or more (Isidore 2017). More severe transgressions include events in which the public is harmed or insulted in some way. For example, Pepsi appeared to imply in its 2017 ad featuring reality star, Kendall Jenner, that its sugary beverages are the solution to complex social issues involving protestors and police barricades. The timing of the ad was particularly misguided because it first aired when tensions were running high and semi-violent protests were occurring in response to what many saw as unfair targeting of the African American community by police, culminating in the "Black Lives Matter" movement. The ad appeared to be trivializing this movement, and everyone affected by it. A year after the advertisement aired and was pulled, the brand has not recovered sales amongst those segments most offended by the misguided advertisement (Marzilli 2018).


Brand Latitude Supports Transcending the Normal Function of a Brand

Not only might a brand deviate from expectations, but it may also transcend its role entirely. Since the traditional role of a brand is simply to signal product and firm characteristics such as quality, durability, or low price, anything that goes beyond signaling expected features and benefits could be considered transcendence. Research on symbolic consumption has examined ways in which brands and products can be used to "fulfil internally generated needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego identification" (Park 1986). Harley Davidson Motorcycles, for example, has become an important identity-signaling device for some -- used to increase social cohesion within the group and differentiation from those not of the group (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). A second example is the public acceptance of a brand as a voice for political and social change as has been the case with Patagonia, a U.S. apparel brand. Patagonia is widely known for its very public, forceful advocacy on behalf of various environmental causes. When a brand transcends its normal, expected role, it is easy to see how this makes the brand become iconic and likely increases the survival rate of the brand by ensuring that there is always a community of staunch supporters that are interested in more than just the features and benefits of the products sold under the brand's name.

**Manifestations of Brand Latitude**

While a construct identified as "brand latitude" is not identified in the marketing mangagement literature, a discussion of the various manifestations of brand latitude

already identified in the literature is an essential component of developing an integrative model. By integrating the literature in these various areas, we are able to find similarities and patterns between manifestations, allowing us to make well-reasoned predictions regarding expected antecedents and outcomes that might apply to all manifestations of brand latitude.

*Brand stretchability*. Firms often extend well-established brand names to new products in order to capitalize on the brand recognition that they've already developed. While some brands are extended to products that are very similar to the original product carrying the brand name (in terms of category and attributes), other brand extensions are more distant (e.g., out of category) (Meyvis and Janiszewski 2004). Distant brand extensions are considered to be lower fitting extensions, with lower expectation of success (Loken and John 1999). For an example of a distant product extension, Tide, a laundry detergent brand, has been extended to a dry cleaning franchise, called Tide Dry Cleaners (Martin 2010). While there is congruity of meaning between laundry detergent and dry cleaning, the functional nature of Tide's original detergent product would seem to make it difficult for this brand to extend to a different functional category (Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991). A brand that is able to easily extend into distant product categories without damaging its brand image, and having the benefit of the brand recognition in the new space is said to have brand stretchability. Stretchable brands are given license by the public to deviate from their expectations. Thus, we consider brand stretchability to be a form of brand latitude.

*Advertising flexibility*. Due to the difficulty in gaining consumers' attention in today's world cluttered with marketing messages, it often behooves enterprising marketers to deviate from established advertising practices of other brands in their same category. Unfortunately, such deviations are not always well-received, and can lead to embarrassment or loss in brand equity in severe cases. Brands that are able to successfully deviate in this context have what has been termed "advertising flexibility" (Barone and Jewell 2013, 310).

*License to engage in advocacy*. The extent to which modern brands are engaged in politically controversial policy and social issues is a new, understudied issue. Given the enormous pressures placed on firms by their various stakeholders, it is likely that brands' emphasis on social issues will continue for the foreseeable future. While we know of no examples in the literature where a brand's attributes are considered in relation to its latitude in the realm of controversial advocacy, Essay 2 of this dissertation provides an initial study of this topic.

## Cultivating Brand Latitude

When considering brand latitude, perhaps the most important question is "how can it be developed?" As a conceptual essay, the present research proposes some likely antecedents to brand latitude that can be tested with empirical data and methods. These propositions are based on an evaluation of extant empirical findings and conceptual research that appear to be relevant to brand latitude. Prior research has empirically

demonstrated a number brand attributes to be antecedent to concepts closely related to brand latitude in various contexts (see Table 1). Our approach to proposing antecedents of brand latitude generally starts by identifying the commonalities among the various antecedents in these diverse contexts.

The dynamic modern marketplace rewards firms that are able to make full use of their brands and this same marketplace punishes brands that are not aware of their boundaries. Brands of today must do much more than fill their traditional role as symbols of quality, low price, or other firm or product attributes that can lead to increased sales volume or justify a higher price. Brands are relied upon for entry into new product categories (brand stretchability), engaging in unusual, attention-getting advertising (advertising flexibility), and as a platform to engage with the public on important political and social issues. Research has shown that all brands are not equal in their usefulness in engaging in these activities. Research on brand extensions has shown that prestige brands, due to their abstract nature, are more elastic than functional brands (Park, Milberg and Lawson 1991). Brands that are protypical of their category are likewise more leverageable in distant product categories (Goedertier, et al. 2015). Research on advertising flexibility has found that brands which are perceived to be more innovative are given more license to engage in advertising strategies that are atypical of their category (Barone and Jewell 2013; Barone and Jewell 2014). These research findings build a case for the idea that some brands, based on their perceived attributes, are better able than others to be leveraged in new and unusual ways.

Some prior research on brand stretchability has noted that prestige brands have a tendency to be more stretchable than functional brands due to the abstract nature of luxury relative to functional products which tend to be more closely tied to a functional category (Park, Milberg, and Lawson 1991). Additionally, brands that are considered to be prototypical within their category tend to also benefit from increased brand stretchability (Goedertier, Dawar, Geuens and Wijters 2015).

TABLE 1

EMPIRICALLY-DEMONSTRATED ANTECEDENTS OF VARIOUS

MANIFESTATIONS OF BRAND LATITUDE

| Antecedent | Manifestation of brand latitude | Definition | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prestige (vs. functional) | Brand stretchability | A brand's ability to extend into distant product categories with new products | Park, Milberg and Lawson 1991 |
| Protypicality | | | Goedertier, Dawar, Geuens and Wijters 2015 |
| Innovativeness | Advertising flexibility | Ability to effectively use advertising tactics under a broader range of conditions (including those in which the tactic is perceived to be atypical) | Barone and Jewell 2013; Barone and Jewell 2014 |
| Brand citizenship | License to engage in advocacy | A brand's ability to engage in controversial social or political discussion without public backlash | See Essay 2 |

The empirically demonstrated antecedents identified thus far (prestigiousness, prototypicality, and innovativeness; Barone and Jewell 2013; Goedertier et al. 2015; Park, Milberg and Lawson 1991) all relate to the leadership of the brand, and are close enough to each other in form that we see some initial evidence of a spillover effect between types of leveragability. The similarity of these empirically-identified provides some justification for the conceptualization of brand latitude as a holistic variable that is not domain specific. In other words, a brand that has latitude in one domain likely has latitude in another domain. A second argument for the existence of a unifying construct is a consideration of the myriad ways in which a brand latitude may be manifest. There is no limit to the ways in which a firm may leverage its brand. It is not feasible, practical or desirable that every different type of deviation should have its own corresponding concept of latitude.

Pattern of Conformity to Injunctive Norms

In an effort to explain why behavior that deviates from normative expectations can sometimes go unpunished by one's social group, Hollander (1958; 2006) proposed the concept of idiosyncrasy credits. Idiosyncrasy credits are positive impressions of an individual that accrue over time as the individual exhibits a pattern of conformity to group expectations. We refer to these group expectations as injunctive social norms (Borsari and Carey 2003). Thus, idiosyncrasy credits are accrued by adherence to

injunctive social norms, and lost by disregarding injunctive social norms. Any deviation that follows such a demonstration of conformity to injunctive norms could be seen by one's social group as anomalous and/or justifiable based on information not yet available to the group. Thus, a pattern of conformity to injunctive norms will act as a buffer against social penalties for future deviations, making it antecedent to brand latitude as shown in our model in Fig. 1. A similar mechanism is at work when brands, after developing an association with charitable giving and other altruistic activities, develop resistance to damage from subsequent failure to live up to the public's expectations (Joireman et al. 2015; see Sen, Du, and Bhattacharya 2016 for a review). Such altruistic behavior is consistent with the social norm of helping others in need.

Having established that a demonstration of conformity to injunctive norms leads to increased latitude to deviate, we now turn our focus to the transcendent properties of brand latitude. Does this same pattern of conformity lead to increased ability to transcend the normal function of a brand? One injunctive norm relevant to brands is that the products they produce should be high quality. Most consumers would consider a defective product to be a serious breach of their expectations. Conforming to the quality norm allows brands to benefit from brand love, a relationship in which a brand is able to transcend its traditional role to become the target of consumer adoration, leading to resistance to negative information as an outcome (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi 2012). Thus, we propose the following:

*P1: Brands that establish a pattern of conformity (nonconformity) to injunctive norms will have higher (lower) brand latitude.*

*Brand Inauthenticity as a Negative Moderator*. Running counter to the conformity to injunctive norms explanation of brand latitude is the idea that people can sometimes be more offended by brands that establish a stellar reputation then later violate it through bad or unexpected behavior. In this situation, members of the public may feel that they have been scammed and the most recent violation by the brand represents a sort of unmasking in which the brand's true character has now become observable. What would lead to a pattern of good behavior being a bad thing? One likely possibility is the perceived lack of authenticity of the brand's original motives. Morhart et al. (2015) defines perceived brand authenticity "as the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful toward itself (continuity), true to its consumers (credibility), motivated by caring and responsibility (integrity), and able to support consumers in being true to themselves (symbolism)." As shown in Fig. 1, authenticity moderates the relationship between a pattern of conforming behavior and the development of brand authenticity. Brands behaving with continuity, credibility, integrity, and possibly even symbolic value to for consumers will be perceived as authentic but brands violating tenets of this construct in their actions will not be well received.

*P2: Relative to high authenticity brands, low authenticity brands will be less likely to achieve brand latitude through a pattern of conformity to injunctive norms.*

*Similarity in Form or Category as a Negative Moderator.* Another consideration is that people may become offended by the proximity of the category of the violation to the previously established pattern of good behavior. If the brand establishes itself as environmentally conscious, for example, any violation of public expectations related to environmentalism should be dealt with especially harshly by the public. Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz (2009) found that perceived corporate hypocrisy is one reason people react negatively to inconsistent information about a firm's social responsibility. Many people are skeptical of coporate social responsibility efforts (Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013), and perceptions of information asymmetry between corporate brands and the public create the impression that earlier environmentalism was simply for show, and lurking underneath was a deep-seated hypocrisy.  This concept was demonstrated in a study of automobile customer satisfaction in which higher levels of perceived product quality led to more negative responses to safety recalls (Liu and Shankar 2015). This brings us to our next proposition:

*P3: Brands that demonstrate a pattern of conformity to injunctive norms will achieve brand latitude only when the deviation is in a distant category from the previously demonstrated pattern of conformity.*

While conformity to injunctive norms is likely to contribute to brand latitude (P1), message characteristics that are incongruent with the goodwill nature of injunctive norms

conformity may have a dampening effect on subsequent brand latitude. The warmth inherent in positive attributes such as altruism, caring for employees, and other positive characteristics necessitates a warm approach to messaging. Stern (1991) argues that warmth can be conveyed through choice of narrative voice when the brand is referencing itself. In communications, the brand may self-reference either in the first-person voice (e.g. we, us, ours) or third-person (e.g. the brand name). Based on research of narrative voice in literary fiction, Stern (1991) argues that use of first-person voice signals warmth and compassion, which is consistent with properties displayed through brand citizenship. In contrast, she argues, third-person voice signals competence. While competence is not at odds with conformity to injunctive norms, it doesn't closely mirror the construct as does warmth. Thus, a combination of conformity to injunctive norms, a brand attribute, and use of third-person voice should negatively influence subsequent brand latitude. Thus, the following proposition:

> *P4: Brands that demonstrate a pattern of conformity to injunctive norms will be less likely to achieve brand latitude when the brand communication uses third-person voice (vs. first).*

Pattern of Nonconformity to Descriptive Norms

In answer to the question of which brands have latitude, it makes sense to consider whether a brand's efforts to position itself as a deviating brand—one that is always pushing the envelope—might result in increased latitude. The idea behind this

explanation of brand latitude is that the public may become accustomed to their patterns of deviation and accept them as normal and expected, thereby granting latitude to the brand. For example, brands that are known for deviating by engaging in politics, use of irreverent advertising, risky product design, or other methods may develop brand latitude over time.

Research on perceptions of coolness has shown that deviation from social norms can actually be seen in a positive light, but only if the norms being violated are either descriptive in nature or deemed to be illegitimate (Warren and Campbell 2014). This idea is supported by a related stream of research in the management literature that puts forward the idea that firms attain celebrity status, in part, through a pattern of very public, nonconforming actions (Rindova et al. 2006). For example, innovativeness, a brand attribute associated with nonconformity, but in a positive, non-offensive (descriptive norms) way, has been shown to increase a brand's latitude to deviate in advertising contexts (Barone and Jewell 2013). Given that brands may obtain latitude to both to deviate (e.g. advertising flexibility) and to transcend their traditional role (e..g. celebrity status), we therefore argue that the demonstration of a pattern of nonconformity to descriptive norms will lead to increased brand latitude. The antecedent role of nonconformity to descriptive norms is depicted in Fig. 1. In summary, we offer the following proposition:

*P5: A brand that has established a pattern of nonconformity (conformity) to descriptive social norms will have higher (lower) brand latitude.*

If establishing a pattern of nonconformity to descriptive norms truly does lead to increased brand latitude, as depicted in Fig. 1, it follows that brand values that relate directly to conformity could be relevant as antecedents of brand latitude. Torelli et al. (2012) adapted the work of Schwartz (1992) on universal values to a brand context, and offered it as an alternative to existing conceptualizations of brand personality. One dimension that is very relevant to conformity is openness. The openness dimension encapsulates stimulation and self-direction values, and is in opposition to "conservation," a value directly linked to conformity, which combines the values of security, conformity and tradition. Brands that are more open (e.g., innovative, liberal, creative, etc.) are less likely to conform to descriptive norms, and may be granted more brand latitude as a result. As stated earlier, innovativeness, a component of openness, increases brand latitude advertising contexts (Barone and Jewell 2013). Brands representative of the openness value are expected to take risks, and do things differently. They are brands that are not afraid to fail, and are known for diverging from the norm in positive ways. Thus, we offer the following proposition:

*P6: Perceptions of brand openness (vs. conservation), a value trait, lead to higher (lower) brand latitude.*

In Keller and Richey's (2006) discussion of corporate brand personality, the "heart" of a brand is described as having passion and compassion.  It is argued that a brand must have compassion "for employees, stakeholders, and members of the

communities in which it operates" (Keller and Richey 2006). Compassion may be expressed many ways both internally and externally. While internal compassion may result in positive rankings for the company in terms of a place where employees might like to work, it is the external communication of compassion that will influence perceptions of brand latitude and downstream consequences for the company and its brands.

One way in which compassion may be externally communicated is through taking a stance on important issues that express the brand's ideological compass. Some political ideologies may be more congruent with brand latitude than others. Two criteria could be used to evaluate a political ideology for compatibility with brand latitude. First, if the ideology is commonly associated with conformity to injunctive norms, such as helping those who are unable to care for themselves, the ideology aligns well with the principle of adherence to injunctive norms and is consistent with brand latitude. Second, if the political ideology is future-oriented and change oriented, it may transfer its reputation for deviating from descriptive social norms to the associated brand, again increasing brand latitude. In the U.S., brands typically only associate publicly with progressive causes. Given that progressive politics meets both criteria for brand latitude (compassion and future/change orientation) it makes sense to do so. Therefore, we propose the following:

*P7: Brands that are more commonly associated (not associated) with*

*compassionate, change-oriented political ideologies will have higher (lower)*

*brand latitude.*

We argue that Proposition 6 is most consistent with a pattern of nonconformity to descriptive norms identified as an antecedent to brand latitude in Fig. 1. While the display of compassion component of such ideologies is clearly relevant to conformity to injunctive norms, such as the norm of treating others well mentioned above, the ideological disagreement about how to best show compassion, and under which situations it is warranted, make it so that association with change-oriented political ideology is a nonconforming attribute of a brand. This is particularly evident when one considers that the anticipated role of a firm is not to engage in politics at all, but to avoid them in favor of more conventional firm goals, such as maximizing profits (Hall and Hitch 1939).

**Outcomes of Brand Latitude**

Brand Resilience

A risk inherent to brands is that they can sustain large decreases in brand equity over time. Obviously, such decreases in brand equity are extremely disadvantageous because this means that the brand has less ability to effect important outcomes, such as driving revenue, acting as a magnet for the recruitment of talented employees, and attracting investors. The rate of decline typically depends on the cause. Marketing crises,

such as product-harm incidents, often cause rapid declines that are difficult to recover.

Terry Clark (1988) tentatively defined a marketing crisis as "an event or issue which

[has] the following characteristics: (i) Threatens marketing goals, (ii) reduces the

marketer's ability to control or direct the marketing environment, and (iii) decision or

response time is short" (see Appendix A for an overview of marketing crisis literature).

More subtle events such as changing consumer preferences simply chip away at brand

effectiveness over time, leading to the same end result of lower brand equity. While

brand equity is a well-studied concept, its resilience has often been overlooked, likely due

the difficulty in predicting such future events and changing preferences.

Prior literature has shown that a brand can inoculate itself against marketing crises

by achieving high quality standards (Dawar and Pillutla 2000; Liu and Shankar 2015;

Pfarrer, Pollock, and Rindova 2010). Such standards are expected of nearly all brands,

and therefore constitute an example of an injunctive norm. Even when someone buys an

inexpensive product, there is an expectation that the product will perform its intended

function. As we argued earlier, adherence to injunctive brand norms is antecedent to

brand latitude. Brands that have high (low) brand latitude are thus, more readily able

avoid, minimize, or overcome marketing crises, and other events that diminish brand

equity. Thus, we make the following two propositions:

*P8a: High (low) latitude brands will be more (less) likely to **avoid** a marketing crisis.*

*P8b: High (low) latitude brands will be more (less) likely to **overcome** a marketing crisis.*

Brand Celebrity

Brands that are allowed to transcend the normal function of a brand can in some sense achieve celebrity status, characterized by a high level of public attention and positive sentiments about the brand (Rindova, Pollock, and Hayward 2006). Once achieved, the level of brand attachment and commitment from customers is likely to help the brand avoid dangers such as shifting interest from customers. It also creates an ideal environment wherein loyal members of the public actively promote the brand free of charge. We argue that one outcome of a brand obtaining high brand latitude is that they ascend to a sort of celebrity status in which they are able to set the rules for their category, they get free advertising from the press and loyal fans on social media, and they are able to weather or avoid various types of marketplace storms that other brands are affected by. Thus, we propose the following:

*P9: High (low) latitude brands are more (less) likely to achieve brand celebrity status.*

**Discussion**


Brands frequently deviate from category norms during the course of business. Often these deviations are simply minor departures from descriptive norms purposefully executed in order to draw increased attention to the brand. In other cases, these deviations are accidental or more egregious and can lead to marketing crises. While some brands are punished for the slightest of deviations, other brands seem to walk on water, and can get away with anything. Moreover, there are brands that actually transcend the normal function of a brand as a signal of expected characteristics of the products. Transcendent brands become trusted political voices and important identity signals for both groups and individuals. Normally, we would expect deviations from established norms, or the transcendence of a brand beyond its expected role to create a sense of dissonance within the observer due to the unexpectedness or even inappropriateness of the brand behavior that would lead to lower evaluations, but that is often not seen in these exceptional brands. Brand managers have a strong interest in figuring out ways to ensure that their deviations are not evaluated negatively.

The foregoing work provides a conceptual framework for a theory of brand latitude, including a testable set of propositions. We argue for its importance as an overlooked component of a brand's true equity, explaining the portion of equity that is not encapsulated in a brand's ability to increase revenue within its existing product category relative to a generically branded product. As part of this effort, we've drawn from multiple literature streams that examine brand deviations from a variety of lenses,

including product harm, advertising flexibility, and other types of strategy flexibility and marketing crises. Within our propositions we include various predictions that are relevant to managers regarding how to cultivate brand latitude, a highly desirable brand attribute, based on the foregoing literature review.

## Future Research

First, the conceptual framework proposed herein and accompanying research propositions offer multiple opportunities for future brand latitude research. A variety of quantitative and qualitative investigative research programs would be appropriate for such an endeavor. Such programs of study could be used to further differentiate brand latitude from related concepts, explore its relationship to brand equity and brand value, and to understand the antecedents and outcomes of brand latitude, including any moderators. Moreover, tests of mediation could assist in determining the process whereby various predictors of brand latitude lead to increased brand latitude. Potentially, brand transcendence and brand deviation can be studied as separate constructs to understand whether a brand must have both the capacity to transcend and to deviate simultaneously, or whether these are attributes that can be considered separately in brands that are high in one and low or average in the other.

Second, as discussed earlier, people are able to use both information about the brand (discussed in the preceding framework), and information about the message itself when determining message appropriateness. Future research could delve more deeply

into the properties of the message that might make it more or less palatable in various contexts relevant to brand latitude. One example that is discussed in Essay 2 is choice of narrative voice (first-person vs third) that is used when a brand references itself in messages that deviate from the norm in some respect (e.g., overt political messaging, edgy advertising messages, disclosure of breaches of trust).

CHAPTER III

ESSAY 2:

HOW BRAND ATTRIBUTES AND CHOICE OF VOICE (FIRST-PERSON VS.
THIRD) AFFECT BRAND LATITUDE IN CONTEXTS OF CONTROVERSIAL
ADVOCACY

**Contribution Statement**

This research aims to identify and explore the attributes of a brand that lead to
higher or lower brand latitude in contexts of controversial public advocacy. Recall that
brand latitude was defined as *a public entity's capacity to deviate from category norms or
to transcend the normal function of a brand without incurring adverse responses from the
public* in Essay 1. Secondly, this research considers the brand's approach to the style of
the message itself—specifically the use of first person vs. third person voice. Managers
increasingly desire to use their brand as a platform to engage in advocacy of a
controversial nature. A better understanding of which brands are able to credibly engage
in such advocacy without fear of public backlash has thus become an important
marketing question. Moreover, the present research examines the process by latitude is
granted to brands by consumers. If brand managers were to better understand their
sources of brand latitude and how to develop it, they would be better able to leverage
their latitude in communications.

## Introduction

Brands and corporations have been increasingly pressured to take a stand on divisive social and political issues (Pinkham 2016). While many of these forays into controversy have ultimately been well-received, such as Nike's 2018 partnership with Colin Kaepernick, a U.S. athlete and controversial activist, Pepsi's 2017 partnership with reality star Kendall Jenner aimed at addressing the same topic proved to be catastrophic (Victor 2017). Prior research has challenged the wisdom of engaging in socially responsible activities by providing evidence that it lacks economic benefits relative to other corporate efforts (Brown and Dacin 1997). This viewpoint, supportive of the neoclassical view of the firm, does not adequately consider the reality that firm decision-makers have motives besides profit-maximization (Monsen and Downs 1965). Given that firms are intent on engaging in controversy regardless of economic outcomes, it is prudent to consider the circumstances under which such advocacy may be positively or negatively received by the public.

The aim of the present research is to evaluate potential antecedents of latitude to engage in advocacy at both the brand and message level. Latitude to engage in advocacy is characterized by a generally positive or neutral response to one's efforts at engaging in the discussion around socially or politically divisive issues. A deeper understanding of the antecedents of brand latitude will help brand managers to evaluate whether they can successfully engage in controversial advocacy, and what they might do to improve their ability to do so more effectively in the future.

This research makes several contributions. First, building on social deviance theories, we offer an empirical examination of ways in which deviation from brand category norms may be positively received. As Rindova, Pollock and Hayward pointed out in 2016, "the processes that lead customers and other stakeholders to evaluate novel, nonconforming actions positively warrant closer attention" (p. 60). A lack of research in this area persists to this day.

Second, building on literature in adjacent fields of brand research that are latitude-relevant, we identify and test two brand attributes (citizenship and innovativeness) as potential antecedents of latitude to engage in controversial advocacy. Brand citizenship, a term we use to denote positive associations the public has with a brand due to a pattern of good behavior demonstrated by taking care of employees, charity involvement and other prosocial behaviors, positively predicts latitude to engage in advocacy. Innovativeness, already shown to be an antecedent to latitude to deviate in advertising contexts (Barone and Jewell 2013) is tested as a potential antecedent of latitude to engage in controversial advocacy.

Third, we address a gap in marketing communications literature regarding the effects of choice of narrative voice (first-person vs. third). While copywriters are forced to choose whether a given brand will address itself in the first or third-person, little is known about when a given narrative voice is preferred. The vast majority of research in marketing communications related to differences between use of first-person and third-person voice centers on the speaker, not the listener (Packard, Moor, and McFerran 2018). Research on how choice of narrative voice (first vs third-person) is perceived by

consumers and other publics is an understudied topic in marketing literature. Because brand messages are more likely to be more critically evaluated when they relate to controversial advocacy, this study's context provides an ideal environment to study choice of narrative voice in self-references.

In the studies that follow, both the properties of the brand (citizenship, innovativess) and the properties of the message (narrative voice: first-person vs. third) are evaluated. Specifically, we hypothesize and provide experimental evidence that brand citizenship will lead to increased brand latitude (Studies 1 and 2). We also hypothesize and provide experimental evidence that brands that are perceived to be more innovative will have higher brand latitude to engage in controversial advocacy (Studies 1 and 2).

Next, using a large dataset of brand Twitter status updates, we shift our focus to evaluating the attributes of the message by testing and providing evidence for our hypothesis that—relative to noncontroversial brand messages—controversial advocacy messages will be more likely to be shared if they use first (vs. third) person voice to refer to themselves (Study 3). We then delve deeper into the discussion of narrative voice in message crafting by experimentally testing our hypothesis that third-person voice is more effective at driving types of engagement that require people to trust in the competence of the brand (Study 4). In experimentally testing H5, we explore the combined effects of brand citizenship, a brand attribute, and narrative voice, an attribute of the message. We provide initial evidence that the effectiveness of brand citizenship (H1) is attenuated by the use of third-person (first-person).

**Theoretical Framework**

Controversial Advocacy by Brands

We use the term *controversial advocacy* to describe engagement in a public debate that is currently divisive and morally-charged. Regardless of which side of the debate the brand enters into, it is likely to simultaneously please and offend large portions of the media and the general population. In recent years consumer brands have increasingly engaged in the public debate over controversial issues. While some brands are pushed by external and internal stakeholders into taking a stand, other brands voluntarily enter the fray with no apparent economic incentive for doing so. A prominent example of activism of a voluntary nature is U.S. apparel brand, Patagonia's, staunch commitment to environmentalism, which has repeatedly pitted the brand against conservative policy and politicians (Bain 2017). According to Patagonia's website, environmentalism, and by implication not profit, is the purpose of the business (Patagonia 2018). Other brands are likewise increasing their commitment and visibility with regard to various divisive issues that their founders or other stakeholders feel strongly about. According to Levi's CEO, Chip Berg, taking a stand is a moral obligation that has the beneficial secondary effect of increasing employee loyalty (Schulman 2018). These brands are essentially leveraging their prominent place in society to promote their political or moral viewpoint.

## Brands Subject to Social Norms

Societies have informal social norms to indicate what behavior is appropriate in a given time and place. Norms are generally seen as useful because they regulate conduct in a way that promotes order and civility (Gilovich et al. 2015). Given all of the literature showing that brands are often personified by consumers (e.g., Aggarwal and McGill 2011), it follows that brands too should follow an established set of social norms. Like humans, brands often deviate from established norms.

A brand's deviation from norms may occur as part of an effort to stand out from the competition and be noticed, or it may simply be an accident. Following a deviation, consumers may choose to disregard the deviation, or evaluate it positively or negatively. In 2006, Rindova, Pollock and Hayward pointed out that "the processes that lead customers and other stakeholders to evaluate novel, nonconforming actions positively warrant closer attention." Yet, in subsequent years, there has been only a limited amount of investigation into what might make these deviations by brands seem more acceptable. We previously defined brand latitude as *a public entity's capacity to deviate from category norms or to transcend the normal function of a brand without incurring adverse responses from the public* (see Essay 1). Here we investigate how brands develop latitude.

## Brand Attributes (Citizenship and Innovativeness) Antecedent to Brand Latitude

Conceptual research in social psychology has proposed that the degree to which an individual may deviate from group norms without negative consequence is determined by that individual's idiosyncrasy credit–a hypothetical measure of accumulated positive impressions others hold towards them (Hollander 1958; Hollander 2006). Others are more likely to give a high idiosyncrasy credit individual the benefit of the doubt, assuming that any deviation they make is either appropriate, or a one-time error rather than evidence of a troubling pattern.

Research on branding has similarly noted that consumer brands are able to build up idiosyncrasy credit, protecting them from public backlash related to future deviations from consumer expectations. For example, research has shown that brands that are associated with charitable giving and other altruistic activities are resistant to damage caused by a subsequent deviation (Joireman et al. 2015; see Sen et al. 2016 for a review). We argue that just like people, brands are able to acquire idiosyncrasy credit through a pattern of good behavior. These behaviors include taking care of employees, providing excellent customer service, and being open and honest with the public. For brevity, we will use the term, *brand citizenship*, to represent the quality of a brand having a large amount of built-up idiosyncrasy credit through a pattern of good behavior. Note that a similar term, "brand citizenship behavior," has been used in past literature to describe employee-level behavior that enhances brand identity (Burman and Zeplin 2005). We argue that brand citizenship, a brand-level construct, positively impacts a brand's ability to successfully engage in controversial advocacy.

*H1. Brands high (low) in brand citizenship will have higher (lower) latitude to*

*engage in controversial advocacy.*

On the other hand, it may be possible for a brand to develop latitude by establishing a pattern of deviation from expectations. While past research on idiosyncrasy credits has focused mainly on conforming behaviors leading to idiosyncrasy credits, neither the name of the construct, nor its usage rules out the possibility of nonconforming behaviors increasing idiosyncrasy credits if such behaviors are positively received. Research on consumer perceptions of what makes things cool has shown that deviation from social norms can actually be seen in a positive light, but only if the norms being violated are either descriptive in nature or deemed to be illegitimate (Warren and Campbell 2014). This idea is supported by conceptual research in the management literature proposing that firms attain celebrity status, in part, through a pattern of very public, nonconforming actions (Rindova et al. 2006). Moreover, advertising research has shown that the innovativeness of a brand can lead to increased flexibility in advertising contexts (Barone and Jewell 2013). Innovative brands may be given more latitude due to their track record for deviating from expectations in ways that achieve positive results. Consumers may be more inclined to give innovative brands the benefit of the doubt, knowing that it worked out last time. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

*H2. Brands perceived to be more (less) innovative will have higher (lower)*

*latitude to engage in controversial advocacy.*

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Message Attributes (Political Orientation and Narrative Voice: First-person vs Third)

Consumers are able to evaluate the appropriateness of a brand's controversial statement not only by what they know about the brand, but also by a consideration of the style and content of the message itself. The most prominent attribute of such a statement, and the attribute most likely to determine objection or acceptance, is the level of alignment between the political orientation of the statement and that of the message evaluator. Past research has shown that people are more persuaded by appeal types that are consistent with values determined by their political orientation (Kidwell, Farmer and Hardesty 2013). In determining a messaging style, firm decision makers are faced with two competing objectives for their audiences of interest: (1) gain approval among those who agree with their position, and (2) avoid offending those who disagree. Note that some firm decision makers may feel so strongly about their political stance that they do not fear, nor do they regret offending the opposition, even though this would seem to risk negatively impacting the total consumer demand for the brand. For example, Yvon Chouinard, the founder and owner of Patagonia, a U.S. apparel brand has leveraged the Patagonia brand to engage extensively in controversial advocacy, seemingly with little regard for those who might be offended. In his book on management, he lays out his karmic philosophy, "every time we've elected to do the right thing, it's turned out to be more profitable" (Chouinard 2016, p. 194). Other firm decision makers may also have an expectation of positive rewards, including profits, from doing what they think is right, regardless of who might be offended. Moreover, even when many are offended, the end

result may still be increased revenue if the positive effects of the increased exposure and positive feelings from the like-minded outweigh any negative fallout from those opposed to the message (Snyder 2015). Thus, in the present research, we focus primarily on those who are politically-aligned with the message in both the hypotheses that follow and the corresponding tests. Finding ways to avoid offense is not a topic well-addressed by this research.

A second criterion available to consumers in this type of evaluation is the brand's choice of narrative voice—first, second or third person. While a substantial body of research has considered the effects of voice on the speaker, little is known about its effects on the listener (Packard, Moor, and McFerran 2018). The small body of literature in this area suggests that choice of voice can have an effect on some advertising outcomes. For example, the use of second person voice (e.g., "you," "your") has been shown to enhance consumer involvement in online brand messaging (Cruz, Leonhardt, and Pezzuti 2017) and consumer attitudes towards brands when consumers expect to be close with the brand (Sela, Wheeler, and Sarial-Abi 2012). Other research has examined the effects of the use of the first person singular pronoun, "I," when dealing with customer complaints (Packard, Moore, and McFerran 2018).

In the case of controversial advocacy, the choice is often whether the brand will refer to itself using first-person narrative voice (e.g., "we," "us") or third-person (e.g., "Ben & Jerry's"). Stern (1991) applied theories from dramatic literature in order to better understand how different use of narrative voice may be received in advertising contexts. Using Advertising Age's "Best Advertising of 1989" winners as case studies, she pointed

out differences in the role of the narrator (first-person = confessor; third-person = teacher), function, audience role, and many other aspects relevant to the choice of narrative voice. To our knowledge, however, no published research has empirically examined how choice of narrative voice in self-references may affect observer evaluations of a brand or its message. Although differences between first-person and third-person voice when referencing the brand may be subtle and unnoticeable in many contexts, controversial advocacy is a topic likely to make such language elements more salient as readers attempt to understand the underlying motives of the brand. One possible signal that such language differences may send is information about the warmth or competence of the brand delivering the message. Past research has shown that people quickly assess brands and their messages according to warmth and competence, and that these assessments guide future consumer interactions with the brand (Fiske et al. 2002).

Stern (1991) argued that first person narrators are more seen as more intimate with the observer, more sincere, and more open about their values. When a brand uses first-person plural voice to refer to itself, there is an indication that all of the employees, owners and other influencers that stand behind the brand also stand behind the cause. First-person pronouns are friendlier and more inclusive. We therefore argue that the first person narrative voice is more likely to signal warmth. Past research has shown that social media users signal their identity by endorsing content that shows their warmth, rather than their competence (Bernritter, Verlegh, and Smit 2016). People also identify more readily with warm brands (vs. competent brands) (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).

Thus, we argue that first person voice will be more effective in extending the reach of social media messages that are controversial in nature.

*H3. Relative to noncontroversial brand messages, controversial advocacy messages will be more likely to be shared if they self-reference using first-person (vs. third-person) narrative voice.*

Given that brands seem interested in being heard and seen when they engage in controversial advocacy, it follows that increased organic sharing of this content on social media is a desirable outcome for most brands.

By contrast, when a brand uses the third person to reference itself when it makes controversial statements, there is an indication that the statement is a matter of company policy, not necessarily endorsed by the employee base, but rather enforced on it. Stern (1991) similarly argued that the goal of this type of communication is to inform, rather than to create intimacy as is the case with first-person. While this eliminates the virtuous possibility of employee buy-in and consensus implied by first person, it carries a finality that is hard to ignore. Thus, the third person narrative in this situation signals power and competence, rather than warmth. The third-person narrator is by nature all-knowing, stating facts, rather than opinions (Stern 1991). Consumers or potential employees may have increased desire to interact with a competent brand when it involves any kind of interaction with the company, including seeking employment or product purchase due to the increase in reliability that is signaled by competence (Fiske et al. 2002). This allows consumers and job-seekers to know they are getting what they expect to receive when they interact with these brands. We therefore argue the following:

*H4. Brand messages of controversial advocacy that use third-person (first-person) narrative voice will result in higher (lower) desire to engage with the brand for those whose political ideology is aligned with the brand.*

While brand citizenship is likely to contribute to the brand's success when engaging in controversial advocacy, the effectiveness of brand attributes likely depends on characteristics of the message itself. Messages that are inconsistent or incongruent with the warm nature of such positive attributes as altruism, caring for employees, and other positive characteristics will likely dampen their effectiveness. Use of first-person voice signals warmth, which is consistent with properties displayed through brand citizenship. Thus, a combination of first-person voice and brand citizenship should optimally influence subsequent purchase intentions. On the other hand, the competence signaling properties inherent in use of third-person voice should dampen the effectiveness of brand citizenship. Thus, the following hypothesis:

*H5. The effectiveness of brand citizenship (H1) in driving latitude to engage in controversial advocacy is attenuated by use of third-person (first-person) voice in the message delivery.*

**Overview of Studies**

This series of studies explores brand-level and message-level antecedents of brand latitude in the context of controversial advocacy. Studies 1 and 2 use controlled experiments to test how brand characteristics (citizenship and innovativeness) may

influence its latitude to engage in public advocacy of a controversial nature. Studies 3 and 4 use both archival data from Twitter and experimental data to investigate how a property of the message itself (use of first vs. third-person voice by the brand) may affect how well the controversial message is received. Study 5 again uses an experimental approach to show that the effectiveness of brand citizenship in achieving latitude to engage in advocacy is attenuated by use of third-person voice due to its incongruity with the warmness linked to citizenship.

## Study 1: Brand Citizenship and Innovativeness Increase Latitude to Engage in Controversial Advocacy

Study 1 provided an initial test of the relationship between the attributes of a brand and its latitude to engage in controversial advocacy. Specifically, Study 1 provides empirical evidence that both brand citizenship (H1) and brand innovativeness (H2) are predictive of subsequent latitude to engage in controversial advocacy.

Method

We randomly assigned participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($N = 202$; 38% female; Median age = 30; all in the United States) to one condition in a 2 (innovativeness: low, high) × 2 (citizenship: average, high) between-subjects experiment. After a brief introduction to the study, informing participants that their opinion about a

specific brand action would be collected, all participants were presented with a profile of Moda Rey, a fictitious Portuguese apparel brand. Participants were asked to carefully read the profile, including our subjective ratings of the brand, in order to answer questions about it on the next page. Moda Rey's profile consisted of a brief description of the company's background, information about the innovativeness (low vs. high) and citizenship (average vs. high) of the company presented in counterbalanced order (all study stimuli can be found in Appendix C), and a recent news item describing the company's controversial involvement in pro-refugee advocacy.

After the manipulation, respondents were asked to rate how much they agree with the statements that followed using single-item, 7-point likert scales (1 = "Strongly disagree," 7 = "Strongly agree"). Brand latitude is observed by its outcomes. When a brand engages in controversial advocacy, how is it received? Thus, we operationalized brand latitude by following up their reading of the brand's engagement in controversial advocacy with two dependent variables, perceived quality, "Moda Rey seems like a quality brand," and trust, "I would trust the Moda Rey brand." A similar approach was used by Warren and Campbell (2014). Next, participants completed the manipulation checks for citizenship, "Moda Rey is a responsible company," innovativeness, "Moda Rey is an innovative company," and controversial advocacy, "Moda Rey's involvement with immigration policy is outside of what I would expect from a clothing brand." Next, still using 7-point likert scales, respondents rated themselves using a validated short-form consumer need for uniqueness scale (Tian, Bearden and Hunter 2001; Ruvio, Shoham and Brenčič 2008; see scale items in Appendix B).

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Results

Manipulation checks showed that both manipulations worked as intended. A 2 (innovativeness: low, high) × 2 (citizenship: average, high) ANOVA revealed the anticipated main effect of the innovativeness manipulation on perceived innovativeness of the brand ($M_{lo\ innov}$ = 4.04, $M_{hi\ innov}$ = 5.44; $F(1,200)$ = 44.12, $p$ < .001). Also as expected, we found no effect of the citizenship manipulation on subsequent ratings of innovativeness ($F(1, 200)$ = 1.29, NS). The citizenship manipulation also performed as expected. Participants perceived the brand to be more socially responsible when they saw the high citizenship version of the stimulus ($M_{avg\ citizen}$ = 4.59, $M_{hi\ citizen}$ = 5.21; $F(1,200)$ = 11.63, $p$ < .001). Again, as expected, the citizenship manipulation did not manifest an effect on perceptions of innovativeness ($F(1,200)$ = 1.31, NS).

Next, we ran a series of two regressions to test the effects of our citizenship (average vs. high) and innovativeness (low vs. high) manipulations on brand latitude, which we operationalized as brand quality and trust following exposure to information regarding controversial advocacy by the brand. As predicted by H1 and H2, regressing quality on citizenship (mean-centered), innovativeness (mean-centered) and their interaction yielded significant effects of both citizenship ($B$ = .64, $t$ = 2.88, $p$ < .001), and innovativeness ($B$ = .57, $t$ = 2.32, $p$ = .02), but there was no interaction effect ($B$ = .01, $t$ = .03, $p$ = .98). Similarly, regressing our second dependent variable, trust, on the same model yielded significant effects of citizenship ($B$ = .95, $t$ = 3.82, $p$ < .001),

innovativeness ($B$ = .68, $t$ = 2.46, $p$ = .01), but there was no interaction effect ($B$ = -.48, $t$ = -1.3, $p$ = .20). See Fig. 2 below.

**FIGURE 2**

EFFECT OF CITIZENSHIP AND INNOVATIVENESS ON QUALITY FOLLOWING

ADVOCACY BY THE BRAND
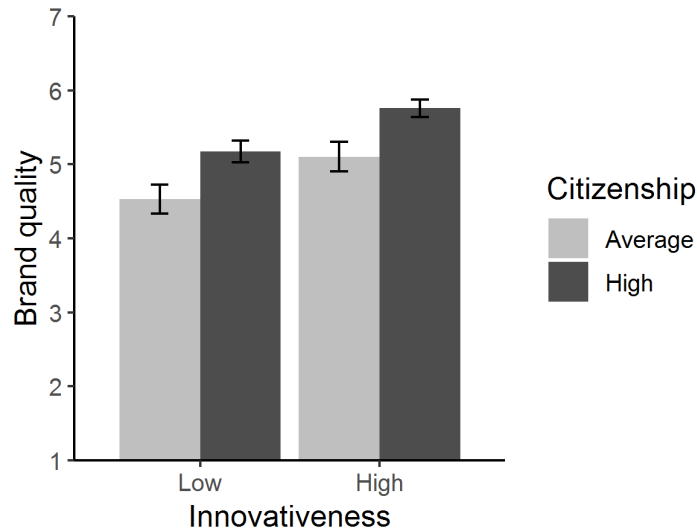


*Note*: Error bars represent standard error

Study 1 provided initial support for our model, by confirming that both brand citizenship (H1) and innovativeness (H2) play a role in predicting subsequent latitude to engage in controversial advocacy.

**Study 2: More Conservative Test of Innovativeness**

In Study 2, we examine H2, the hypothesis that innovativeness leads to increased latitude to engage in controversial advocacy, using a more conservative test. While our Study 1, and other innovativeness studies use a control condition that is non-innovative

(e.g. Barone and Jewell 2013), we created a tradition condition in opposition to innovation. Having a strong tradition is a desirable trait for most brands, and speaks to the brand's authenticity (Morhart et al. 2015). By presenting two conditions that are equally positive, we eliminate the problem of comparing something desirable (an innovative brand) with something undesirable (a laggard). In contrast, we present a well-performing brand in both innovation and tradition conditions to tease out whether the effect of innovativeness on brand latitude found in past studies is simply a function of brand quality. Study 2 also tests H1, our hypothesis that citizenship is predictive of latitude to engage in controversial advocacy by manipulating brand citizenship, operationalized as altruism, using two pretested brands (low: UnderArmour; high: Patagonia). A null result gives an inconclusive conclusion to this test.

Method

*Pretesting.* We first conducted two pretests to identify brands that differed in brand altruism, but were relatively similar on other brand traits for use in the manipulation in the main study. Although each pretest and the main study were completed by different respondents, they all came from the same subject pool during the same school term. Pretest 1 (*N*=24) asked respondents to name a brand that they saw as being motivated by altruism, and a brand they saw as being purely profit-driven. Respondents were also asked to identify brands that fit several other attributes (innovativeness, norm breaking, and brand advocacy). From the results, we selected the

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most familiar brands by identifying the subset with the highest frequency of occurrence in response to all questions. This process yielded a set of three brands in each of three categories (beverage, apparel and technology).

Next, Pretest 2 ($N$=49) was used to winnow the list from nine down to three brands. During Pretest 2, respondents were asked to rate each of the nine brands based on innovativeness, altruism (profit motive), and deviance (conformity). The brands Patagonia and Under Armour were selected because they were (1) in the same industry (apparel), (2) dissimilar with regards to perceived altruism ($F(1,96 = 11.50, p < .001)$, $M_{Patagonia}$= 4.96, $SD_{Patagonia}$=1.86; $M_{Under Armour}$= 3.92, $SD_{Under Armour}$=1.08), and (3) reasonably similar with regards to both deviance ($F(1,96 = 1.77, p =.09)$, $M_{Patagonia}$= 4.06, $SD_{Patagonia}$=1.75; $M_{Under Armour}$= 4.47, $SD_{Under Armour}$=1.24) and innovativeness ($F(1,96 = 2.88, p = .09)$, $M_{Patagonia}$= 5.06, $SD_{Patagonia}$=1.38; $M_{Under Armour}$= 4.63, $SD_{Under Armour}$=1.11).

*Design and participants.* The experiment used a 2 × 2 design with brand altruism (high: Patagonia, low: Under Armour) and manipulated brand value (innovation, tradition) as the between-participant conditions. Undergraduate business students ($N$ = 169) participated in the study for course credit. Twelve participants were removed for failing an attention check that read, "Please select 'Disagree' below to show that you are paying attention to the study," (7 items; 1=Strongly disagree; 7=Strongly agree; all items were labeled), which was inserted into the brand equity measure late in the study. This left a final sample size of 157 ($M_{age}$ = 21.71, 38.8% female). The experiment took about five minutes to complete.

*Stimuli and procedure.* After consenting to participate and reading a brief introduction to the study in which participants were informed that we were seeking their opinion about specific brand behaviors, each participant was randomly sorted into one of four conditions. Next, each participant was presented with a fictitious press release touting an award for either a more (Patagonia) or less (Under Armour) altruistic brand based on pretesting. The language of the award also differed between conditions, to portray a brand that had a brand value in line with either innovation or tradition (see stimuli in Appendix C). After reading this press release, each respondent viewed a second press release that indicated the brand's involvement in controversial advocacy to award voting rights to previously convicted felons in the United States who are presently banned from casting a ballot.

Immediately after reading both press releases about the brand, they were asked to rate their agreement on 7-point scales (1=Strongly disagree; 7=Strongly agree) for each of the five dependent variables that were used to capture brand latitude. These scales included sincerity: "[Brand] is sincere in its efforts to restore voting rights to ex-convicts," congruity: "It makes sense for [Brand] to get involved with voting rights advocacy on behalf of ex-convicts," influence: "[Brand] has the power to call attention to the cause of voting rights for ex-felons," moral authority: "When it comes to social issues, [Brand] has authority in this space," and brand value (reversed): "[Brand]'s involvement in voting rights advocacy for ex-convicts will decrease the value of their brand."

Next, respondents answered a series of manipulation check questions and control variables. First, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with "[Brand]'s advocacy for voting rights for ex-felons is controversial," (the controversial advocacy manipulation check) on a 7-point scale (1=Strongly disagree; 7=Strongly agree). Second, respondents were shown a screen that presented them with a four-item, bipolar matrix and they were asked to rate where they would place the brand between 1 and 5 for the other two manipulation checks: "Traditional...Innovative," and "Profit-driven...Altruistic," and two control variables: "Unfamiliar...Familiar," and "Low quality...High quality." Next, participants rated where they stood on an individual differences control variable: "What is your stance on voting rights for U.S. citizens who have previously been convicted of a felony, but have now completed their prison sentence? (1=Very strongly against; 7=Very strongly favor)." Lastly, participants rated their agreement (7-point; 1=Strongly disagree; 7=Strongly agree) with a four-item horizontal marketing partnership authenticity scale and a 10-item brand equity scale (see measures in Appendix B). Lastly, participants were debriefed and thanked for their time.

Results

*Manipulation checks.* Consistent with the pretest, Patagonia, was rated as more altruistic ($M$=3.65, $SD$=.88) than Under Armour ($M$=2.92, $SD$=1.01), $\chi^2$(4, $N$ = 157) = 24.10, $p$ <.001. The innovativeness manipulation was also successful in that respondents in the innovation brand condition rated the brand to be more innovative ($M$=4.36, $SD$=.71) than those in the tradition brand condition (M=3.64, $SD$=1.03), $\chi^2$(4, $N$ = 157) = 27.35, $p$ <.001. Seeking to control for past brand innovativeness, we regressed the innovativeness manipulation check on the dichotomous brand variable (Under Armour, Patagonia) and found that, consistent with the pretest, Under Armour and Patagonia were deemed by our sample population to be similarly innovative, F(1,155) = 1.77, p = .19; $M_{Patagonia}$=4.10, $SD_{Patagonia}$=.93, $M_{UnderArmour}$=3.90, $SD_{UnderArmour}$=.97. A potential weakness of the study is that the level of controversy was rated lower than expected on a 7-point scale ($M$=3.18, $SD$=1.24). This indicates that either (1) respondents did not find the advocacy to be particularly controversial, indicating a failure to successfully manipulate controversial advocacy, or (2) respondents may be inclined to rate only a particularly egregious violation as controversial.

*Brand latitude.* See Table 2 for regression of all dependent variables measured on a model that includes brand: Under Armour (Patagonia), brand value: innovation (tradition) and their interaction as predictors. Note that the model had no significantly detectable effect on any of the dependent variables. While not significant, there is some indication that the model may be predictive of moral authority $F$(3,153) = 2.43, $p$ = .07. If true, this would indicate that the less altruistic brand (Under Armour) has lower moral authority ($M$=3.69, $SD$=1.32) to engage in controversial advocacy compared with the

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more altruistic brand (Patagonia; *M*=4.32, *SD*=1.62), *Est.* = -.62, *t*=-1.88, *p* = .06. We did

not carry out simple effects tests due to the non-significant result. Further tests with

larger sample sizes and stronger manipulations of controversial advocacy are needed to

determine whether this is a true effect.

**TABLE 2**

STUDY 2 RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSES FOR OUTCOMES RELEVANT

TO BRAND LATITUDE

| | Dependent variable | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sincerity | Congruity | Influence | Moral authority | brand value |
| Intercept | 5.26 (.19)* | 3.83 (.23)* | 4.91 (.24)* | 4.31 (.25)* | 4.49 (.23)* |
| Under Armour (Patagonia) | .05 (.25) | -.15 (.30) | .19 (.31) | -.62 (.33) **.** | .06 (.30) |
| Brand value: Innovation (tradition) | .08 (.28) | .08 (.33) | .42 (.34) | .02 (.36) | .27 (.33) |
| Under Armour × Innovation | -.40 (.37) | -.13 (.44) | -.48 (.45) | -.04 (.47) | -.19 (.44) |
| *R²* | .02 | .01 | .01 | .05**..** | .01 |

*Notes:* All predictors are categorical variables and are not standardized. Standard errors are in parentheses. **p*<.001, .*p*=.06, ..*p*=.07.

Discussion

Study 2 manipulated innovativeness in opposition to brand heritage, another

positive trait, in order to ascertain whether it is only the positive energy associated with

innovativeness that is predictive, or it is the deviance. A null result here weakens the idea that innovativeness leads to brand latitude (H2), but rather it is the positive associations of innovativeness and not the deviance component. Thus, it may be that any positive brand associations lead to latitude, and not the other characteristics of attributes such as the component of deviance inherent in brand innovativeness. Further testing, however is warranted. A second purpose of Study 2 was to see whether altruistic behavior could lead to subsequent latitude to engage in controversial advocacy. This was meant to be another operationalization of brand citizenship, which could be used to predict latitude to engage in controversial advocacy (H1). A null result fails to support the hypothesis. It is unclear whether the null result indicates a failed manipulation, a disconfirmation of H1, sampling error, or some other issue of the study design, warranting further investigation. This likely speaks to the difficulty of using two known brands to represent differing levels of citizenship, an abstract construct. Future tests may be more successful by using a single brand and manipulating the desired characteristic.

## Study 3: Latitude Partially Derived from Communication Style (Type of Self-references)

Consumers are able to judge the appropriateness of a brand's controversial advocacy both by their prior knowledge of the brand's attributes, and by an evaluation of the way in which the controversial advocacy was communicated. Study 3 is consistent with the first two studies in that it deals with the ways in which consumers judge the

appropriateness of controversial advocacy, but it also departs from these studies because it examines the communication at the message level, rather than the brand level. This is justified and relevant because the brand's perceived attributes are determined—in large part—by patterns of behavior in the brand's communications. Thus, a deeper understanding of which communications approach to advocacy are granted most latitude will shed light on what brand attributes may lead to increased brand latitude.

In order to examine brand-level communications in controversial advocacy, Study 3 uses a corpus of approximately 1.8 million brand Twitter status updates to look at the role of the language used in the brand's actual statements that are controversial in nature. When brands engage in controversial advocacy, astute observers may use the language used by the brand to infer information about the brand's role in the advocacy. The present study examines the role of voice in controversial messaging. Brand managers must often choose whether to use the plural first person (e.g. "we," "us") or third person self-references that simply use the company's name when crafting these messages. While the difference is subtle, observers often have little information to work with in evaluating the appropriateness of the message. We posit that first-person voice is more well-received in messages that contain information that is politically or socially controversial in nature. This is likely due to the fact that first person pronouns (1) humanize the brand, and (2) signal values that are deeply internalized by the company and people that stand behind the brand.

Description of Data


Using Twitter's public application programming interface (API), we collected the

3,200 most recent Twitter status updates (tweets) from 1,000 Twitter screen names.

Collection ran from February 2 to February 3, 2019. We selected all of the screen names

identified on Socialbakers' list of the top 1,000 U.S. brands on Twitter (Socialbakers

2019).

Two classes of tweets were removed from analysis: retweets and tweets that start with

the "@" symbol. Retweets are tweets not originally published by the brand that are

shared on the brand's timeline, generally as a show of support. Because the brand of

interest did not originate the tweet, it is difficult to determine whether and how much of

the subsequent engagement with the tweet should be attributed to the brand. Tweets that

begin with an "@" symbol are directed at another Twitter user, and are not generally

visible to one's Twitter followers, and were also excluded. Though public, these tweets

maintain a low profile and are typically only seen by the Twitter user they are directed to.

In the case of brands, many such tweets are customer service responses to complaints and

are unlikely to contain information relevant to controversial advocacy. Note that brands

with a high rate of such tweets have a low number of usable tweets in our final dataset.

Some brands are missing from the dataset entirely due to their account privacy

settings or deletion of their Twitter content. The final dataset consisted of 1,470,334

tweets from 978 brands with publication dates ranging from November 21, 2007 to

February 3, 2019. Several of our measures of interest were available in the dataset without any manipulation:

- CREATED_AT: Date/time stamp indicating when the tweet was created.

- FOLLOWERS_COUNT: A count of the number of Twitter users who follow the Twitter user who sent out the tweet.

A few other measures were derived with minimal manipulation:

- REPLY: This is a binary variable that we set to 1 if Twitter indicated that the tweet was in reply to another previous tweet. Otherwise it is 0.

- THIRD_PERSON: This variable is a count of each time a brand uses its screen name within the tweet. For example, Nike's screen name is "Nike," so any use of the term Nike, regardless of letter case, would add one to the count for the given tweet.

- FIRST_PERSON: This is another count variable that adds up each mention of " we ," " us ," " our ," or " ours," regardless of letter case within a given tweet.

- CONTROVERSY: This is a binary variable that is scored as 1 if believed be controversial and 0 otherwise. See the next section below to read a description of the tweet classification method.

- RETWEETS: This is our outcome variable. It indicates how many times the tweet was shared. For brands wanting to promote controversial causes, retweets indicate message reach fairly well.

Tweet Classification

Prior to data analysis, we first had to classify each individual tweet as either controversial or non-controversial. Given that our corpus was very large, consisting of nearly 1.5 million tweets, and classifying tweets as either controversial or noncontroversial was likely to be overly subjective, we implemented a semi-automated approach. This approach consisted of identifying 25 Twitter profiles that are known for engaging in controversial advocacy, extracting the 100 hashtags that are most commonly used by this set of brands, matching this set of hashtags up to the hashtags used in our primary corpus of tweets, and eliminating or modifying hashtags that lead to too many false results. This process is detailed in the following sections.

*Identifying controversial Twitter profiles.* In order to identify 25 Twitter accounts that routinely engage in controversial advocacy as their primary function, we conducted a series of five Google searches designed to identify the five most well-known non-profits that work in each of five areas (LGBT rights, environmentalism, immigrant rights, voting rights, and women's equality). Use of Google search engine was appropriate because its index is designed to identify the most relevant and reputable websites for a given query (see list of queries used and brands identified in Table C1). The first five nonprofits in each category were identified in each query by scanning down through search results. News outlets, Wikipedia pages, lists of nonprofits, and other irrelevant websites were disregarded. Twitter handles for each brand were obtained from the website's homepage.

*Extraction of controversial hashtags.* Next Twitter's public API was used to collect up to 3,200 tweets from each of the 25 controversial Twitter handles for a total set of 78,801 tweets. A total of 11,866 unique hashtags were extracted from these tweets. Their frequencies ranged from 1 to 1,138 occurrences in this dataset. The hashtags were sorted according to frequency and the 100 most frequently occuring hashtags were selected for the next stage of analysis.

*Hashtag matching and culling.* For the next stage of our analysis, we mechanically identified tweets from our top 1,000 brands corpus that contained one or more of the controversial hashtags. A review of tweets identified through this process led to the observation that several of the hashtags were leading to false positives. The largest offenders were removed or modified and the entire list was examined to determine whether any other problematic hashtags could be identified. See Table C2 for a full list of hashtags that were removed or modified through this process, and C3 for the full list of included hashtags. This resulted in 4,783 tweets classified as controversial, which constituted a mere 0.325% of the total dataset. This was as expected, given that most corporate brands do not count controversial advocacy as one of their primary functions.

Results

*Model.* The goal of our empirical model was to assess how brand voice (first vs. third-person) affected sharing of the brand's politically controversial messaging. To this end, we regressed RETWEETS, our outcome variable on the model shown in Table 3.

Note that the focal effects of interest are the two two-way interactions, with one to measure the impact of using first person pronouns in politically controversial (noncontroversial) messages (CONTROVERSY × FIRST_PERSON) and the other measuring the impact of the use of third person self-references using one's own brand name also in controversial (noncontroversial) messages (CONTROVERSY × THIRD_PERSON). Main effects of each of these variables and various controls (FOLLOWERS_COUNT, CREATED_AT, REPLY) are also included in the model. Note that robust standard errors are used to adjust for heteroskedasticity in the data.

TABLE 3

STUDY 3: EFFECTS OF BRAND VOICE ON SHARING OF POLITICALLY CONTROVERSIAL CONTENT

| | DV = RETWEETS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Est. | S.E. | T val. | p |
| (Intercept) | -11.58 | 8.14 | -1.42 | 0.155 |
| CONTROVERSY | -13.27 | 1.21 | -11.01 | < .001 |
| FIRST_PERSON | -1.6 | 0.41 | -3.93 | < .001 |
| FOLLOWERS_COUNT | 43.88 | 1.57 | 34.23 | < .001 |
| CREATED_AT | 0.00 | 0.00 | 5.86 | < .001 |
| REPLY | -17.41 | 1.26 | -13.86 | < .001 |
| THIRD_PERSON | 9.14 | 0.52 | 17.54 | < .001 |
| CONTROVERSY × FIRST_PERSON | 2.88 | 0.83 | 3.45 | < .001 |
| CONTROVERSY × THIRD_PERSON | -5.41 | 1.42 | -3.81 | < .001 |
| Observations | 1,470,334 | | | |
| Model fit | $F(8,1470325) = 2647.276, p < .001$; R2 = .014 | | | |

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*Analysis.* The results revealed a significant negative effect of Controversy,
indicating that tweets of a controversial nature are less likely to be shared. Regarding
voice, the results showed a significant positive effect of self-references
(THIRD_PERSON) and a negative effect of use of first-person plural pronouns
(FIRST_PERSON) in terms of sharing. Recall that we hypothesized that relative to
noncontroversial messages, messages that involve controversial advocacy would be more
likely to be shared if the brand were to reference itself using first-person (vs. third) brand
voice (H3). In support of this hypothesis, we observe a positive FIRST_PERSON ×
CONTROVERSY interaction and a negative THIRD_PERSON × CONTROVERSY
interaction. Subsequent simple slopes analyses showed that the positive effect of voice
was not significant for controversial messages (Est. 2.64, $t = 1.76$, $p = .08$), though it was
significantly negative for noncontroversial content (Est. = -3.29, $t = -3.93$, $p < .001$),
indicating that the negative effect of first-person goes away, and perhaps reverses when
controversy is present. Simple slopes analysis of the THIRD_PERSON ×
CONTROVERSY interaction showed that the effectiveness of using the third-person
self-references was decreased by the presence of controversy, and that it was significantly
positive both when controversy was present (Est. = 9.30, t = 2.82, p < .001) and not
present (Est. = 22.75, t = 17.54, p < .001).

Discussion

The results of this study provide an initial test of the effectiveness of the use of different types of brand voice (first-person vs. third-person) in determining latitude to engage in controversial and non-controversial messages. While use of first-person voice is generally less effective at gaining retweets, in which Twitter users share the brand's message with their followers, and use of third-person voice is much more effective, the presence of controversy seems to partially reverse both of these effects. In Hypothesis 3, we argued that relative to noncontroversial brand messages, controversial advocacy messages will be more likely to be shared if they self-reference using first-person voice (vs. third-person). In support of H3, when controversy is present, use of first-person voice may be preferable, and the benefits of using third-person self-references significantly decrease.

**Study 4: Type of Self-reference (First vs. Third-person) Affects Desire to Affiliate with Brand for Liberal Respondents**

Study 4 examines whether first person brand voice will impact two new dependent variables (willingness to work and willingness to purchase from the company) differently than sharing behaviors were impacted in Study 3. The study uses LGBT rights advocacy as its stimuli due to its controversial nature and prominent presence in modern brand communications (Snyder 2015). We provide evidence that, as hypothesized,

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controversial brand messages that use third-person (first-person) narrative voice will result in higher (lower) desire to engage with the brand for those who are politically-aligned with the brand's message (H4). Study 4 attains internal validity by manipulating the controversial nature (high vs. low) of the brand's public advocacy.

Method

We randomly assigned participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk ($N = 299$; 43.8% female; Median age = 32; all in the United States) to one condition in a 2 (voice: first-person vs. third) × 2 controversy (high vs. low) between-subjects experiment. After briefly introducing them to the study, participants were presented with a statement ostensibly from the "values" section of the corporate website of Ben & Jerry's ice cream brand. This statement of values was either in support of LGBT rights in the high controversy conditions, or supportive of early childhood education in the low controversy conditions. We manipulated the voice used by the brand when self-referencing to be either third-person (e.g. "Ben & Jerry's is") or first-person (e.g. "We are"). Refer to Appendix C for full text of studi stimuli.

After viewing the manipulation, respondents responded to two dependent variables: "Does this statement make you feel more or less inclined to buy their products?" and "Does this statement make you feel more or less inclined to work for this company?" Each statement was answered by a 7-point bipolar scale that ranged from "much less inclined" to "much more inclined." Then, participants completed an

anthropomorphism scale that required them to rate where they would place the brand on a 5-point bipolar scale between each of five opposed pairs of words (Bartneck et al. 2009). Next respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each item of a 3-item belongingness scale adapted from Malone, Pillow, and Osman (2012). The stem of the question stated "This company's support of this cause," and alternatives "helps me feel included," "makes me feel like an outsider" (reversed), and "makes me feel like they do not care about me" (reversed) were rated (1=Very strongly disagree; 7=Very strongly agree). Respondents then rated Ben & Jerry's using a 10-item brand equity scale (Yoo and Donthu 2001; 7-point scale: 1-Very strongly disagree/7-Very strongly agree; see Table A1).

An attention check was presented within the brand equity measure to ensure respondents were taking the task seriously. The attention check item read, "Please select 'disagree' below to show you are paying attention." Next, each respondent was asked to complete a manipulation check for the controversy manipulation. They were asked to rate their agreement on a 7-point scale (1=very strongly disagree; 7=very strongly agree) with the statement, "Some people I know would be offended by Ben & Jerry's support of [LGBT rights/early childhood education]." Lastly, they were asked to complete some basic demographics, including a 7-point ideology scale (1=Very liberal; 7= Very conservative), and debriefed.

Results

Prior to conducting any analysis, 22 participants were filtered out of the study due to failure to correctly answer the attention check, leaving a final sample of 277. A 2 (controversy: low, high) × 2 (brand voice: first-person, third-person) ANOVA revealed the anticipated main effect of the controversy manipulation on a subsequent measure that evaluated the perceived level of controversy of the brand's advocacy statement ($M_{\text{lo controversy}}$ = 2.31, $M_{\text{hi controversy}}$ = 4.31; $F$(1,273 = 81.43, $p$ <.001).

Two regressions were utilized to test the effects of our brand voice manipulation and controversy manipulations, and their interactions, on willingness to purchase Ben & Jerry's products, and willingness to accept employment from Ben & Jerry's. We also included our 7-point measure of self-reported left-right political orientation (liberal vs. conservative) variable as a covariate, along with its interactions with each of the fore-mentioned variables. As can be seen in Table 4 results, as expected there were no main effects of first-person brand voice, controversy, or conservatism. There also were no observable effects of the two-way interactions we measured between first-person and controversy or first-person and conservatism, indicating that the effects of brand voice do not depend on how liberal vs. conservative the person is, or on how controversial the advocacy is. As expected, we did find a significant Controversy × Left-right political orientation interaction, indicating that the controversial (noncontroversial) nature of the message impacts subsequent willingness to purchase and willingness to work differently depending on political orientation. Subsequent Johnson-Neyman analyses revealed that the slope of controversy is significant ($p$ < .05) only for values above 3.93 on the left-right political orientation scale (midpoint = 4), indicating that presence of controversy in

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the message is a deterrent for people not politically aligned with the nature of the

message (conservatives) when seeking employment. The same analysis with willingness

to purchase the product as the dependent variable showed that the effect was positive

below 1.74 (1 = very liberal; 2 = liberal) and negative above 4.01. This indicates that

presence of controversy deterred those who were more likely to disagree with the

message ideologically (conservatives), and attracted those whose beliefs were more likely

in line with the message (liberals).

**TABLE 4**

STUDY 4 EFFECTS OF VOICE (FIRST-PERSON VS. THIRD) ON PALATABILITY

OF PUBLIC ADVOCACY

| | Dependent variable | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Willingness to purchase | Willingness to work |
| Intercept | 5.48 (.15)** | 5.59 (.15)** |
| Voice | -.06(.20) | -.05 (.21) |
| Controversy | -.01(.20) | -.12 (.21) |
| Left-right | -.01 (.09) | -.04 (.64) |
| Voice × Controversy | -.30 (.29) | -.19 (.29) |
| Voice × Left-right | -.13 (.12) | -.13 (.12) |
| Controversy × Left-right | -.46 (.12)** | -.45 (.12)** |
| Voice × Controversy × Left-right | .31 (.16) . | .44 (.17)* |
| $R^2$ | .18** | .17** |
| $\Delta R^2$ | .17** | .16** |

*Notes: Voice (1ˢᵗ person = 1; 3ʳᵈ person = 0), Controversy (controversial = 1; noncontroversial = 0), Left-right political orientation (mean-centered; higher values are more conservative; lower values are more liberal). Standard errors are in parentheses. **p<.001, *p<.01,.p=.06.*

Next, we evaluated our focal effect of interest, a three-way interaction between

voice, controversy, and left-right political orientation. In support of H4, we observed a

significant 3-way Voice (     first-person) × Controversy × Left-right interaction. Results

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showed a marginally significant negative effect on willingness to purchase the products and a significantly negative effect on willingness to work at the company. In order to interpret this effect, we removed respondents who were in the low controversy condition and analyzed the data as a two-way interaction. Subsequent Johnson-Neyman analyses showed the effect of voice was only significant for liberal respondents (left-right political orientation < 2.71; see Fig. 3), and that these respondents were more likely to want to work for the company when third-person self-references were used.

**FIGURE 3**

STUDY 4 EFFECTS OF PUBLIC ADVOCACY ON RECRUITING
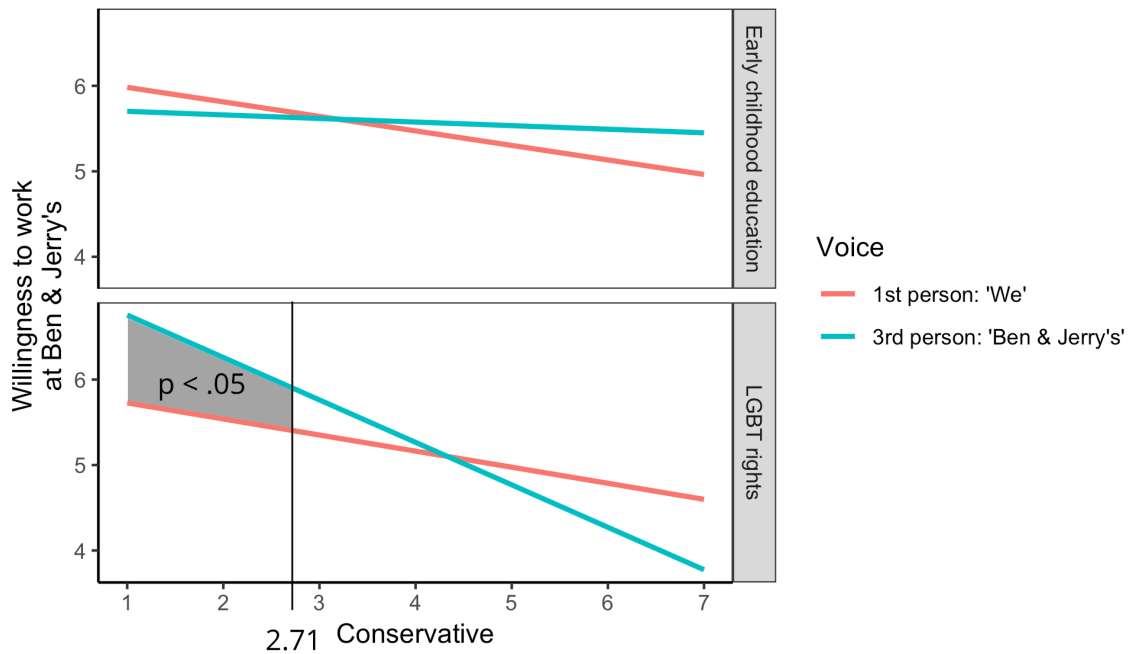


Lastly, in an effort to rule out potential causes of our focal effect, we tested whether the voice manipulation had an effect on either anthropomorphism, which it did

not, $F(1,275) = 0.60$, $p = 0.44$, or belongingness, which was also not significant F(1,275) = 2.01, p = 0.16.

Discussion

Results of Studies 3 and 4 showed that latitude to engage in controversial advocacy depends on narrative voice, an attribute of the message, and may differ depending on the desired outcome (driving engagement with brand vs. message sharing). Study 4 supported hypothesis 4 in showing that more politically liberal respondents prefer to work at a company or buy from a company that engages in controversy when it uses third-person narrative voice (e.g. "Ben & Jerry's is") rather than first-person (e.g. "We are"). By contrast, Study 3 showed that use of first-person voice is preferred when Twitter users are deciding whether to share a brand's controversial content. This discrepancy can be explained by the differing nature between sharing controversial content and working for or buying from a company that engages in controversial messaging. When people share content, they are more likely to share content that makes them appear warm (vs. competent), with first person pronouns showing higher warmth (Bernritter, Verlegh, and Smit 2016). Use of third-person voice, on the other hand, signals competence in the authoritativeness and finality of its meaning. People would rather work for or buy a brand that is competent due to higher levels of trust (Fiske et al. 2002).

**Study 5: Interaction Between Brand Citizenship and Voice (First vs. Third)**

The purpose of Study 5 was to test whether the positive effect of brand citizenship on latitude to engage in controversial advocacy depends on choice of narrative voice used in the message (first-person vs. third). Recall that we hypothesized that the effectiveness of brand citizenship hypothesized in H1 is attenuated by use of third-person (first-person) voice in the message of controversial advocacy (H5). During the course of investigation, we find support for H5, by showing that benefits obtained through good corporate citizenship are diminished by use of third-person voice. We argue that this effect is due to the association of third-person self-references with competence (vs. warmth), and therefore incongruity with the helpful, supportive characteristics displayed through brand citizenship.

Method

Study 5 used Mturk participants (N=224; 37.5% female; median age = 30). Twelve respondents were removed prior to analysis due to failure of a simple attention check (same as in Study 4; inserted at the end of the manipulation checks), leaving a final sample size of 212. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (voice: first-person vs. third) x 2(citizenship: high vs. low) design.

In order to manipulate voice, we used the Ben & Jerry's values statement from Study 4 (see Appendix C). The brand citizenship manipulation from Study 1 was used

(see Appendix C). Following the consent form and a brief introduction to the study, each participant was presented with a page asking them to "review the following information about Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream." Moving down the page, they next saw the bolded question, "how do consumers and employees rate this company?," which was immediately followed by the citizenship manipulation, which included a citizenship score that was either 5/10 or 8/10 with corresponding text, indicative of either average or high citizenship (stimuli in Appendix C). Further down the page, they saw Ben & Jerry's logo, used as a separation between content ostensibly presented by the independent rater (citizenship manipulation) and the message of controversial advocacy that was used to manipulate first-person vs third-person narrative voice (stimuli in Appendix C). After exposure to the stimulus, respondents were asked to recall the stimuli and rate their agreement with the following dependent variables: "I would like to work at this company," and "I would be willing to purchase their products" (1=Strongly disagree; 7=Strongly agree). Next, participants were shown both first-person and third-person versions of the Ben & Jerry's values statement from the Study 5 narrative voice manipulation, and asked which was more "warm and friendly," and which was more "competent and capable." The majority of users felt that first-person voice was warmer (62.7%) and third-person voice was more competent (70.8%), $\chi^2(1) = 8.994$, $p = .003$. Lastly, respondents rated their agreement with two manipulation checks, using a 7-point scale (1=Very strongly disagree; 7=Very strongly agree). The first of these checks was used to evaluate the efficacy of the controversy manipulation that all participants saw, "some people I know would be offended by Ben & Jerry's support of LGBT rights," and

the second was used to evaluate the efficacy of the citizenship manipulation, which varied between conditions (high vs. low), "Ben & Jerry's was rated high in corporate citizenship by Moody's Ratings."

Regressing our citizenship manipulation check on the corresponding citizenship variable showed a significant result, $F(1, 210) = 149.24$, $p < .001$, indicating a successful citizenship manipulation. Average scores for the controversy check ($M$=4.10; $SD$=1.90), showed it to be near the midpoint, strong enough to show that some found it to be controversial, but certainly not everyone. Lastly, basic demographics were collected, including a left-right political orientation scale and participants were thanked for their time and debriefed.

Results

In order to test for our focal effect, the interaction between brand citizenship and voice (first vs. third), we regressed willingness to purchase, our dependent variable, on a model that included main effects for brand citizenship, voice and their interaction, plus left-right political orientation as a control variable. All predictors were mean-centered. The resulting model was significant, $F(4,207) = 8.544$, $p < .001$; $R^2 = .142$. As expected, first-person voice ($B = -.554$, $t = -2.035$, $p = .043$) and left-right political orientation ($B = -.234$, $t = -4.547$, $p < .001$) had negative effects, indicating that third-person voice was more effective overall and participants who were less aligned politically with the controversial brand message were subsequently less inclined to purchase the brand's

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products. Brand citizenship did not have a significant main effect in this model ($B = .165$, $t = .597$, $p = .551$). In partial confirmation of H5, results showed a marginal effect of our focal effect of Brand Citizenship × Voice ($B = .700$, $t = 1.860$, $p = .064$), indicating that the effectiveness of brand citizenship may depend on use of first-person voice. Simple slopes analysis indicated a significant effect of brand citizenship when first-person voice was used ($B = .866$, $t = 3.402$, $p = .001$), but not when third-person voice was used ($B = .165$, $t = .597$, $p = .551$).

Discussion

In H5, we hypothesized that the effectiveness of brand citizenship on building latitude to engage in controversial advocacy (H1) is attenuated by use of third-person (first-person) voice in controversial messages. In partial confirmation of this hypothesis, Study 5 showed a marginally significant effect ($p = .064$) of the interaction between citizenship and voice, with subsequent simple slopes analysis revealing that the positive effect of citizenship, present when first-person voice was used, went away when third-person voice was used. Public goodwill conveyed to brands that are high in brand citizenship may be rendered less effective at producing subsequent latitude to engage in controversial advocacy when third-person voice is used to deliver the message. Use of third-person voice signals competence, rather than warmth, which is in many ways incongruent with properties demonstrated by the brand's previous pattern of good behavior.

## General Discussion

In this paper, we investigated both the brand attributes and communications styles that lead to increased latitude in contexts of controversial advocacy. Study 1, a controlled experiment provided evidence that both innovativeness and good citizen qualities of a brand may lead it to have increased latitude to engage in controversial advocacy. Study 2, another controlled experiment, decomposed innovativeness by pitting it against an option with equally positive associations that were in opposition to innovativeness (tradition). A null result weakens past assertions that innovativeness leads to latitude and introduces the idea that it is only the positive associations with innovativeness and not the deviance component that leads to latitude.

Study 3, used brand Twitter data to determine what communications style in controversial messaging was most likely to be shared. The study showed that use of third-person voice is generally more effective, but this is attenuated by the presence of controversy. First-person voice is generally detrimental to achieving more retweets, and therefore a wider distribution of one's message via word-of-mouth, but there is a positive interaction, indicating that this pattern may not hold when controversy is present in the message.

Study 4 again used a controlled experiment to further probe the impact of voice (first-person vs. third) by showing that more liberal respondents actually prefer use of third person voice in a brand's controversial messaging when asked whether they would

be willing to buy from or work for the brand. This provides some evidence that controversial messages are more shared when they use first person voice because they are seen to be more palatable to the opposition, not because they are preferred by the sharers. Study 5 tested whether the effectiveness of brand citizenship on subsequent latitude to engage in controversial advocacy was attenuated by use of third-person voice. Results, though only marginally significant, showed that this was indeed the case, and could possibly be explained by the competence-signaling (rather than warmth) inherent in use of third-person voice, and its incongruity with the warmness associated with brand citizenship.

Managerial Implications

This research is useful because engagement with controversial causes has become increasingly common among firm decision makers. Such engagement is desirable because it simultaneously meets several objectives. These objectives include driving revenue through increased awareness obtained by the mere exposure effect (Zajonc 1968), increasing employee engagement, and satisfying the decision makers' desire to use the brand's influence to promote a cause they believe in.

It serves brand managers well to understand both how to achieve more latitude to engage in advocacy, and how best to craft messages that deal with controversial advocacy. The present research addresses both. Key takeaways for managers include: (1) Use first person voice when engaging in controversial advocacy on social media in order

to maximize reach, (2) keep in mind that third-person voice may seem more more powerful and can be useful in certain circumstances that do not include content sharing, including increasing willingness to purchase, and willingness to work at the company. However, this is only true for people who are ideologically aligned with the controversial advocacy.

Implications for Researchers

First, the present research provides the first empirical test of the antecedents fo brand latitude at both the brand (innovativeness, citizenship) and message level (narrative voice: first-person vs. third). Second, a literature gap is addressed in which Rindova (2006) pointed out that extant research currently has no explanation for why some deviant behaviors by firms are rewarded rather than punished. The present research builds upon Warren and Campbell's (2014) findings that people think things are cool if they deviate or conform appropriately by showing that establishing such a pattern can lead to increased brand latitude. Third, this research addresses an understudied emergent trend in modern brand strategy in which brands are leveraged to promote a political cause.

Fourth, building on conceptual work by Stern (1991), this paper constitutes the first empirical research on brand voice, meaning a brand's use of first person or third person to represent itself. Brand voice is important because how the brand refers to itself can signal important messages to the consumer, such as how well the message represents

the brand's true values, and how certain the brand is of its statement. Additionally, this paper is one of a very few to address conditions under which deviance is accepted by the public. While public acceptance of deviant behavior is seen as negative in social psychology, brands must routinely deviate from public expectations in order to be noticed, or in order to promote causes that founders, managers and employees want to get behind. A better understanding of what makes deviant behavior acceptable is sorely needed in the context of branding.

Limitations and Future Research

This paper makes an important initial contribution to our understanding of what leads to brand latitude at both the brand and message level. There are, however, many more brand attributes worthy of consideration, such as brand rebelliousness, meaning consumers expect the brand to engage in controversial advocacy because it has established a pattern of deviation. There are also many more considerations in brand messaging besides use of first person vs. third. For example, does the harshness of the tone have an impact? Regarding the specifics of the current study, one suggestion we make is that innovativeness is not predictive of brand latitude, but rather it is the positive associations associated with it (not the deviance component) merits further testing and can't be taken as fact based on a single result, particularly given the fact that this confirming result was a null, which is not confirmatory. Future research should further

investigate the 2-dimensional nature of innovativeness, rather than continuing to pit it against non-innovativeness unthinkingly.

Lastly, the present research is mainly focused on garnering positive reception of one's controversial advocacy among the like-minded. Future research may investigate what can be done to avoid offending the opposition, an important topic to firm decision makers who wish to show support for a controversial cause without alienating the half the population that disagrees with them.

CHAPTER IV

OVERALL DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS OF ESSAYS


This dissertation has addressed brand latitude, which is defined herein as *a public entity's capacity to deviate from category norms or to transcend the normal function of a brand without incurring adverse responses from the public*. Brand latitude is important because modern firms leverage brands to achieve much more than greater market share relative to similar competitors. For example, brands facilitate entry into new product categories, increase attention to social causes, and attract talent to job openings. While managers expect all of their branding efforts to be successful, such non-standard uses of brands may be received positively, negatively, or indifferently. The present investigation explores both the brand attributes and styles of approach that can lead to increased brand latitude.

The first essay integrates various streams of literature to develop the concept of brand latitude. It subsequently proposes testable brand-level antecedents and outcomes of brand latitude, which are based on a thorough review of multiple literature streams that discuss situations when brands are given more latitude to deviate or to transcend their traditional role as signals of functional brand attributes. Lastly, potential moderators of these main effects are considered, including a discussion of how choice of narrative voice in self-references (first-person vs. third) affects how well the message is received.

The second essay empirically investigates components of the aforementioned framework in the context of controversial political advocacy by brands, an emergent and understudied topic. Essay 2 considers the effects of both brand attributes (good character, innovativeness, altruism) and characteristics of the controversial message (use of first-person vs third-person narrative voice) on brand latitude. A consideration of message characteristics is useful in this context because individuals judge the appropriateness of a brand's engagement in controversial advocacy both by their prior knowledge of the brand's attributes and by the nature of message delivered. This investigation shows that our brand attributes did seem to have an impact on brand latitude, but only when compared to the absence of such attributes. When compared to equally brands with other equally desirable attributes, there was no effect of these attributes on brand latitude. This means that it is possible that the public simply gives more latitude to brands they like, rather than granting latitude to specific brand personalities, controlling for likeability. This research also shows that first-person self-references are more likely to be shared by the public because they help people signal warmth (competence). The opposite is true when engagement with the brand is the goal. People are more likely to purchase the brand or work for the company that uses third person references, which signal competence. The result is a better understanding of what brands should do and how they should do it in order to increase the chance of positive reception by the public.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MARKETING CRISIS BUFFERS

**TABLE A1**

Table 2 Empirically demonstrated marketing crisis buffers

| Buffer | Nature of crisis | Moderator | Nature of study | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abstract positioning | Counterattitudinal (negative) information | generalness of negative information (-) | Experimental | Pham and Muthukrishnan 2002 |
| Familiarity | Brand crisis ("well-publicized claims of unsubstantiated or false brand propositions" (Dawar and Lei 2009)) | | Experimental | Dawar and Lei 2009 |
| | Product harm | | Experimental | Cleeren et al. 2008 |
| Loyalty | Product harm | | Experimental | Cleeren et al. 2008 |
| Admiration for brand | Product recall | | Archival | Hsu and Lawrence 2016 |
| | Negative earnings surprise | | Archival | Pfarrer, Pollock, Rindova 2010 |
| Corporate social responsibility | Service failure | Value alignment | Experimental | Joireman et al. 2015 |
| | Negative legal/regulatory actions against firm | CSR activity targeted at public (rather than trading partners) | Archival | Godfrey, Merrill, Hansen 2009 |
| | Product harm | Importance of CSR to participant | Experimental | Klein and Dawar 2004 |
| Quality | Product harm | | Field survey, experimental | Dawar and Pillutla 2000 |
| | | Incongruity with expectations | Archival | Liu and Shankar 2015 |

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| Negative earnings surprise | Archival | Pfarrer, Pollock, Rindova 2010 |
| --- | --- | --- |

SCALE ITEMS

| Measure (source): Study | Items | Alpha |
|---|---|---|
| Need for uniqueness (Ruvio et al. 2008): Study 1 | **Creative choice** | |
| | I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated. | |
| | I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being original. | |
| | I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands | |
| | Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image. | |
| | **Unpopular choice** | |
| | When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them, I have broken customs and rules. | |
| | I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own. | |
| | I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used. | |
| | I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know by buying something they would not seem to accept. | |
| | **Avoidance of similarity** | |
| | When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less. | |
| | I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population. | |
| | As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone. | |
| | The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it. | |
| Horizontal marketing partnership authenticity (Charlton and Cornwell, under review): Study 2 | [Brand]'s advocacy for ex-prisoners' voting rights will last for a long time. | α=.80 |
| | The relationship between [Brand] and ex-prisoners' voting rights is an honest combination. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | [Brand]'s advocacy of ex-prisoners' voting rights is a benefit to the public. | |
| | [Brand]'s advocacy of ex-prisoners' voting rights connects people with what is really important. | |
| Brand equity (Yoo and Donthu 2001): Studies 2 and 4 | **Brand loyalty** | α=.85 |
| | I consider myself to be loyal to [Brand]. | |
| | [Brand] would be my first choice. | |
| | I will not buy other brands if [Brand] is available at the store. | |
| | **Perceived quality** | α=NA |
| | The likely quality of [Brand] is extremely high. | |
| | The likelihood that [Brand] would be functional is very high. | |
| | **Brand awareness/associations** | α=.79 |
| | I can recognize [Brand] among other competing brands. | |
| | I am aware of [Brand]. | |
| | Some characteristics of [Brand] come to my mind quickly. | |
| | I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of [Brand]. | |
| | I have difficulty in imagining [Brand] in my mind (reverse). | |

APPENDIX C. STUDY STIMULI

STUDY 1 STIMULI

| | Description |
|---|---|
| High citizenship | Citizenship score: 8/10<br>Moda Rey achieves high marks for citizenship due to its high employee morale, generous donations to charity, and decent customer satisfaction scores. |
| Average citizenship | Citizenship score: 5/10<br>Moda Rey achieves acceptable marks for citizenship due to industry average employee morale, modest donations to charity, and reasonable customer satisfaction scores. |
| High innovativeness | Innovativeness score: 8/10<br>Moda Rey is known as an innovative brand that creates some of the most edgy and unique styles on the market today. |
| Low innovativeness | Innovativeness score: 2/10<br>Moda Rey is known as a safe brand that creates popular styles that fit current, mainstream tastes. |

**Study 2 screen 1 stimuli:** 2 (high brand altruism: Patagonia, low: Under Armour) × 2 (brand value: innovation × tradition); Both Under Armour conditions are shown below. Patagonia conditions are the same as Under Armour with only the brand name being varied.

Innovation condition:

ITMA PRESS RELEASE
October 17, 2018

**Subject: Under Armour Is Again Recognized As Top Innovator**

On September 8, 2018 during the Annual Conference 2018 of the International Textile Manufacturers Association (ITMA) in Copenhagen, Denmark, ITMA announced the winner of its 10th annual Top Innovator Award. For the third consecutive year, **Under Armour, Inc.** has won the award for most innovative apparel brand. According to the contents of the award announcement, **Under Armour** "has innovated every aspect of the apparel industry in recent years, from materials to design and manufacturing processes." Some of **Under Armour**'s latest innovations include the use of nanoporous fabrics and biodegradable materials. The award announcement also noted that **Under Armour** has led the market on the design front with its bold, creative styles during recent years.

Tradition condition:

ITMA PRESS RELEASE
October 17, 2018

**Subject: Under Armour Is Again Recognized As Timeless Brand**

On September 8, 2018 during the Annual Conference 2018 of the International Textile Manufacturers Association (ITMA) in Copenhagen, Denmark, ITMA announced the winner of its 10th annual Classic Brand Award. For the third consecutive year, **Under Armour, Inc.** has won the award for most classic apparel brand. According to the contents of the award announcement, **Under Armour** "has refined every aspect of the apparel industry in recent decades, from materials to design and manufacturing processes." Some of **Under Armour**'s longest-lasting contributions include the use of breathable fabrics and sustainable materials. The award announcement also noted that **Under Armour**'s timeless styles have been a model of stability in a world of fast fashion in which apparel typically goes out of style very quickly.

**Study 2 screen 2 stimuli:** Controversial advocacy manipulation (all participants saw the same stimulus, only varying Brand name: altruistic brand: Under Armour vs. nonaltruistic brand: Patagonia)

## Under Armour Campaigning for Voting Rights for Former U.S. Prisoners
October 19, 2018
*by* Noah Jorgensen

Under Armour, for the first time ever, is actively campaigning for voting rights to be restored to former U.S. prisoners. According to estimates, over six million U.S. citizens were not allowed to vote in the 2016 election because they had a felony conviction on their record. The majority of these people had already served their sentences and returned to society. Most U.S. states take away felons' voting rights, occasionally for life, even after they serve out their sentences. This disenfranchisement affects one in 40 U.S. adults (2.5% of the total US voting-age population), according to The Sentencing Project, a group that advocates criminal-justice reform. Under Armour supports the reintroduction of voting rights to the majority of these citizens once their time has been served.

STUDY 4 STIMULI

| Controversy | Text |
| --- | --- |
| High | Ben & Jerry's has (We have) a long and proud history of commitment to social justice, including LGBT rights and marriage equality. This commitment is grounded in the company's (our) core values, which include a deep respect for all people and an unshakable belief that everyone deserves full and equal civil rights. Way back in 1989, Ben & Jerry's was (we were) the first major employer in the state to offer health insurance to domestic partners of employees, including same-sex couples. |
| Low | Ben & Jerry's has (We have) a long and proud history of commitment to social good, including childhood education. This commitment is grounded in the company's (our) core values, which include a deep respect for all people and an unshakable belief that everyone deserves a chance to succeed. Way back in 1989, Ben & Jerry's was (we were) the first major employer in the state to offer free after school educational programs to children of employees. |

*Note:* Study is a 2(Controversy: High vs. Low) × Voice(1st person vs. 3rd person design)

Study design was a 2 (citizenship: low vs. high) x 2 (voice: first-person vs. third-person) manipulation. Shown below is the low citizenship x third-person voice condition.

**Please review the following information about Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream:**

**How do consumers and employees rate this company?**

Citizenship score: 5/10

Moody's Ratings gives them acceptable marks for citizenship due to industry average employee morale, modest donations to charity, and reasonable customer satisfaction scores.

**Also, consider this statement from the "Values" section of the brand's website:**



Ben & Jerry's has a long and proud history of commitment to social justice, including LGBT rights and marriage equality. This commitment is grounded in the company's core values, which include a deep respect for all people and an unshakable belief that everyone deserves full and equal civil rights. Way back in 1989, Ben & Jerry's was the first major employer in the state to offer health insurance to domestic partners of employees, including same-sex couples.

In the high citizenship conditions, the Citizenship Score was 8/10 and the text immediately below the score read, "Moody's Ratings gives them high marks for citizenship due to their high employee morale, generous donations to charity, and decent customer satisfaction scores." In the first-person voice conditions, the text below the Ben

& Jerry's logo read, "We have a long and proud history of commitment to social justice, including LGBT rights and marriage equality. This commitment is grounded in our core values, which include a deep respect for all people and an unshakable belief that everyone deserves full and equal civil rights. Way back in 1989, we were the first major employer in the state to offer health insurance to domestic partners of employees, including same-sex couples."

# APPENDIX D: KEYWORD PATTERN SELECTION

## TABLE D1

## ENTITIES THAT ENGAGE IN CONTROVERSIAL ADVOCACY AS THEIR

## PRIMARY OR SOLE FUNCTION (STUDY 3)

| Google query | Entity name | Twitter screen name |
|---|---|---|
| lgbt nonprofit | Human Rights Campaign | HRC |
| lgbt nonprofit | GLAAD | glaad |
| lgbt nonprofit | The Trevor Project | trevorproject |
| lgbt nonprofit | GLSEN | glsen |
| lgbt nonprofit | Outright International | outrightIntl |
| controversial environmental nonprofit | Leonardo diCaprio Foundation | dicapriofdn |
| controversial environmental nonprofit | Earthworks | earthworks |
| controversial environmental nonprofit | SierraClub | sierraclub |
| controversial environmental nonprofit | Indigenous Environmental Network | ienearth |
| controversial environmental nonprofit | North Carolina Conservation Network | NCConservation |
| controversial immigration nonprofit | Vamosjuntos.org | vamos_juntos_ |
| controversial immigration nonprofit | Immigration Advocates Network | ImmAdvocates |
| controversial immigration nonprofit | IRCO | IRCOnews |
| controversial immigration nonprofit | USCRI | uscridc |
| controversial immigration nonprofit | American Immigration Council | immcouncil |
| controversial voting rights nonprofit | ACLU | ACLU |
| controversial voting rights nonprofit | Center for American Progress | amprog |
| controversial voting rights nonprofit | Brennan Center | brennancenter |
| controversial voting rights nonprofit | Rock the Vote | RocktheVote |
| controversial voting rights nonprofit | reclaimtheamericandream.org | hedricksmith1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| womens workplace equality nonprofit | Gender at Work | GenderatWork |
| womens workplace equality nonprofit | Equal Rights Advocates | equalrightsadv |
| womens workplace equality nonprofit | EqualityNow | equalitynow |
| womens workplace equality nonprofit | WeDo | WEDO_worldwide |
| womens workplace equality nonprofit | Catalyst | CatalystInc |

TABLE D2

DISCARDED OR MODIFIED HASHTAGS (STUDY 3)

| Hashtag | Removed | Modification rule |
|---|---|---|
| #givingtuesday | 1 | |
| #ICYMI | 1 | |
| #mondaymotivation | 1 | |
| #michigan | 1 | |
| #gridlock | 1 | |
| #diversity | 1 | |
| #women | 1 | |
| #GOP | 0 | Must not be followed by "r" to avoid "GoPro" references |
| #womenshistorymonth | 1 | |
| #blackhistorymonth | 1 | |
| #trans | 0 | Must **not** be followed by a letter to avoid a variety of words that share the same root "trans" (e.g. "transformative," "transnational," "transitive," "transistor") |

TABLE D3

FINAL SET OF HASHTAGS (STUDY 3)

#LGBTQ|#trans(?![:alpha:])|#oilandgas|#lgbtq|#EqualityAct|#climate|#NoDAPL|#fracking|#climatechange|#conversiontherapy|#cutmethane|#mining|#refugees|#5thwcw|#GOP[^r]|#MeToo|#humanrights|#LGBTIQ|#noDAPL|#refugeeswelcome|#RefugeesWelcome|#GLAADawards|#gender|#Trump|#DACA|#HR1|#immigration|#LGBT|#inequality|#StrongerCA|#CCH2018|#methane|#COP23|#LGBTI|#ncpol|#HumanRights|#RockTheVote|#inclusion|#SOTU|#ActOnClimate|#CSW62|#voters|#TitleIX|#CatalystAwards2019|#gerrymander|#TakeTheLead|#taxcut|#AM_Equality|#refugee|#genderline|#FGM|#ShutDownBerks|#Not1More|#COP22|#EndFGM|#equalpay|#ForThePeople|#KeepItInTheGround|#TimesUp|#TrevorLIVE|#publichealth|#SB44|#Democracy|#lgbt|#ParisAgreement|#reform|#ClimateChange|#GreenNewDeal|#India|#womenclimatejustice|#lgbtiq|#NoBorderWall|#CSW63|#democracy|#CatalystForChange|#FutureAtWork|#states|#not1more|#ElectionDay|#SDGs|#gerrymanders|#TPS|#CutMethane|#environment|#ncga|#TransMilitaryBan|#voting|#politics|#sexualharassment|#EqualPayDay|#megadonors

*Note:* For the convenience of future researchers, including replicators, this is the actual regular expression used to query the Twitter dataset and match hashtags. The text is mostly interpreted literally by the algorithm with a few exceptions: "|" represents the OR function, "(?![:alph:])" indicates that the preceding term cannot be followed by a letter of the alphabet, and "[^r]" indicates that the term cannot be followed by an "r."

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