

INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS AND CAUSE MARKETING
A STUDY OF TWITTER USERS AND CONSUMER RESPONSE TO #METOO-RELATED
CAMPAIGNS

by

PHUONG THAO PHAM

Bachelor of Science, Strategic Communication, 2019
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
College of Communication
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Science in Strategic Communication

May 2020



BOB SCHIEFFER
COLLEGE of COMMUNICATION

Institutional Logics and Cause Marketing:
A Study of Twitter Users and Consumer Response to #MeToo-Related Campaigns

Thesis approved:

Catherine A. Pearson _____ 4/27/20
Committee Chair Date

Eunsoo Kwon _____ 4/27/20
Committee Member Date

Julie O'Neil _____ 4/27/20
Committee Member Date

Julie O'Neil _____ 4/27/20
Associate Dean Date

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis marks the end of my five years studying in the U.S. and at Texas Christian University. First of all, I would like to thank my family for giving me all the love, support, and opportunity to pursue my education here. Without them, I would not be able to reach where I am right now. I also want to extend my sincere thanks to my professors and friends in the Strategic Communication Department and the Chinese Program at Texas Christian University. Their knowledge, care, and guidance inspired me to broaden my academic horizons.

I would like to give my special thanks to my committee chair, Dr. Catherine Coleman, for supporting and providing me with invaluable guidance throughout my research. This project had not been a smooth and easy journey; however, her patience, knowledge, and support have kept me moving forward. I truly appreciate her introduction of different theories and methodologies to help me carry on with this project and intellectually challenge myself.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Julie O'Neil and Dr. Eunseon Kwon, who have been so supportive and encouraging during each step of my project. Without their feedback, this project would not be possible.

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Introduction

In the middle of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the #MeToo movement pervaded social media platforms and called public attention to the sensitive topic of sexual harassment and assault, creating one of the most prominent digital social movements in recent years. With its context tied to legal cases and deep political involvement, most people associate the #MeToo movement with HR-related problems and workplace harassment. However, when Harvey Weinstein, one of the most powerful producers in Hollywood, faced a series of sexual harassment allegations from female celebrities in 2017, the movement started spreading to the entertainment and media industries (Hillstrom, 2019). Since then, empowered by the movement, sexual harassment survivors have come forward with their assault incidents in the advertising industry, forcing big names in advertising to step down (Doland, 2018). The #MeToo movement also inspired another hashtag movement specifically for advertising, #TimesUp, which aims to raise public awareness about the objectification of women in advertising and advocate for changes in the industry. With this fallout, advertisers admit that a “cultural nervousness” exists in the industry (Bell, 2018) and that they need to be more careful with how to depict women (Poggi, 2018).

Although ad professionals note that a substantial connection between the movement and the advertising industry exists, little or no research has been done on the effect of #MeToo on brands’ messaging. Professionals and critics observe that the movement indeed has inspired several notable brands’ approaches to messaging and creative work, such as Gillette’s “The Best Men Can Be” and Bonobos’ “Evolve the Definition” (Bradley, 2018). Yet, while people often associate #MeToo with women’s empowerment, most of these campaigns come from male-oriented or masculine brands. These campaigns either directly or indirectly address the sexual

harassment issue by providing guidance for non-traditional masculinity or how to act appropriately. This research explores brand and consumer discourses surrounding brands identified in popular and trade press for their engagement with messaging that responded to the #MeToo phenomenon. Specifically, the study examines brand-generated content and consumer engagement with Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be" and Bonobos' "Evolve the Definition" campaigns. To examine these discourses, the study poses the central research question: What have been influences of #MeToo on brand meaning? To answer this overarching question, the study first examines consumers' interpretations of the Gillette's and Bonobos's of #MeToo on Twitter. In analyzing the data from Twitter, Twitter users appeared to draw from shared cultural resources, such as social movement discourses and advertising messages, to interpret and (re)construct meaning for these brands. Institutional theorists have termed symbols and practices used to provide meaning as institutional logics. Therefore, this research seeks to identify the logics and the way they are utilized by consumers to make sense of #MeToo-related brand messages. And finally, going back to the overarching question, this study examines whether the use of such logics gives legitimacy to the #MeToo movement as having a significant impact on advertising content.

Literature Review

This study starts with a literature review on gender identity in advertising and femvertising to provide a context for the existing gender issues and discourses in the profession, which is followed by a brief overview of the #MeToo movement's development and its influence on masculine brands' advertising. Institutional theory with a focus on logics and legitimacy is then introduced as the theoretical lens to examine the dynamics between #MeToo's influence and brands' responses. Then, the author introduces the Gillette's and Bonobos's campaigns and the emerging context of institutional logics during the #MeToo movement. This context ultimately forms a foundation for analyzing consumers' responses to #MeToo-related messages.

Gender Identity in Advertising

Since the last half of the twentieth century, advertising and consumer research scholars have shown a strong interest in gender roles and gender identity in advertising and media. Studies on the effects of gender roles and gender advertising date back to the late 1960s and early 1970s (Eisend, 2019). In contemporary gender research, scholars distinguish between sex, gender, and sexuality and view gender as a socially constructed phenomenon that serves as a powerful force in mediating individual identities (Bettany, Dobscha, O'Malley, & Prothero, 2010; Bristor & Fisher, 1993; West, 2017). Judith Butler, an influential theorist in gender and feminist studies, introduces the idea of gender performativity (Hein, & O'Donohoe, 2014). Butler (1990) argues that gender is neither a noun nor a set of free-floating attributes, but rather is performative and "always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (p. 25). Butler builds this concept on Nietzsche's claim that for every deed, there is no actual doer. This notion serves as the foundation for her application to gender

performativity: “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1990, p. 25). Through different works throughout her career, Butler highlights how repeated practices create gender, which eventually establishes a sense of gender performances and performativity as natural (rather than socially constructed) (Hein, & O’Donohoe, 2014).

Bristor and Fisher (1993) also conclude that gender is “a social concept referring to psychologically, sociologically, or culturally rooted traits, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral tendencies” (p.519). With these socially constructed traits, gender serves as a filter for individuals’ experiences, helps people navigate their social worlds, and ultimately makes consumption activities fundamentally gendered. Therefore, people, through consumption activities, create, reinforce, or negotiate gender identities, especially during times of societal changes in gendered roles and expectations (Fowler, & Fowler, 2012; Zayer, Sredl, Parmentier, & Coleman, 2012). During this consumption process, advertising and media play essential roles in creating and influencing consumers’ decisions and consumption patterns. Therefore, the construction of media and advertising both shape and reflect gender stereotypes and identities for both individuals and society. While receiving advertising and media’s gendered messages, consumers simultaneously absorb and negotiate the meanings of the messages delivered to them. At the same time, researchers have found that audiences are not as susceptible to advertising priming as previous literature implies, and consumers, as common culture readers, are critical of advertisements and aware that advertising is a strategic genre (Knudsen, 2019). As critical ad readers, consumers feel that advertisements do not accurately depict both female and male roles (Scigliampaglia, Lundstrom, & Vanier, 1979), resulting in inequitable gender discourses in advertising.

Femvertising

Background of feminist waves.

Feminism and gender role representation in advertising have intertwined throughout the course of media history. Researchers often divide the history of feminism into “waves” to study each period’s core discourses and its effects on society and advertising. Researchers argue that the second, third, and emerging fourth waves of feminism have had a more direct and documented influence on advertising’s representation of women (Maclaran, 2015; Lambiase, Bronstein, & Coleman, 2017).

The first wave started in the 1850s with the early suffragette movement, and the movement’s key figures, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Amelia Bloomer, became celebrity endorsers for department stores and products that signified and support women’s (limited) independence. The second wave of feminism lasted from the 1960s to 1980s, and Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer’s critiques on the market’s manipulation of women’s bodies in relation with advertising heavily influenced the movement. Second-wave feminism marks the relentless criticism of negative female stereotyping, which resulted in more sophisticated representations of women’s empowerment (Maclaran, 2015).

Third-wave feminism emerged in the early 1990s and committed to the notion of intersectionality, a concept the first two waves ignored or failed to address. During this period, a new generation of feminists drew attention to marginalized groups under the bigger arch of women’s experiences, such as women of colors, transgender, race, ethnicity, ability, age, class, and nationality. This approach reconstructed feminism in a more inclusive and diverse way. The advertising industry followed suit and challenged the contemporary social constructions of gender. Notable examples include Nike’s ads, which introduced a new articulation of women’s

representation (Lambiase et al., 2017). In addition, younger generations who enjoyed the political and social gains from second-wave feminism did not feel feminist ideals aligned with their own ideals of womanhood; hence, they sought to reclaim certain bodily and feminized practices that second-wave feminism rejected, such as fashionable dressing and cosmetics, which appeared as empowering for women's diverse lifestyle choices of the new age.

With the rise of Internet sites and non-mainstream media content in the early 2000s, feminism shifted to focus on individuality and women's right to pleasures. This shift turns away from the collective structural critiques of women's vulnerability and agency in more traditional feminist ideals, which researchers refer to as sexual freedom and sexual revolution (McRobbie, 2007; Lambiase et al., 2017). According to McRobbie (2007), this individual freedom and concept of pleasure led to the ironic normalization of pornography in both pop culture and advertising, in which women see sexualization of the female body as empowerment and liberation. This direction channeled the premise of fourth-wave feminism and femvertising that have taken place since the mid-2000s.

Fourth-wave feminism generally coincides with the rise of social media platforms and online media around the early 2010s and marks the digital characteristic of this feminist era. Women could connect and engage in active dialogues via Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and start digital activism to address stereotypes and representations of women in advertising. For example, advertising executive Madonna Badger started the hashtag #WomenNotObjects in 2016 to battle advertising's objectification of women (Lambiase et al., 2017). Connective action - the ability to engage in real time regardless of location and circumstances – gives young feminists who try to blend the micro-political elements of third-wave feminism with an agenda that seeks large-scale

social changes of the second wave, a powerful tool to articulate their message and to encourage corporations to change their ways (Maclaran, 2015).

Femvertising, Empowerment?

The concept of femvertising arose at the end of third-wave feminism in the early 2000s. Although SheKnows Media did not coin the term “femvertising” until 2014 (Lambiase et al., 2017), one of the advertising campaigns that ad professionals later identified as femvertising is Dove’s campaign Real Beauty in 2004 (Spark Staff, 2017). According to SheKnows Media, femvertising is “advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages and imagery to empower women and girls” (Spark Staff, 2017, para. 2) Other notable ad campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and empower women include Always’s “Like A Girl” in 2014 (Bahadur, 2015), Under Armour’s “I Will What I Want” in 2014 (The Drum, 2016), and Barbie’s “You Can Be Anything” (Barbie, 2016). These campaigns received a warm welcome and recognition from ad professionals and organizations for delivering positive messages to women and girls over the world (Mamuric, 2018). SheKnow Media even gives annual Femvertising Awards (Bahadur, 2015). However, many consumer research and gender scholars see such campaigns as reflecting corporations’ desires to connect with pro-feminist consumers for their spending power rather than to embrace genuine feminist messages (Lambiase et al., 2015). Critics see femvertising as one of the many ways that advertisers capitalize on social movements rather than supporting feminist causes (Maclaran, 2015; Lambiase et al., 2017). One of the critiques of the normalization of sexuality in advertising is that the empowering message focuses only on female sexuality, which reduces women to only their appearance and sexuality. This limited empowerment is problematic (McRobbie 2007), especially with the rise of the #MeToo movement. Both scholars and ad professionals see that the true meaning of feminism, which is to

advocate for equal rights for women, got lost in the noise, leading people to reject the term “feminism” and advertisers to increase sexualization of the female body (Ngabirano, 2017).

The #MeToo Movement

Background

While women used online media to showcase their freedom of choices and sexuality as a form of empowerment (Maclaran, 2015), the #MeToo movement emerged and drew public attention to rather different aspects of women empowerment: supporting survivors of sexual harassment and assault. Although Internet users did not widely adopt the actual #MeToo hashtag until after 2017, talks about sexual assaults and misogynistic behaviors arose during the United States’ 2016 presidential election. A large part of these conversations were critiques of then-presidential candidate Donald Trump’s controversially misogynistic remarks and sexual misconduct allegations. At the same time, the U.S. had its very first female presidential candidate, Hilary Clinton, a highly educated, successful female leader and a role model for many women. Therefore, the public saw the 2016 election not only as a presidential campaign but also as a fight for women’s equality and against the misogynistic power structure (Hillstorm, 2019).

After Trump won the presidential election, American women feared that his leadership would normalize misogyny and hamper efforts toward women’s equality, which prompted protesters to join the Women’s March on Washington on January 21, 2017, to demonstrate their opposition to Trump’s election. During this time, women accused several high-profile media personalities, such as Mark Halperin (ABC News), Matt Lauer (NBC News), and Bill O’Reilly (Fox News) of misogynist attitudes toward Clinton when covering the election (Hillstorm, 2019). However, the movement did not really take off until when Harvey Weinstein, one of the most

powerful producers in Hollywood, faced a series of sexual harassment allegations from female celebrities in 2017. The scandal rocked Hollywood and the entertainment industry when 85 women, including well-known actresses, such as Angelina Jolie, Uma Thurman, and Salma Hayek, came forward with sexual harassment allegations against Weinstein. In October 2017, actress and activist Alyssa Milano called for women who have experienced sexual harassment to use the hashtag #MeToo in order to give the public a sense of the problem's magnitude, giving the movement the name "MeToo" (Hillstorm, 2017).

The #MeToo movement then went on to inspire another hashtag, #TimesUp, specifically for advertising that aims to call out sexual misconduct and women's lack of professional representation in advertising. Since then, empowered by the movement, sexual harassment survivors have come forward with their assault incidents, forcing executives in big agencies, like Dentsu Aegis, to step down (Doland, 2018). With this major fallout, advertisers admit that a "cultural nervousness" exists in the industry (Bell, 2018), and that they need to be more careful when depicting women (Poggi, 2018). At the same time, consumers also expect brands to engage more in social causes and to take specific stands on social issues (Sternberg, 2019). This action urges advertisers to act in response to the #MeToo movement.

Digital Activism

The #MeToo movement marks one of fourth-wave feminism's most distinctive characteristics, digital connectivity and activism. Social media have become an important way to invoke social changes thanks to their ability to connect and organize actions within large audiences and bring in results quickly (Lambiase et al., 2017). Guo and Saxton (2014) propose a three-stage pyramid model of social media-based advocacy that can apply to the movement, including reaching out to people, keeping the flame alive, and stepping up to action. The first

stage, reaching out to people, started when actress Alyssa Milano asked survivors to simply put the hashtag “#MeToo” in their social media posts, but then she didn’t ask them to share their stories due to the sensitivity of the matter. This call to action raised concerns about false allegations due to lack of collaborating evidence. However, #MeToo activists claimed that the hashtag provided a safe environment for survivors to receive support from other survivors. After 10 days, Twitter estimated that the hashtag appeared in 2.3 million tweets across 85 countries (Hillstorm, 2019). The second stage, which is keeping the flame alive, emerged when powerful women in the entertainment industry launched the #TimesUp movement to maintain the magnitude of #MeToo and call for fundamental changes in laws, policies, and workplace cultures (Hillstorm, 2019). However, supporters of the #MeToo movement did not take clear initiatives in the final stage, which is stepping up to action. The movement did not ignite any large-scale protests like the Women’s March from supporters, which may have resulted from slacktivism – the lack of actual collective actions after engagement in online conversations (Lambiase et al., 2017). However, the movement did prompt initiatives from lawmakers, corporate executives, and the media to take actions to address sexual harassments and workplace culture. For example, big companies whose executive leaders committed sexual harassment revamped their anti-harassment programs and promised to commit to building a new culture of diversity, inclusion, respect, and civility (Hillstorm, 2019).

Masculine Brands and #MeToo

In this complicated media landscape, what is the #MeToo movement’s effect on advertising? Professionals and critics acknowledge that the movement inspires several notable brands’ approaches to messaging and creative work, including Gillette’s “The Best Men Can

Be,” Bonobos’ “Evolve the Definition” (Bradley, 2018), AXE’s “Is It Okay For Guys,” and Harry’s’s “A Man Like You” (Adams, 2018).

While people often associate #MeToo with women’s empowerment, most of these campaigns come from male-oriented or masculine brands. These campaigns directly or indirectly address the sexual harassment issue by providing guidance for non-traditional masculinity or guidance for men on proper behaviors. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that ad professionals see themselves as responsible for taking an active role and re-shaping the meaning of masculinity. Amia Lazarus, Observatory Marketing’s head of strategy and entertainment consulting, stated: “There is now even more responsibility for brands that are communicating with men to take an active role in ensuring that men are responsible human beings” (Bradley, 2018, para. 10). Meanwhile, brands that had been using femvertising, such as Dove, Covergirl, and Always, did not directly respond to the MeToo movement and continued with their approaches of using femvertising with some adjustment to improve the diversity of women representations by featuring marginalized groups, such as members of the LGBTQ+ community and women of color. So, why do masculine brands seem to be more responsive to the #MeToo movement than feminine brands? An examination of literature on the history of masculinity in advertising and its discourses is important for understanding the context of this phenomenon.

Masculinity in Advertising

Until recently, advertising scholars have focused on gender stereotypes and femininities, with little attention to masculinities. This lack of research might have resulted from the fact that the majority of gender scholars are feminist scholars whose interests align with the effects of advertising on media and on women (Zayer et al., 2012). Studies focusing on gender, and more

recently, masculinity in consumer research, show that throughout the course of history, advertising and media have portrayed men as immune, logical, and rational and women as vulnerable, emotional, and irrational (Ostberg, 2019; Zayer, & Coleman, 2015). On these communication channels, men often embraced traditional roles, which researchers often sorted into three large categories, including the breadwinner, rebel, or man of action. The breadwinner model originated from Western society's gendered roles and responsibilities, which associate men with paid productive labor outside of the household and women with unpaid productive labor inside the household (Ostberg, 2019). The rebel model embodies the ideal of men not conforming to social structures and trying to come back to more archaic forms of masculinity. This archaic form of masculinity is embodied in the "real man" ideal which is a breakout from the conforming image of the corporate and consumption man. For example, Mountain Dew became an iconic brand because it successfully connected with its male consumers by utilizing the wild-man myth and creating male mascots who completely differed from the corporate Yuppies of the 1980s (Holt, 2004). The man-of-action model relates the two models together and leverages their attributions of masculinities. Holt (2004) conceptualizes the man-of-action as individual who has "the vision, the guts, and a can-do spirit to transform his wobbly institutions" (p. 98). Men adopt this man-of-action role and negotiate different masculinity roles by reconfiguring everyday consumption activities to encompass traditional masculine traits, such as competition and independence (Ostberg, 2019).

As societies evolve, gender norms and gender roles also change according to social needs. The breadwinner role of traditional masculinity has become less dominant as more women have joined the workforce, and more men have taken up traditionally feminine responsibilities, such as parenting, cooking, and caregiving. These generational and social

changes demand modified definitions of masculinity (Ostberg, 2019). Klasson and Ulver (2015) find that as men participate in more domestic work, the traditional notion of masculinity needs reevaluation, and contemporary masculinity has broadened to include feminine characteristics, such as appearance and nurture. Hence, they argue, framing masculinity as homogenous and hegemonic is not sufficient in describing today's social situation anymore, and researchers should see that multiple masculinities exist. This multiple-masculinity approach also responds to the concept of gender fluidity. Gender fluidity refers to gender identity as non-binary and varying gender expression over time (It Gets Better Project, 2020). Taking this concept into consumer research, gender fluidity can take the form of individuals taking actions or taking part in consumption activities traditionally performed by the opposite gender. Gender fluidity, along with multiple masculinities, give men the freedom to become multifaceted in their gender performances and actions. For example, in their study, Zayer, Sredl, Parmentier, & Coleman (2012) conducted a content analysis of gender themes in two popular show, *Entourage* and *Sex and the City*, and they find that the characters move between the masculine and feminine sphere by adopting certain consumption activities, such as men going shopping and considering plastic surgery or women engaging in self-satisfaction and pleasure.

Classic campaigns, such as the Marlboro Man and the Hathaway Man, once established among advertising and consumers what it meant to be a man: reserved, hard-working, macho, and confident (Adams, 2018). Although older research showed that men were independent advertising influences as they were deemed logical and rational (Connell, 2005), men are not immune to the effects of advertising. With the increasing sexualization of the male body, starting in the 1990s, men have become conscious about complying with standards of idealized bodies or images and have increasingly experienced negative self-perceptions (Ostberg, 2019; Zayer &

Coleman, 2015). They constantly look for justification from other men and through consumption activities to reclaim or establish their own masculinities. For example, Hein and O'Donohoe (2014) find that young men use banter in informal, daily conversations with each other to construct boundaries between safe and danger zones of masculine consumption. Klasson and Ulver (2015) find that men involved in domestic work try to enhance their status by engaging in consumption practices to make up for their masculinity.

Self-congruency theory points out that individuals prefer products that reflect their own images or identities rather than just satisfying functional purposes (Neal, Robbie, & Martin, 2016). This theory implies that men look for brands that accommodate their individual meanings of masculinity. However, current advertising practice does not seem to adapt to these new gender roles quickly enough because advertising representations of men still conform to very traditional perspectives of masculinity (Ostberg, 2019; Eisend, 2019). This slow response creates gender and cultural discourses, which can become full-blown crises for brands and companies if they ignore these gender dynamics. For example, Huggies had to pull the ad "Dad Test" from its Facebook page because it depicted fathers as incompetent and helpless caregivers without their wives. The campaign ignited a high-profile online petition from 1,300 dads who felt offended because the depiction did not reflect their reality as parents (Gianatasio, 2012). Ad professionals also recognize and acknowledge the ethical problems of using gender stereotypes in advertising, but they believe that women are more sensitive and hence, it is easier to "pick on guys than the girls" (Zayer & Coleman, 2015, p. 6). However, ad professionals are willing to adjust their gendered approaches if the adjustments are strategic considerations that adhere to external forces controlled by clients, media, and media agents in the marketplace (Zayer, & Coleman, 2015).

This strategic aspect may help explain why brands like Gillette and Bonobos launched campaigns that confront traditional masculinity in response to the #MeToo movement.

Institutional Theory

Previous sections on gender identity and masculinity in advertising suggest ever-negotiating dynamics between social norms, advertisers, and consumers. These dynamics together form a structure of power and processes that institutional theory can explain. Institutional theory, which has its roots in economic and organizational research, defines institutions as consisting of “cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior. Institutions are transported by various carriers—cultures, structures, and routines—and they operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction” (Scott, 1995, p, 33). Marketing scholars have used these three pillars of institutional theory—cognitive, normative, and regulative—to examine and explain how social actors make choices and navigate through social structures, which in part explains consumption practices and consumer perceptions of brand legitimacy (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012; Dolbec & Fischer, 2015; Zayer & Coleman, 2015). This study builds on that research and, using qualitative analysis of Twitter data and consumer interviews, seeks to understand consumers’ perception of #MeToo’s influence on advertising content. Although all three pillars can support in-depth analysis of social structures, with each focusing on specific levels of the system ranging from world systems to organizational sub-systems and (Zayer & Coleman, 2015), this study focuses on the institutional logics that social actors employ to assign meanings for the phenomenon, interpret brand messaging, and assess brand legitimacy. Institutional logics help explain meaning-making processes of social behaviors and offer a suitable framework for the phenomenon observed in this study.

Three pillars of institutional theory

The first pillar of institutional theory is the regulative process of institutions which involves rule-setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities of actors and agencies within the social system. This regulative process may operate through informal activities, such as shaming or shunning, or formalized systems, such as laws and regulations. As institutional theory has its foundation in economics, scholars in the regulative camp tend to assume that social actors employ a cost-benefit or reward-punishment rationality which promotes their self-interest to explain why they conform to institutions' regulative force (Scott, 1998). On the subject of #MeToo, the regulative force is workplace regulations, law enforcement, and affirmative actions regarding sexual harassment and discrimination, such as Title IX compliance and court trials for sexual harassment allegations. As regulative forces can include informal sets of rules, expected or understood common sense or etiquette about workplace behaviors regarding gender respect and diversity also have institutional regulative impact. The second pillar, the normative pillar, emphasizes normative systems that include both values and norms that define goals/objectives and determine appropriate means to pursue those goals. In this school of thought, social actors interact according to conceptions of their roles and expectations which do not necessarily contain formalized regulations such as laws and rules. Here, actors' choices are structured through socially mediated values; hence, actors conform to the norms not because of their self-interests but because of social obligations to follow (Scott, 1998). Advertisers, observing all the conversations about #MeToo, might feel an obligation to address the issue, prompting them to put out campaigns about the topic. The third pillar is the cognitive pillar, which focuses on social actors' subjective interpretations of external stimuli that influence their responses. Human actors construct and continuously negotiate social reality through internal sensemaking and meaning-

assigning processes in relation to external stimuli. These actors also interact with the external world within the context of wider, preexisting cultural systems which provide orientation and guidance. Therefore, they make choices based on shared conventions, take certain things for granted, and make connection if an adherence to a common understanding framework exists (Scott, 2008 as cited in Zayer & Coleman, 2015). This cognitive process can explain why consumers reacted differently to the same advertising campaign, which leads to the question of which framework or logic they use to interpret the message.

Institutional logics

According to Thornton and Lounsbury (2012), institutional logics are the “socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their activities, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences” (as cited in Mutch, 2018, para. 1). Institutional logics exist on both organizational and individual levels and set the rules that monitor the marketplace and shape the cognition and behavior of social actors within that marketplace. Institutional logics also have been employed to understand social actors’ process of utilizing material and cultural resources to construct meanings to their social reality under all three pillars of institutional theories. Friedland and Alford (1991) focus on how social actors interpret institutional constraints and contradictions as symbolic and cultural resources, or logics, to transform their identities, organizations, and society (as cited in Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Jackall (2010) viewed institutional logics as embodied in practices, sustained and reproduced by cultural assumptions and political struggles, which emphasizes the normative dimension of institutions. Thornton and Ocasio (1999) integrate the structural, normative, and symbolic as three complimentary and necessary dimensions of institutions, linking individual agency and

cognition and socially constructed structures in examining logics. As institutional logics determine social actors' cognitive process, logics both provide resources for agency and change and constrain them from thinking and acting outside of the logics' boundaries because of their taken-for-granted nature (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015). Because of such connections between logics, resources, and social actors, institutional logics have been utilized in consumer and marketing research to examine both organization's and consumers' utilization of logics to transform their identities and mobilize social changes (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2012; Dolbec & Fischer, 2015). Scaraboto and Fischer (2012) examine how fashion consumers utilized institutional work by paid actors (influencers and photographers) to generate their own institutional work in the marketplace. Dolbec and Fishcher (2015) identify institutional logics that consumers employ to support the Fat Acceptance Movement in the fashion industry, which contributes to a better understanding of consumers as agentic and strategic actors who mobilize market changes. Taking a similar direction, this study examines consumers' utilizations of advertising messages as cultural resources to form institutional logics that they use to interpret social dynamics. More specifically, this study seeks to explain the responses to the Gillette and Bonobos campaigns by identifying logics that consumers adopted to make sense of the #MeToo movement's impacts on culture and of the brands.

Institutional legitimacy

Each of the pillars in institutional theory creates a basis for legitimacy for organizations and social actors in performing their roles. From an institutional perspective, legitimacy is not a commodity to be possessed but a condition reflecting cultural alignment, normative support, and consonance with relevant rules or laws. During their early stages, institutions provide patterns of behaviors which form shared meanings among the participants. As these meanings connect to

wider cognitive frames, norms, and rules, they gain legitimacy (Scott, 1998). According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), “Legitimation ‘explains’ the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivated meaning. Legitimation justifies the institutional order by giving it a normative dignity to its practical imperatives” (as cited in Scott, 1998, p. 46). Scott (1998) considers organizational legitimacy as the degree of cultural support for an organization. Expanding this notion to advertising, consumers consider whether a brand has the legitimacy to put out certain messages or products by referring to the narrative it has built into the shared pool of pop culture.

Each of the pillars emphasizes different means for institutions to gain legitimacy. From the regulative perspective, organizations establish legitimacy through conformity to relevant legal requirements and rules. The normative pillar assesses legitimacy through moral obligations rather than the mere legal requirements. The cognitive perspective focuses on the legitimacy that comes from adopting a common frame of reference or definition of the situation. For example, adopting a mainstream or orthodox identity to relate to a specific phenomenon or situation is to seek the legitimacy that comes from cognitive consistency (Scott, 1998). Applying to advertising, Gillette and Bonobos adopting #MeToo-related messages might have been a way to seek legitimacy among the movement’s supporters as brands that cared and wanted to improve the situation.

Brands’ Background and Context for Institutional Logics

Gillette

Gillette is a personal care brand that specializes in men’s products, such as razors and shaving products. The brand has a long history, dating back to its first prototype in 1900. Since

then, Gillette has positioned itself as the high-quality and innovative shaving brand (Gillette, 2019a). The brand's claim in quality started becoming its defining product attribute after the 1989 Super Bowl ad that popularized the tagline "The Best a Man Can Get." After 30 years, the company has successfully reinforced this high-quality value and has been able to charge a premium price, which helped Gillette gain large market share within the shaving market. In 2005, the company was acquired by Procter and Gamble for \$57 billion (Taylor, 2019).

The 1989 Super Bowl ad featured the typical alpha male who embodied traits of traditional masculinity. Gillette's North America director, Pankaj Bhalla, remarked: "He was obviously working for Wall Street [...]. And he always got the girl in the end, who caressed his cheek and kissed him for reasons we can't fully explain" (Whiteside, 2018a, para.3). The positioning strategy seemed to be effective among the older generations who would watch the 1989 ad live during the Super Bowl game as Gillette maintained its 70-percent share of the razor market for a long time. However, this number dropped to 50% in the past decades, and Gillette was forced to reduce its razors' price by 15% due to increasing competition from online subscriptions, such as Dollar Shave Club and Harry's (Taylor, 2019). These services aim at younger consumers who value convenience and cost-saving attributes offered by online subscriptions (Mintel, 2018). Recently, Gillette has initiated rebranding efforts to attract younger consumers and with new "best" definitions to include different nuances of the changing masculinity. For example, Gillette released the ad "Your best never come easy" which featured a one-handed NFL player to be more inclusive with male representation and the idea of strength. The brand's 2017 "Go Ask Dad" campaign, which attempted to mend the generational and emotional broken connection between young men and their dads, showed that emotion and humanity could be a part of the evolved conceptions of masculinity (Whiteside, 2018a).

In January 2019, Gillette released “The Best Men Can Be” campaign that made references to bullying, sexual harassment, and toxic masculinity. Many viewers saw the ad as an unfair depiction of masculinity and reacted negatively to the campaign (Taylor, 2019). A short time after its launch, the ad received 1,700 likes while having more than 10,000 thumbs down vote on YouTube (Hsu, 2019). AdWeek reported that among social conversations about the ad, while men were offended and angered by the ad, 51% of women engaged in Gillette-related conversation expressed joy and approval of the ad (Zupan, 2019). Nevertheless, Gillette lost 8 billion dollars in brand value after launching “The Best Men Can Be.” (Barrett, 2019).

Bonobos

Bonobos is an online apparel retailer launched in 2007 that specializes in men’s clothing. More specifically, the brand’s goal is to help men find better-fitting pants. The brand introduced the concept of direct-to-consumer model to the fashion industry. After some time of staying completely online, Bonobos saw the potential and opened several “guide shops” in big cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, and Austin, to further grow its services and business (Whiteside, 2014). In 2017, Walmart acquired the brand for \$310 million dollars (Whiteside, 2018). Bonobos’ higher mid-range price point, urban and hip clothing, and clean and modern online store gives the impression that the brand positions itself as innovative, young, and fun.

In July 2018, Bonobos launched the “Evolve the Definition” ad on its first national spot to address the outmoded notion of masculinity. The 90-second video ad featured men of different gender associations speaking about their own definitions of masculinity (Price, 2018). Bonobos claimed that the campaign was in response to the #MeToo movement and aimed to tackle sexual harassment and sexual assault. The brand also stated that the initiative fit into its guiding mission, which is “We Make Fit Happen for Everybody.” Bonobos’s leadership also explained

that because gender is changing, the company wanted to become more inclusive and diverse as a fashion brand (Whiteside, 2018b, para. 15). However, the reactions to the video were not all positive. The ad received twice as many dislikes as likes on YouTube, but the brand's CEO, Micky Onvural, explained that the company wanted to start that conversation (Whiteside, 2018). Onvural stated that as Bonobos' leader, she saw how both men and women are vital in redefining masculinity and creating changes that the #MeToo movement demands. Hence, Onvural, on the behalf of Bonobos, defended and justified the campaign as the brand's taking responsibility to have an impact on the issue of sexual harassment (Price, 2018).

Institutional Logics from Institutional Agents

As institutional theory examines the social structures and interactions between organizations and actors across the three pillars, the regulative and normative perspectives are useful in examining the logics of regulatory agents and of Gillette and Bonobos to put out campaigns in response to #MeToo. The cognitive perspective will be used in examination of consumers' logics as they make sense of #MeToo's influence on advertising content in the findings.

Regulative Process: Policy, Law Enforcement, and Workplace Regulation. The #MeToo movement was credited for ushering in not only changes in society's awareness about sexual harassment but also in legislation and workplace regulations. One could consider such changes the regulative force from both high- and low-level organizations, such as the government and businesses. In 2016 when the movement was prevalent, at least 32 lawmakers left office or lost influential positions due to sexual harassment allegations. Under such internal pressures and external conversations about #MeToo, legislators proposed laws and workplace regulations in the hope to address the situation and provide protection and justice for sexual

harassment survivors and workers. For example, Arizona, Maryland, and New York, among a few other states, placed limits on nondisclosure agreements that stopped victims of sexual abuse from coming forward in criminal proceedings. Legislators also cited #MeToo's influence in passing legislation to improve the testing of rape kits and extend the statute of limitation for victims who want to file civil lawsuits for their cases (Beitsch, 2018). Such changes represented the macro-level of the regulative force implemented by the government. On the lower level of regulative process, 25 to 32% of businesses and companies incorporated new diversity and inclusion training and/or anti-harassment policies in the last two years (Beitsch, 2018; Pesce, 2018). Such efforts were to provide protection, promote equality, and offer affirmative actions for workers and sexual harassment victims, which infers that these institutions were operating on a justice logic. This logic aims to mitigate an imbalanced situation in which predators and abusers usually had power over the victims who were oppressed or lacked the resources to defend or fight back.

Normative Process: Brands and Advertising Agencies. In response to conversations and the regulative force coming from the #MeToo movement, brands (like Gillette and Bonobos) and advertising agencies sensed the need to address this issue and choose their own narratives. These organizations listened to conversations and discourses about #MeToo from stories shared on social media while navigating with new policies and regulations. Mass demonstrations and other extended movements, such as the Women's March and #TimesUp, demanded that the public pay attention to the reality of gender discrimination and media representation and called for "transformative social change" from the legislature and the media (Women's March, 2020). Together with the regulative force, such conversations and activism established the #MeToo movement as relevant and important topics that should be addressed by organizations who have

power in the society. This pressure can be interpreted as the normative force that influence social actors to respond to the #MeToo movement to fulfill their moral obligations of promoting justice and equal rights.

When conforming to the normative force, brands operated on at least two logics, *economic* and *brand's congruence*. Using the economic logic to address prevalent social issues, brands could reach and attract potential consumers who cared about the issues but were not their consumers. Industry analyses and reports suggested that Gillette was trying to target women with “The Best A Man Can Get” campaign (Zupan, 2019), which justified this logic. Bonobos was essentially an online warehouse service before launching the “Evolve the Definition” campaign in 2018 as its first national spot (Whiteside, 2018), which also manifested the brand’s purpose to reach a broader target. Brands also did not adopt the same narrative about #MeToo as they identified aspects that encompassed their brands’ values, products and the movement’s aims. As a brand that had established a strong masculine identity, Gillette identified toxic masculinity as its narrative and one of the roots of sexual misconduct. For Bonobos, the brand’s target was urban and sophisticated men who might be open to fluid and liberal masculine constructs. Hence, Bonobos identified gender equality as its focus and injected the narrative of inclusiveness from #MeToo. This process of choosing different aspects from a broader social issue suggests that brands used the congruence logic to consider which elements of the issue that would resonate most with their existing values and image.

From existing literature on the discourses of the #MeToo movement, gender issues, the two brands’ narratives, and institutional theory, the study poses the central research question: What have been influences of #MeToo on brand meaning? To answer this overarching question, this study asks the following questions:

RQ1: What are consumers' interpretations of the Gillette's and Bonobos's narratives of #MeToo on Twitter?

RQ2: What are the logics and how are they utilized by consumers to make sense of #MeToo-related brand messages?

RQ3: Using such logics, do consumers give legitimacy to the #MeToo movement as having a significant impact on advertising content?

Methodology

This study explores consumer discourses surrounding two campaigns, Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be" and Bonobos' "Evolve the Definition," which trade press, such as *AdWeek* and *PR Week*, recognized for their engagement with gender messaging in response to the #MeToo phenomenon. Specifically, the study examines online consumer engagement on Twitter, with brand-generated content, in relation to the two campaigns, as well as in-depth interviews with consumers about the #MeToo movement and Gillette and Bonobos.

Using qualitative analysis of Twitter users' responses and in-depth interviews with consumers, this study examines the relationship between #MeToo and consumers' responses to #MeToo-related brand messages to provide a framework for understanding how brands can effectively tackle social changes. The researcher analyzed two sets of consumer data: Twitter users' responses to the Gillette's and Bonobos's campaigns and interviews with participants who fit within both brands' target consumers (and whose characteristics subsequently will be explained).

The reason for choosing Twitter as the platform to collect online consumer response was because Twitter is a valuable social media platform for gathering consumer opinions on a wide

range of topics (Park & Paroubek, 2010). Qualitative methods can also utilize Twitter's enormous amount of consumer data and reveal social norms, concerns, and group practices through conversations and user interactions on Twitter (Marwick, 2013). The author then conducted a textual analysis of the tweet to identify discourses surrounding the two campaigns and #MeToo. Textual analysis was appropriate for this data set because Twitter is a large collection of text, and qualitative textual analysis can unearth subtleties of interaction of this platform that quantitative methods may miss (Marwick, 2013). A software program that ran on a Python Web Scraper foundation tracked down tweets containing specific hashtags posted between the launching date of each campaigns to November 30, 2019. From the brands' websites, press stories, and Facebook fan pages, two combinations of hashtags were identified and utilized to collect tweets that responded to the campaigns and addressed the #MeToo topic, which included "#TheBestAManCanGet #MeToo" and "#EvolveTheDefinition #MeToo."

Although the official name of the Gillette campaign was "The Best Men Can Be," a search with this name on the software only yielded less than 100 results, many of which were not in English. A social media audit of Gillette's Facebook and Twitter account showed that the majority of responders to the campaign used the hashtag "#TheBestAManCanBe" rather than "#TheBestMenCanBe." This phenomenon suggested that consumers might be more familiar with Gillette's previous tagline, "The Best A Man Can Get" and utilized "The Best A Man Can Be" as a derivation of the old tagline. Hence, the hashtag "#TheBestAManCanBe" was utilized for the search instead. Previous research suggests that people use hashtags on Twitter to track down like-minded users and to join a broader community of users who also participate in the conversation (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2019). Past studies also suggest that hashtags play an essential role in the social media's linguistic marketplace (Page, 2012). Therefore, tracking people's

responses to the campaigns by using the campaigns’ hashtags on Twitter and analyzing the tweets will provide insights about consumers’ interactions with the brands and other consumers in relation to social and political movements. In total, the 522 tweets were collected with the hashtag combination “#TheBestAManCanGet #MeToo,” and 802 tweets were collected with the “#EvolveTheDefinition #MeToo” combination.

The author then adopted the open, axial, and selective coding method to identify the common themes and patterns of consumers’ reaction to Gillette’s and Bonobos’ campaigns. The researcher did a preliminary examination of the tweets to identify keywords and themes (open coding), which were then used to analyze the entire data set (see Appendix 2 for an example of the open coding process). The researcher then grouped the themes and labels according to their relationships (axial coding) and proceeded to identify the substantive themes across the data (selective coding). See Table 1 for an example of the open/axial/selective coding process.

Table 1			
<i>Open/Axial/Selective Coding Process</i>			
Selective Coding	Axial Coding	Open Coding	
It’s easier to be open when it’s not about you	Positive		
	Consumer demand brands to acknowledge, state their position, and tackle social issues	Expect the brands/messages to become the agent of change	The definition of masculinity needs to change; Advocate the change/brand leadership; Use the message as guidance for educational purposes.
		Express recognition of brand efforts	Approve of the message/execution
		Make connection between the campaigns and social dynamics	Redirect criticisms to the critics; Expand to political debates
	Negative		

	Consumer feel abandoned and left behind	“Brands are betraying consumers to be hip”	The traditional concept of masculinity is not wrong
		Attribute problems to opposing beliefs/political parties	Political agenda Redefine the problem as “left-wing” manipulation
		Insincere motives lead to unauthentic campaigns	The campaigns are for boosting sales The execution contradicts the message
	Neutral		
	Purpose/cause marketing is a hit or miss	The media want to wait for public response	Report about the campaign; Asking/polling for followers’ opinions
		Brands are navigating through “dangerous water”	Analyze the campaign from a business/advertising viewpoint

Based on verbal cues and context, the researcher assigned valence labels that categorize the tweets according to their attitudes toward the campaigns, which include positive, neutral, and negative. For example, tweets with contexts and keywords, such as “love” and “support,” that express supportive attitudes toward the campaigns were coded as positive; tweets containing keywords such as “stupid” and “dumb,” that express critical attitudes, were coded as negative, and tweets that did not contain expressive cue or only focused on sharing news were coded as neutral. See Table 2 for the categories. The researcher then identified common themes emerged that within these categories.

	<u>Positive (%)</u>	<u>Negative (%)</u>	<u>Neutral (%)</u>
Gillette	71.2	17.0	10.8
Bonobos	26.8	32.0	41.0

For the Gillette's campaign, out of the 510 tweets collected, 87 were negative (17.0%), 363 were positive (71.2%), and 55 were neutral/ambivalent (10.8). However, many of the negative tweets accused Gillette of deleting negative comments, which might explain the disproportional numbers between the Twitter data and reactions on YouTube. For the Bonobos campaign, out of the 802 tweets collected, 2 tweets had to be eliminated because they were unrelated to the topic. Out of 800 tweets, 215 were positive (26.8%), 256 were negative (32.0%), and 328 were neutral/ambivalent (41.0%). The researcher also categorized the tweets based on their type of accounts: whether they were from personal or public/media accounts. With this categorization system, the researcher could identify common themes across the categories in the responses to both campaigns and reveal the pattern of consumer reactions on Twitter.

The second data collection part of the study included conducting interviews with men and women between the age of 18-35 who were familiar with or brand users of Gillette and Bonobos to further understand how they perceived the #MeToo movement's influence on advertising content. The reason for this choice of age range is because young people are more comfortable discussing gender fluidity (Hein, & O'Donohoe, 2014) while older consumers are more likely to prefer traditional masculinity portrayal (Hirschman, 2014). Moreover, both men and women are consumers of Gillette's shaving products, and women, 75% of whom are under 35, participate in 62% of shaving conversations online. Hence, brand watchers and data analysts have made the connection that Gillette was trying to engage women through "The Best Men Can Be" campaign

(Zupan, 2019). Gillette has also tried to target younger men since its attempt to make connection with young male consumers with its 2017 “Go Ask Dad campaign.” (Whiteside, 2018a). A visit to one of Bonobos’s stores in Fort Worth, Texas and an informal interview with the store manager informed the researcher that Bonobos’s primary customers were urban men between their 20s to 40s who enjoyed a casual and sophisticated look.

Twelve interviews were conducted between January 15 and March 02, 2020 with men and women between the age of 18 – 35 who claimed to be familiar with or current users of Gillette and Bonobos. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling and convenience sampling methods by utilizing the author’s connections, advertisements on university’s announcement platforms, and social media. Questions about participants’ familiarity with either of the brands and their age were utilized as screening questions to exclude participants who did not fit the parameter above. Within the sample, four participants were 21 – 25 years old (33.3%); four participants were 26 – 30 years old (33.3%); four participants were 31 – 35 years old (33.3%); four participants were female (33.3%), and eight participants were male (66.7%). See Table 3 for more detail on interview participants.

	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Brand Used/Familiar with</u>	<u>Knowledge about #MeToo</u>
Positive				
Participant 1	25	Female	Both	Yes
Participant 3	22	Male	Gillette	No
Participant 7	27	Female	Gillette	Yes
Participant 9	31	Female	Both	No
Participant 12	21	Male	Both	Yes
Neutral				
Participant 2	27	Male	Gillette	Yes
Participant 5	31	Female	Gillette	Yes
Participant 8	32	Male	Both	Yes
Participant 10	26	Male	Both	Yes
Negative				
Participant 4	23	Male	Gillette	No
Participant 6	35	Male	Gillette	Yes
Participant 11	27	Male	Both	No

During the interview, participants were asked “grand tour” questions (McCracken 1988), as well as focused questions on their perceptions of the brands being examined. In addition, the participant watched 2 video ads, Gillette’s 2019 “The Best A Man Can Be” and Bonobos’s 2018 “Evolve the Definition,” and then answered questions relating to his/her perception of the ads and the #MeToo movement.

In the interviews, the participants did not express their opinions about the campaigns as strongly as users on Twitter. However, based on both their answers’ contexts, verbal cues, and tones, the researcher was able to categorize the answers into emotional groups similar to the grouping of the tweets. The participants were grouped based on their opinions toward brands’ addressing the #MeToo movement in their advertising campaigns, and the groups included the positive response group (41.7% - 5 participants), the negative response group (25% - 3 participants), and the neutral group (33.3% - 4 participants). See Table 3.

The author sought emerging themes in the text while also referring back to the literature, a process called dialectical tacking (Strauss & Corbin 1998). As phenomena are not static but constantly changing in response to prevailing conditions, a qualitative study needs to reflect and build this change into its methods. Moreover, social actors are seen as having options and means of controlling their destinies, which enables them to make choices according to the perceived actions. Hence, a grounded theory approach seeks to uncover relevant conditions and how the actors actively respond to those conditions, and the consequences of their actions. The investigator usually starts the data analysis process simultaneously with data collection and observes any themes or patterns emerging from the data set without preexisting biases of theory-observation congruence or compatibility (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Among the themes grounded in gender, social movements, and brand meanings that were identified from initial data analysis, patterns of logics started to emerge from the Twitter data. Hence, the author of this study adopted the institutional theory framework to further interpret both the Twitter data and the interviews to explain the dynamics of the discourses. Although the research relied on the categories and logics identified in the Twitter data as a foundation for data interpretation of the interviews, the researcher was open to additional logics and themes to identify consumer logic adoption and how they gave legitimacy to the messages.

Findings

Twitter Users' Interpretations of #MeToo-Related Brand Messages

Overarching Theme: It's Easier to be Open When It's Not About You.

In response to the first research question, the overarching or meta-theme across the tweets was that consumers tended to express a more neutral or positive attitude toward the messages if

they perceived the advertisers did not directly aim the #MeToo topic at them. On the other hand, users who believed the campaigns were aiming at them expressed negative emotions responded to the campaigns in a defensive manner. The sub-themes in each category will better explain this relationship through specific examples.

Brands as Social Actors with Responsibilities

Twitter users whose perceptions of the campaigns were positive used Twitter as a platform to demand brands to acknowledge important issues, state their positions on these issues, and vocally tackle those issues. This theme aligns with industry reports indicating that consumers, particularly GenZ consumers, expect brands to be involved in social causes and have purposes (Neff, 2019; Pankowski, 2020). Users expressed this demand in three main ways: specifically, they (1) expected the brand or message to become the agent of change, (2) applauded Gillette and Bonobos for their efforts to address issues of gender and sexual harassment, and (3) used the campaigns as resources to interpret social dynamics.

Brands as Agent of Change. Twitter users who felt positively about the campaigns demonstrated an expectation that brands act as agents of change regarding social issues. For example, these users agreed with Bonobos' message about the need to "evolve the definition" of masculinity and stop toxic masculinity portrayed in the Gillette's campaign. These tweets criticized the current perception of masculinity as narrowed and outdated, and they used expressions such as "rigid" and "incomplete," to describe social perceptions and expectations toward men, which ultimately built up the perception of toxic masculinity as aggressive, macho, and red-blooded. Users acknowledged that as society changes, masculinity needs to adapt to become multidimensional, inclusive, and humane, which allows men to "be themselves" and "embrace emotions as humans." For example:

“Disabuse yourself of the notion that masculinity must have some rigid definition, that language doesn’t evolve. Men are many things & strength can come from being vulnerable, honest & willing to grow, willing to be better men. #Evolvethedefinition @ bonobos” (Tweet #96 – Bonobos)

These positive tweets also applauded the leadership of Gillette and Bonobos for putting out messages to address the gender issue. They praised the campaigns as thought-provoking and empowering while adding voice to help the society move forward. Urgency or timeliness was also frequently mentioned in these tweets as they acknowledged that the two campaigns were timely and needed during this time of social changes, and they called for other brands to join the conversation. In addition, users mentioned that they would use the campaigns for educational purposes. These users thanked the Gillette’s campaign for providing moms guidance for raising “kind, courageous men of tomorrow.”

“As a boy mom, this is my goal: to raise kind, courageous men. Love @ Gillette and their new ad encouraging #thebestamancanbe” (Tweet #429 – Gillette).

Applause for Brand’s Effort. Twitter users also recognized Gillette’s and Bonobos’s effort to address the gender and sexual harassment issues in various manners. Many of the positive tweets showed users’ approval of the message and/or the campaigns’ execution. For the tweets that acknowledged the messages, they focused on supporting the brands’ effort for adding voice to the needed conversation of sexual harassment and gender performance. They made connection between the messages and the larger political and social context. For example, tweets that responded to the Gillette campaign not only addressed the issue of sexual assaults but also branched out to women’s empowerment, such as the Women’s March and gender equality. Tweets in response to the Bonobos acknowledged that “it is time” to present masculinity as a more inclusive spectrum rather than the “mold” of gender performance that the society

imposed on men. Many of the tweets praised the executions of the campaigns by analyzing the campaigns from a business/marketing perspective. More specifically, they focused on how these brands listen to social dynamics and created “customer-centered” campaigns that provided a “platform” to discuss serious issues.

“Powerful & timely ad by @ Gillette @ ProcterGamble highlighting why men should hold other men accountable and why we should all believe in men – a great message for 2019 #TheBestAManCanBe” (Tweet #435 – Gillette)

Brand Message as Cultural Resources. Users who felt positively about the campaigns also utilized the messages as references and resources to make connection and explain social issues. This theme was evident through users’ redirecting critiques of the campaigns to the critics to justify the message. These users clarified that the Gillette’s and Bonobos’s campaigns were not attacks on men or masculinity but opportunities for dialogues and conversations as society moves forward. More specifically, they pointed out that negative responses to these campaigns were defensive mechanisms for people who were insecure about their own masculinity and wanted to protect toxic masculinity to justify their misogynistic actions/thinking. According to Friedland and Alford (1991), while institutions constrain actions of social actors, they also provide sources of agency and change. These contradictions are inherent in institutional logics and provide social actors with cultural resources to transform their identities, organization, and society (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). In this case, the contradiction is between the perceived notion of traditional masculinity (normative force) and the reality of gender performance and constructs in a modern society. Brands like Gillette and Bonobos, as social actors, utilize this contradiction as a resource for their messages, and Twitter users, in return, utilized their campaigns to address social issues.

“Men don’t have to be: aggressive to be men, - violent to be men, - unemotional to be men, - abusive to be men. If you feel personally attacked by @Gillette’s ad, then it’s time to have a look at why” (Tweet #93 – Gillette).

Brands as Trend Followers

Users who responded negatively to the campaigns felt abandoned and left behind in today’s society when brands were moving on without them, and they expressed these through several sub-themes. Specifically, they felt that brands (1) betrayed consumers to be hip and trendy, (2) had insincere motives that resulted in inauthentic campaigns, (3) and abused their campaigns to push political agendas.

Get Woke, Go Broke. Users expressed that the Gillette and Bonobos campaigns, like many other failed cause marketing attempts, were a result of brands’ betrayal of consumers in order to be hip and trendy. Many of the tweets pointed out that the current definition of masculinity or gender performance was not the problem but the people who did not fit in were. They included traditional masculine models, such as service men and breadwinners, as real heroes to contrast with the masculine traits in the Bonobos’s ad. They also made the contrast more vivid by mocking the “beta men” in the ad with visual associations, such as “man buns,” “skinny jeans,” “gay pants,” “soy boy,” and “nu-male.” These users rejected the notion that gender was culturally constructed and a spectrum, and instead, defined gender as a fixed “biological” trait. They argued that as these “beta men” images became more common and prevalent, brands found the need to keep up with these targets; hence, they betrayed history and “the right definition” in order to be hip and trendy. As a response to such betrayal, many of these tweets threatened to boycott the Gillette and Bonobos by switching brand or swearing never to purchase their products again. The hashtag “#GetWokeGoBroke” employed by these users nicely summarizes this theme.

“I wish the men who stormed Normandy on D-Day had been more sensitive and softer. That would’ve worked well. #EvolveTheDefinition” (Tweet #342 – Bonobos).

Insincere Motives, Unauthentic Campaigns. Users also expressed that they perceived insincere motives from Gillette and Bonobos that resulted in inauthentic social marketing campaigns. While defenders of the campaigns redirected negative responses to their origins, critical users also redefined the messages by connecting them to the brands’ histories and commercial purposes. They brought up the campaigns’ commercial purposes and found past messages from the brands that did not align with the campaigns under examination, which implied the brands’ insincere motives to take advantage of a social issue for profits. Many tweets showed pictures of how Gillette sexualized female models in its past advertisements and “pink washed” its products to sell the same products at higher prices for female customers.

“Gillette: *Makes ad about toxic masculinity. Gillette: *Still charges women more for pink version. #thebestamancanbe” (Tweet #2 – Gillette).

For Bonobos, the tweets mocked the brand’s choice of name as a primitive chimpanzee that is unevolved and uncivilized, which was ironic to the campaign’s tagline. They also accused Bonobos of having double standards because while the campaign urged for a more inclusive definition of masculinity, the brand’s products only served a small niche of urban, trendy, small- to mid-sized customers. In addition, these users accused the campaigns of being manipulative with culture to ultimately increase sales. They pointed out that by “brainwashing” new generations with such messages, Gillette and Bonobos were trying to weaken traditional values and create “fake problems” just to “make them fit.” Lastly, these users criticized the execution of the campaigns to highlight the inauthenticity of their efforts. The tweets pointed out that the portrayal of masculinity in the ads stereotyped and put traditional masculine actions under a bad light, which ultimately oversimplified the problem with sexual harassment.

“No one said masculine only applied to men except you @ Bonobos Stop coming up with fake problems and pretending to solve them so you can sell more menswear. #EvolveTheDefinition is a joke” (Tweet #329 – Bonobos).

Brand as Political Agenda Pusher. Users also associated the Gillette’s and Bonobos campaigns to political agendas of opposite beliefs. While some tweets explicitly attributed the messages to feminist influence, other tweets implied this connection by accusing the advertisements of campaigning against men. These tweets expressed a feeling of being left out, attacked and marginalized when they criticized the brands about bullying and betraying men. For example, they used phrases such as “get rid of real men,” “war on masculinity,” cyber bullying, and “[making] men being shamed for being men.” These tweets also called out the messages as “hidden agenda” and “liberal talks” and expressed frustration toward social marketing by referring to it as “unwanted activism.”

“#TheBestAManCanBe... when you are allowed by Liberals to be one. What a dumb business decision this was, ever hear of “New Coke”? You just killed about 50% of your razor sales. Not an exaggeration, the world is not “Liberal Twitter.” If it were that Hillary dolt would be pres” (Tweet #68 – Gillette).

“#EvolveTheDefinition How about leftists take a break from trying to Devolve men into insipid twits who’ve been brainwashed into being ashamed of their masculine qualities” (Tweet #423 – Bonobos).

Purpose Marketing is a Hit or Miss

Another major theme emerged from the Twitter data set was that some users showed ambivalence about the effectiveness of purpose or cause marketing campaigns, which was most evident among users who felt neutral about the campaigns. An important pattern to note is that the majority of the neutral/ambivalent tweets were not from personal accounts but public accounts that represented a media organization, such as online blogs, news networks, and PR/advertising agencies. These accounts expressed their neutrality about the Gillette’s and Bonobos’s campaigns by not explicitly stating their stance but instead waiting for their

followers' responses. They employed several tactics to inspect public opinions, which included reporting about the campaign and surveying their followers' reactions. When reporting news about these campaigns, the accounts simply shared the videos with a short summary of the topic. A phenomenon that the researcher noticed when coding these neutral tweets was that more than 200 tweets from different accounts shared the same article with similar captions about Bonobos's female CEO and its campaign launch. Although determining whether these tweets came from the same source is difficult from the tweets only, the use of chatbots on Twitter to boost trending topics and create the echo-chamber effect could be a possible cause of this phenomenon. These media accounts also showed ambivalence and hesitance to state their positions when they asked followers about their thoughts on the campaigns and invited conversations about gender definitions and performance. Apart from tweets that focused on reporting news and surveying public opinions, other media accounts offered analyses of the campaigns from a marketing/public relations perspective about belief-driven buying. Such analyses provided readers general explanations of why Gillette and Bonobos would put out messages to address social issues and concluded with the assessment that cause marketing is a "dangerous water" that needs careful planning and implementation.

"Gillette have split opinion with short film #Believe – but where do you stand? Is it time brands take a stand against #toxicmasculinity or has the film gone too far reflecting false superstition? #thebestamancanbe" (Tweet #500 – Gillette)

Several neutral tweets were from personal accounts that did not express any strong sentiments toward the campaigns. These users redirected the gender conversation's focus to balance and respect. They acknowledged that the conversation was necessary; however, they also pointed out that "not all men are bad." These tweets put emphasis on the need for a balance of actions and gender performance, which could be similar to the balance of "yin and yang."

“I feel that the concept of yin and yang best sums up masculine and feminine energy. Lmo, what really should be discussed, is how gender should be disassociated as belonging to one type of energy or the other. # EvolveTheDefinition” (Tweet #723 – Bonobos).

Prior research suggests that Twitter disrupts top-down marketing models for brand communication as consumers “talk back,” sharing their pleasure or displeasure with brands publicly and, in doing so, participate in a constant (re)negotiation of brand meaning (Nitins & Burgess, 2014, p. 294). Thus, Twitter data provided foundational understanding of consumer-brand meaning online, including about social norms and concerns (Marwick, 2013), to organize findings for research questions 2 and 3. These themes provided a foundation for the categorization of consumers’ responses to analyze their use of logics in interpreting Gillette’s and Bonobos’s #MeToo-related message.

Consumer Logics and How They Were Used

The second research question asks what logics consumers use to make sense of the #MeToo movement’s influence on advertising content. This topic is important because institutional logics, which are shaped through organizational and individual sense-making, are the resources from which institutional actors (including brands and consumers) draw in making sense of their worlds (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Ertimur & Coskuner-Ballie, 2015). Institutional logics aid consumers’ cognitive processes as they assign meanings and interpret events happening around them. The findings from the Twitter data and interviews reveal that consumers utilized four dominant logics when interpreting advertising messages: (1) economic logics, (2) brand-(in)congruence logics, (3) authority logics, and (4) safety/risk logics. In addition, in-depth interviews suggest that consumers’ abilities to draw from these logics as resources to make sense of the messages – influenced their interpretations of brand meaning.

Economic logics

Similar to the definition in the normative force, the *economic logics* involves brands adopting strategies, specifically social marketing, to reach more people and increase commercial success. Based on the positive tweets, users seemed to use this logic to interpret the brand messages as practical and a win-win situation in which brands can attract attention from the cause's supporters while increasing public awareness of the issue. These tweets acknowledged that while Gillette and Bonobos had commercial objectives to address #MeToo, their campaigns helped carry the message to more people. For example, one tweet read,

“Kudos to @Gillette for tacking #ToxicMasculinity and #maleGenderNorms – As a mother of 3 young men, it falls on all parents, educators, media & marketers to help young men grow into wholehearted, kind & compassionate men #TheBestAManCanBe” – Tweet #273 (Gillette).

In the interviews, participants in the positive group also focused on the practical or mutually beneficial aspect of cause marketing which enables brands to have a social impact while increasing their sales. These participants expressed that by addressing an environmental and societal issues, such as climate change and culture diversity, brands not only could win over supporters of the cause but also build an identity as responsible brands. When assessing the benefits of cause marketing, these participants focused on long-term gains for the society and the brand. They also pointed out that brands also had a need to keep up with social dynamics and not become outdated by connecting to their customers and addressing current issues.

“I think [the MeToo movement] is definitely a social movement that people who do business cannot ignore. And I think it's smart that businesses that use this type of movement to send the messages and try to relate to the movement so that they can get empathized with and raise awareness about their product in the end. Because if you don't stay with the current affairs and what is going on with society, then you become outdated and not being able to relate to your customers and not being able to impress them or create the loyalty for your customers.” – Participant 7 (Female, 27)

In the negative group, the economic logic focused on the brands' uses of #MeToo as a means to increase sales. This logic prompted users to interpret the brands' messages as insincere and lack of true motives. For example:

“Apparently sales are slow @Bonobos who target male POC with feminine looking clothes. So instead of coming up with a better clothing line they want to #EvolveTheDefinition” – Tweet #336 (Bonobos).

During the interviews, participants acknowledged the brands' needs and rights to practice good business strategies and address social issues; however, they expressed dislike for both messages (Gillette and Bonobos) when they felt that the MeToo movement was being exploited too bluntly. Participants pointed out that the messages that Gillette and Bonobos put out could help with raising brand awareness by connecting their brands with the #MeToo movement. However, they questioned the real intent of the campaigns and their effectiveness by dissecting the execution of the ads. For example, participants pointed out that while tapping into a trendy and controversial issue, like gender, the brands would create buzz and become viral for a certain amount of time. However, the campaigns exploited the issue more than they should.

“I feel like they could have shortened the interview. A little bit, and then brought it back to their product line. Because one of the things that one of the things that you need to convey when in an advertisement is not just being like, ‘Hey, we’re different, but it’s also like, hey, buy our stuff.’ Otherwise, it’s just brand awareness. [...] Maybe their thing is they want to make, like, a viral video and get brand awareness and they’re not worried about, hey, you should buy our clothes.”– Participant 6 (35, male).

In the neutral group, interview participants seemed more cautious when expressing their opinions about the use of #MeToo-related messages in advertising and focused on the good business practice of the economic logic. They expected that as cause marketing was becoming more popular, brands and companies had the pressure to put out messages like the Gillette and Bonobos ads. However, participants observed that most issues are controversial; hence, it would

be risky for businesses to take on these issues especially when they have politically polarized targets. In the subject of the #MeToo movement, participants acknowledged that sexual harassment and gender issues are sensitive topic that needs extra thought and care to discuss. Hence, they considered representing a MeToo-related message in a subtle manner and making it coherent with the company's mission would be a more prudent strategy than taking too progressive approaches. Three out of four participants in the neutral group expressed that they preferred the Bonobos ad because its approach to gender issue was more refreshing and uplifting whereas the Gillette ad's approach was too dramatic and overused.

“I was a little bit wary of the way in which are presented, the way for that masculinity needed to be treated. Well, it is an issue, for sure. But the way in which it kind of visualizes certain traumas that I don't think that people necessarily always need to see” – Participant 2 (27, male).

(In)Congruence logics

(In)congruence logics refer to the various ways consumers perceive brands' relevance or legitimacy in addressing social issues. Among the positive tweets and interview responses, the brand-message congruence logic focused on the problem-solving function which prompted users to interpret the campaigns as the brands' strategies to solve the current issue with sexual harassment and gender perception. Twitter users, by focusing on this aspect, justified Gillett and Bonobos's messages as “fit” to the current situation with toxic masculinity. Key terms, such as “it's time,” “leadership,” and “examples,” showed users' acceptance of the brands' positioning of the problem and their proposed solutions (Gillette: becoming “the best a man can be,” and Bonobos: “evolve the definition” of masculinity). This interpretation also aligns with the theme in research question 1 about brands being “agents of change” and using their brands as platforms for conversations.

“Thanks @ Gillette for your inspiring leadership on this incredibly important issue. We can be better, and set the path forward for future generations on a better footing. # thebestamancanbe” (Tweet #104 – Gillette).

“I commend @ Bonobos and @dunn for having the courage and moral leadership #EvolveTheDefinition. Bonobos as it has shown is a leader on social issues not just men’s fashion!” (Tweet #133 – Bonobos).

Interview participants justified the campaigns as “fit” because the ads identified important and current gender issues and countered outdated beliefs and expectations of masculinity. These participants considered the ads as “fitting” into the conversation of sexual harassment and gender performance rather than fitting into the brands’ current images. Some participants observed that some businesses might attempt to take advantage of the #MeToo conversation when the movement was “trendy” to create a “better” brand image, which would make the effort insincere. However, this insincere effort still added up to the spread of the issue and helped it reach more people. Some participants also noticed that both Gillette’s and Bonobos’s core products are for men; hence, they accepted these brands as “relevant” to put out messages about masculinity.

[Campaigns that use the issues to make their brand image better] are just adding more voice to advocate for certain values that [other] people want to achieve, but in other parts the consistency of the message and the product and service need to be more solidified. But I think it’s like another good target. I’m a very positive thinker, so I think it’s a good thing when advertisers try to advocate for something that people value” – Participant 1 (Female, 25).

In the negative group, the incongruence logic was utilized to identify inconsistency between the messages and the brands’ practices which ultimately determined the campaigns’ authenticity. The negative tweets accused Gillette and Bonobos of contradicting their existing images or values to follow a popular trend. More specifically, a good number of the tweets shared photos of Gillette’s past sponsorship events which featured women in tight, Gillette-blue leather bodysuits. In response to the Bonobos’s campaign, some users criticized the brand for putting out a message about inclusion and diversity while focusing on a specific niche of men

and lacking sizes for all body types. These negative tweets also interpreted the campaigns' messages as political agendas from opposing parties and beliefs. While the tweets associated the Gillette's campaign with feminists' battle against men, some of them identified the Bonobos's message with liberalism.

“#EvolveTheDefinition is more liberal social engineering garbage designed to shame men for being strong and powerful. You want to define being a non-masculine man? How about using the age-old definition for it: Being a pussy, #LiberalismIsAMentalDisorder” – Tweet #361 (Bonobos).

Interview participants focused on the execution of the ad to assess the authenticity of the message. They pointed out that although Bonobos pursued an inclusive image, the “Evolve the Definition ad” indicated contradictory values. For example, the participants stated that the dialogues seemed staged, and the people featured in the ad seemed purposefully casted to represent the brand's niche target instead of being “inclusive” of all masculinities. Participants also deemed a cause marketing campaign incongruent with the brand when its goal was to follow trends without understanding the brand's meaning and values. They pointed out that not every product needed to be vocal about its stance on social issues; hence, trying to address these issues might not be as effective as simple and direct advertisement. Therefore, by trying to position the product as something “more than it is,” the ads came out as over-the-top and insincere.

“For Gillette, the video was like way too long. And like, way too heavy for what should have been like, which is for like a \$2 razor” – Participant 6 (35, male).

The congruence logic was more explicit among neutral interview participants than the neutral tweets. These participants utilized the congruence logic and interpreted the campaigns as the brands' adapting efforts to today's society, which justified the campaign even when the messages did not align with their past images. Some participants noticed that Gillette had established itself as a traditional and masculine brand that did not align with the progressive

messages it sent out. However, in the current social landscape in which traditional masculinity may not apply to everyone, Gillette needed such a message to adapt and transform its image to better reflect the reality. Hence, participants considered this change of image as a transformation effort for improvement and not necessarily an unauthentic campaign.

“But Gillette has, I feel that tagline (The Best A Man Can Get) has been with it for a while. So I think it was more so correcting the interpretation of how they wanted that to be seen. So previously, with “The best a man could get” people may have set out use the traditional stereotypes of [being] strong, masculine, and tough. And now they’re trying to provide a new light towards that tagline that they have” – Participant 10 (Male, 26).

Authority logics

The authority logic emerged more evidently among the Twitter data than in participants’ answers. Authority logics refer to users’ perceptions of their power to support or dismiss the campaigns, which would financially impact the brands. Among the positive tweets, the use of authority logic was evident in the way users justified and supported the messages. For example, these tweets reframed the criticism of the campaigns as examples of the gender issue and the reason why campaigns like those of Gillette and Bonobos were necessary. Users also expressed their support through sharing to their network and indicating intentions of future purchases.

“I am researching every product made by proctor & Gamble and buying everything I can. The more ads like this I see the more inspired I’ll become. #courage #thebestamancanbe #thebesticanbe” – Tweet #128 (Gillette).

In the negative group, authority logic became which were evident in the way users referred to brands’ dependence on consumers’ financial support. A lot of the tweets in response to the Gillette’s message threatened to switch brand to Dollar Shave Club or Harry’s. They also pointed out the irony of brands losing support and customers because of cause marketing like Gillette and Bonobos through the hashtag “#GetWokeGoBroke.”

“Your #Misandry in the #GilletteAd is not gonna pay off @Gillette/
@ProcterGamble. You lose customers like crazy. #GetWokeGoBroke
#BoycottGillette #BoycottProcterandGamble #TheBestMenCanBe
#thebestamancanbe” – Tweet 10 (Gillette).

Safety/Risk Logics

The *safety/risk logic* was most evident among the neutral group which consisted of tweets from mostly public or media accounts. This logic referred to these users’ hesitance to take sides in the debate of whether the Gillette or Bonobos campaign was successful to not upset their followers. Instead of stating their positions, these accounts investigated public opinion by being committed to sharing news about the campaign and creating polls to ask for their followers’ reactions to the campaigns. This logic was more evident in the Gillette tweets as more media accounts asked for followers to join their threads and express their opinions while the Bonobos tweets focused on sharing articles about the making of the campaign and Bonobos’s female CEO.

Access to Logics

The discourses of gender issues and debates around sexual harassment, including the #MeToo Movement, provide a frame of reference for consumers to interpret and assign meaning to brands’ #MeToo-related messages. Hence, consumers’ awarenesses and knowledge of these issues influence their ability to draw from these discourses as resources for sense-making. Although the #MeToo movement started out as a response to workplace harassment and sexual misconducts, the movement’s roots embedded in gender inequality, specifically in labor laws and regulations (Hillstorm, 2019). #MeToo also created a premise and momentum for subsequent movements that focused on woman empowerment and representation, such as #TimesUp and Women’s March. Therefore, knowledge about gender issues beyond #MeToo’s dominant sexual

harassment debate provides consumers resources to interpret and assign meaning to brands' #MeToo-related messages.

Participants in this study demonstrated varying degrees of interest in and knowledge about social cases, and specifically, or the #MeToo movement. Eight of the twelve participants expressed gender representations and equality among their interests when asked what, if any, social issues were important to them. Interestingly, participants who demonstrated greater awareness and knowledge of the #MeToo movement provided more elaborate answer to questions involving their perceptions of gender constructs and roles in media. They identified and elaborated on prominent gender issues that have long been topics of critique by feminist scholars, such as stereotypes, body image, and restrictive, traditional representations of men and women. Whether or not they demonstrated approval of Gillette or Bonobos ads, they observed that media and advertising's representation of gender roles and construct were too "extreme" and "narrow" and did not represent the range of gender identities that exist. Hence, they all agreed that the media and advertisers should provide a more realistic representations of the gender.

Further, these participants offered a more nuanced critique of the ads. For example:

"While for the Gillette one, the majority of the ad is just highlighting the society's stereotypes of men, and at the end, then they were like, "Oh, we believe in the best of men." So the first part was just about highlighting this stereotype the negative image of the men but then they didn't really propose a solution. While for the [Bonobos ad], they spend more time talking about what they feel like or how they would define masculinity themselves. Like, I remember the last part when they say that, it's not about how to be a man. It's about how to be human. So it humanizes men a little more, and I feel like it's easier for people to relate to" – Participant 7 (Female, 27)

On the other hand, several participants (four of the twelve) indicated that they did not follow gender issues in social and mainstream media, including the #MeToo movement, and

seldom participated in discussions involving these topics. Their knowledge of the movement was limited to surface-level meanings, such as:

“I don’t necessarily have a strong opinion about [#MeToo]. Again, I believe people are free to say and do as they please and more power to the people coming out about real situations. I believe that it’s focused on too much. I think it’s become more of a movement than it needs to be. I think it’s something that should be happening in everyday life and I guess I can’t speak much to it as a male. So I don’t understand or I can’t emphasize as well to the pressure put on women” – Participant 10 (Male, 26).

These participants further indicated that they hold more traditional views of more rigid, dichotomous (male/female) gender roles. For example, one participant defined masculinity as “lacking emotions and being tough” and women as “having more emotion” and being “beautiful”- Participant 9 (Female, 32). These participants did not see the connection between the #MeToo movement and the Bonobos ad, though did perceive a strong connection between the Gillette ad and the movement. Finally, these participants seemed to agree that advertising representations of gender should be stable and demonstrated a preference for more traditional male/female roles.

“I think the media uses [masculinity and femininity] as absolutes. And so, just like I mentioned earlier about hyper liberal and hyper conservative, I think people are seeing the media specifically take those words to the extreme and use them to describe situations and people on the other side” – Participant 11 (Male, 27).

When asked which ad they would prefer, all four participants chose the Gillette ad as it articulated the problem more clearly and had a “real impact.” A possible explanation for this observation may be because the Bonobos ad carried a broader message of inclusiveness that involved different masculinities while the Gillette ad urged for a change that still rooted from traditional masculinity (being strong and doing the right thing). Hence, these participants

perceived a return to familiar masculine constructs and presentations of #MeToo-related issues in the Gillette ad and chose it over the Bonobos ad.

How Consumers Used Logics

In both data sets, participants adopted similar logics to interpret the messages. However, they prioritize the logics differently, which resulted in different interpretations and attitudes towards the ads. This prioritization was influenced by participants' knowledge or awarenesses to gender issues and #MeToo-related discourses which served as resources to interpret the messages. However, this study's design could not capture how this relationship affects participants' utilization of logics.

Participants who had a positive perception about #MeToo-related brand messages prioritized the problem-solving aspect of the *congruence logic* before considering brands' monetary gains from the *economic logic*. Neutral participants considered brands' financial incentives (good business aspect of the *economic logic*) to justify the need to transform their image to fit in current conversations (*congruence logic*). Participants who had a negative perception about #MeToo-related campaigns recognized overused #MeToo messages that led them question the authenticity of the campaigns (*incongruence logic*) and reached the conclusion that they were aimed to make money (*economic logic*) rather than addressing the issue. Refer to Figure 1 for the dynamics between institutional forces, consumer logics, and consumer interpretations of the messages (that eventually establish message and brand legitimacy).

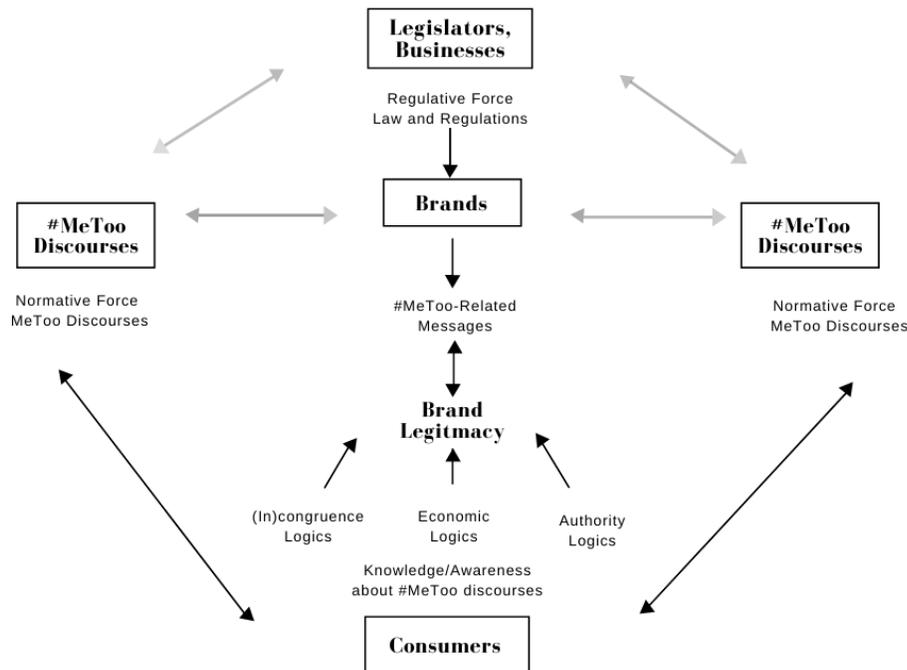


Figure 1: *Dynamics Between Institutional Forces and Consumer Logics in Relation To #MeToo-Related Brand Messages.* This diagram illustrates how the regulative and normative forces interact with #MeToo discourses to influence brands’ normative power/practices. However, this study’s data and scope do not focus on examining these dynamics. Hence, the arrows representing the dynamics between #MeToo discourses, Legislators and businesses, and brands are in grey. From individuals’ cognitive process, consumers, depending on their exposure to #MeToo discourses, utilize (in)congruence, economic, and authority logics to interpret brand messages and assess brand legitimacy.

Consumer Perceptions of Brand Legitimacy and #MeToo Influence on Advertising

Overarching theme: There is definitely a #MeToo impact, but I just couldn’t name it

#MeToo is just another CSR idea that brands can adopt. All participants observed that the Gillette and Bonobos ads and other #MeToo-related campaigns were similar to other corporate social responsibility efforts that tried to address social issues. They acknowledged that in a market where young generations scrutinize businesses’ conducts and support those that act ethically, brands need to stay relevant and adopt cause marketing messages as a strategy to

present their values to the public. With the *economic logic*, this practice would be a win-win situation for both the cause and the brand. Participants also expressed that from an advertising perspective, the #MeToo movement was just another cause similar to other issues to tackle for a CSR campaigns, such as environmental-friendly and ethical sourcing initiatives. Hence, in most of the interviews, the #MeToo movement did not stand out as a more important or different cause than other issues except for two female participants who had personal experiences relating to the movement. On one hand, all participants could identify a direct connection between the Gillette ad and #MeToo because it framed the sexual harassment issue as an outcome of negative masculine behaviors. On the other hand, participants who did not express elaborate knowledge about gender issues perceived the Bonobos's ad as an attempt to piggyback on the #MeToo trend with a general message. Participants acknowledged that the campaigns, regardless of their congruence or authenticity, tried to improve the condition for certain groups and demographics. Therefore, they accepted that brands had important and legitimate reasons to talk about #MeToo and create conversation. Nevertheless, participants were hesitant to discuss the #MeToo movement as they considered it a sensitive topic that might not resonate with everyone. Participants recognized that if the two brands want to pursue an ethical image, they have a moral obligation to address issues that affected people in the society. Participants also accepted brands' need to follow the CSR trend in the industry to satisfy consumers while increasing their sales. These observations suggest that Gillette and Bonobos established their legitimacy through the normative force as brands having moral and practical reasons to adopt social marketing.

Participants Didn't Give The #MeToo Movement Too Much Credit. Despite acknowledging brands' legitimacy in pursuing cause marketing, participants did not perceive a major impact of the #MeToo movement on advertising or media practices. All participants said

that they had been exposed to #MeToo-related advertising content on social and mainstream media; however, none of them could recall a specific brand or message. Most participants indicated that the messages had no impact on their subsequent buying decisions. Several participants mentioned that while #MeToo-related campaigns addressed important issues, they did not retain in consumers' minds because other CSR initiatives that offered trackable solutions were more impressive and memorable. For example, these participants brought up TOMS's buy-one-give-one program and other eco-friendly practices as trackable and direct solutions to a cause in need in comparison to pure messaging.

[The ads] don't really affect my opinion on brands. I know a lot of people are affected by brands stances on social issues. And then like I mentioned earlier, like climate change is a big one for me. So if a brand has an eco-friendly initiative, I'm more willing to follow that brand. As far as the me to movement doesn't affect me as much. Of course, it's selfish, but everyone has selfish intent" – Participant 11 (Male, 27)

Participants also pointed out that #MeToo only added momentum to an inevitable social trend. They explained that as society moved forward, gender constructs and performance also had to change, and as younger generations were growing up and perceived the changes as their reality, they became vocal and less tolerant toward outdated gender stereotypes and discrimination. Hence, #MeToo was just another movement that reflect the clash between young and old generations and the struggle to bring in changes in the society.

Such assessments of the #MeToo movement's influence and the effectiveness of the two campaigns suggested that while brands gained legitimacy as having good reasons to pursue #MeToo messages, they failed to establish their legitimacy through participants' cognitive process. A reason for this was that participants lacked a frame of reference about #MeToo or the narratives adopted in these campaigns did not fit the participants' frame of reference. For participants who had favorable attitudes toward #MeToo-related campaigns, they utilized the

problem-solving aspect of the *congruence logic* which led them to compare these campaigns to other CSR programs (frame of reference) that offer trackable benefits for their beneficiaries (donations, environmental impacts, etc.). Participants who were in the neutral group utilized the *economic logic* which prompted them to use effectiveness as an assessment frame for the Gillette's and Bonobos's campaign. Participants in the negative group, using both the *economic* and *incongruence logic*, recalled the discourses in the #MeToo movement, such as media exploitation and political agenda setting, as their frames of references and deemed the use of #MeToo in advertising as unauthentic and not legitimate.

Discussion

In this discussion section, this study first revisits the topic of gender issues in relation to consumers' access to logics when interpreting #MeToo-related brand messages, and it also offers a possible explanation for masculine brands' responses to the movement. Then, the study focuses on examining how institutional forces and logics might have played into social and marketplace discourses about gender and the #MeToo movement. This section also discusses the dialogic dynamic between brands and consumers observed from the Twitter data and offers implications for practical practices and future research.

Gender Is A Complex and Uncomfortable Topic to Discuss

Themes from supportive tweets and across all emotional valence of the interview suggest that consumers are aware of the unrealistic and limited portrayal of gender in the media and advertising. Consumers, drawing from their own experiences with the media and advertising, have a general perception that media and advertising's gender representation are still traditional

and stereotypical. This acknowledgement aligns with previous studies on gender in consumer research about advertising positioning men as immune, logical, and rational whereas it positions women as vulnerable, emotional, and irrational (Ostberg, 2019; Zayer & Coleman, 2015). However, consumers' knowledge, and language/vocabulary about gender issues dictate how they interpret the gender problems in media representation. For consumers who follow such issues, they see the problems of the current media gender portrayals as two extreme points on the gender spectrum, while in reality this homogenous and hegemonic framing does not sufficiently describe today's society. Hence, these informed consumers are likely to stay neutral or open to messages or portrayals that moves along the two points of the gender performance spectrum. This acceptance is adjacent to the concept of gender fluidity and multi-masculinities in both individual duties and consumption patterns, such as men picking up household chores and purchasing domestic products (Klasson & Ulver, 2015). However, consumers who may not have knowledge to discuss gender issues tend to assign the problems of gender portrayal in media as a political battle for dominance. As the findings suggested, they are likely to interpret traditional gender portrayals as conservative while fluid portrayal as liberal, which prompts them to take sides that align with their political leaning. On one hand, regardless of attitudes or knowledge, interview participants showed hesitance in discussing gender and the #MeToo movement. On the other hand, the Twitter data suggested that users were expressive and vocal about their attitudes toward gender constructs and #MeToo. These phenomena imply that gender issues and the #MeToo movement are sensitive topics that consumers may not feel comfortable to discuss in face-to-face conversations but rather share their opinions on online platforms.

Masculine Brands' Messages, #MeToo, and Institutional Theory

Consumer researchers can also apply institutional pillars and logics to explain the phenomenon of masculine brands' response to the #MeToo movement. Brands, as social actors, draw resources from both institutional forces and individuals' conversations to form their messages and navigate during times of social changes. Friedland and Alford (1991) suggest that social actors utilize institutional constraints and contradictions as their identity as cultural and symbolic resources to transform their identity, space, and position in the society (as cited in Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Under the pressure to respond to the regulative force (laws and regulations) and the normative force (conversations about #MeToo and brands' expectation to act responsibly), advertisers and brands see the need to address the #MeToo movement. However, the normative perception of sexual harassment and brand's congruence might have been the reason why most prominent #MeToo-related campaigns were from masculine brands. #MeToo has been considered a women's empowerment movement that encompasses different issues, such as gender inequality and women's representation, with a central problem on sexual harassment (Hillstorm, 2019). This positioning and the movement's female-dominant supporters might have created the perception that women are the main victims of male predators. Hence, for-women or feminine brands might not see their female consumers as the root of sexual harassment. Brands that had adopted femvertising messages before might see a congruence between their previous messaging with the theme of women's empowerment. However, femvertising often employs sexualization and objectification of non-traditional models to portray empowerment (Windels, Champlin, Shelton, Sterbenk, & Poteet, 2019). Critics of femvertising see this focus on female sexuality as reducing women to only their appearance and sexuality, and this limited empowerment is problematic, especially with the rise of the #MeToo movement

(McRobbie, 2007). Meanwhile, masculine brands like Bonobos and Gillette might listen to #MeToo-related conversations on mainstream and social media and identify an association of sexual harassment with bad male behaviors and toxic masculinity. Therefore, these brands utilized the *economic* and *congruence logic* and drew their own narratives of the #MeToo movement to create messages that were congruent with their images. However, consumers also utilized their own sets of logics to assess brands' congruence with the messages, which ultimately determines their brands' legitimacy. This utilization of logics in making sense of the message will be discussed in the following section.

The Use of Logics in Making Sense of Brands' Messages

Given people's different levels of attentions to social issues, consumers utilize different logics to make sense of brands' messages that address social movements. The tweets and interviews both suggested that consumers used the *economic logic* to acknowledge brands' incentives when they adopt cause marketing strategies. However, based on their stances and knowledge about the issues, consumers prioritize the importance of the logics that they employ to interpret the messages. This prioritization leads to a higher or lower tolerance or support of the message. Refer back to Figure 1.

The findings suggest that consumers' knowledge about #MeToo-related issues influence their process of drawing resources from the movement's discourses to utilize the logics, which ultimately influence their interpretation of the brand messages. Interview participants who had knowledge or awareness of gender issues tended to have a favorable or neutral attitude toward the practice, with the exception of one participant who had a negative attitude. Due to a small sample size, this study could not further examine the nuances and extent to which knowledge and

awareness about an issue can influence consumer attitudes. However, this phenomenon suggests a possible area for future research on the relationship between consumer knowledge and their attitude toward cause marketing messages. Freire (1968/2000) refers to the importance of having the words to understand and articulate one's problems in order to elicit changes and justice. Expanding this notion to other social movements, consumers who do not pay extensive attention to a particular issue may lack the knowledge and language to discuss it, which leads them to turn to more traditional and stable concepts to make sense of the message. Hence, consumers who have the language or are knowledgeable about the issues can be more comfortable to engage in conversations with brands about social issues.

A Dialogic Approach in An Institutional Framework

Findings from both the Twitter data and interviews with participants have important implications for understanding how brands and consumers navigate during times of social activism. Applying the institutional framework to the findings, brands are taking cues from institutional organizations' regulative force (the #MeToo movement, policies, and legislations) and feedback from individual social actors in the marketplace to join conversations about gender issues. As the tweets showed interactions between the brands (Gillette and Bonobos) and Twitter users, this corresponding dynamic suggests a dialogic process between the brands and consumers in assigning meanings and establishing legitimacy for the messages. One of the main tenets of dialogic theory is the recognition of the other party's value or presence (as cited in Kent and Taylor, 2002). Freire (1968/2000) emphasizes the importance of dialogue in bringing in social changes because it invites co-participation from all parties involved and promotes mutual understanding. The dialogic process observed in this study was embedded in the process of

brands navigating under the regulative and normative forces while negotiating their messages' meanings with consumers.

Among the two chosen brands, Bonobos appeared to have engaged more actively on Twitter with responders and tried to maintain positive dialogues with users. Bonobos used its official Twitter account to respond to tweets that praised and supported the "Evolve the Definition" messages. Although this phenomenon could not be verified, the brand might have utilized internal actors who identified themselves as "Bonobos's partners" and contributors of the ad and shared the campaign among their networks to express their support. These tweets made up 20.9% (45/215) of the positive responses to the ad, which could have influenced the direction of other discussions about the campaign. Another unverifiable phenomenon observed among the tweets responding to Bonobos was chatbots' participation. As stated in the findings of research question 1, a substantial amount of the tweets shared a particular article about Bonobos's new female CEO that had very similar, if not exact, wording. If these automatic posts were indeed initiated by Bonobos, it can be inferred that the brand was trying to adopt a dialogic approach and inviting participation from the online public while attempting to infiltrate a dominating narrative into the conversation to create a normative force as a market leader.

In the case of Gillette, the brand did not actively participate in a dialogic process with Twitter users by ignoring comments on its "The Best A Man Can Be" ad. Most of the tweets in response to the Gillette's ad seemed to be organic conversations from Twitter users. However, a number of the tweets accused Gillette of monitoring the conversations about the campaign by deleting negative comments. This observation aligned with the disproportion between the number of negative tweets and the ad's dislike on YouTube. This practice, if proven true,

suggests that Gillette wanted to maintain a positive narrative for its message; however, the brand utilized its regulative force (deleting and monitoring comments) to contain damage.

The two brands' different approaches online also reflected in interview participants' perceptions of the ads. Participants stated that although the two ads carried similar messages about masculinity, the Bonobos ad made them feel good and welcomed to share their beliefs while the Gillette ad was more serious and imposing about what people needed to do. Even in their execution, the Bonobos ad featured people who seemed to have been invited by the brand to share about their definitions of masculinity, and the Gillette ad was a straightforward and uncompromising message presented as a "mini-movie." The Bonobos ad was also more favorable among the neutral group and participants who had knowledge and awareness to discuss gender issues, which suggested that a dialogic approach may be more effective in building trust and legitimacy among informed and neutral consumers.

Brand messages that address the #MeToo movement, specifically in the cases of Gillette and Bonobos, may face backlash due to gaps between their logics and opposing consumers' logics. Although the *economic logic* and *(in)congruence logic* were identified in both the brands' side and Twitter users/participants side, these entities focused on different aspects of such logics, which resulted in mismatches that resulted in negative responses. Gillette and Bonobos operated on the *(in)congruence logic* and drew different narratives from the #MeToo movement that related to their products in order to establish relevance and legitimacy. However, consumers who responded negatively to the messages found this practice as manipulative and contradictory to the brands' images and reached the conclusion that these messages were not authentic.

To battle this gap in logic and establish legitimacy, brands need to listen and acknowledge different viewpoints. Meyer and Scott (1983) define organizational legitimacy as

cultural support for an organization (as cited in Scott, 1998). As cultural support stems from relationships between businesses and consumers, and dialogue is essential in negotiating relationships in public relations (Kent & Taylor, 2002), brands need to engage in and create dialogues with their consumers to establish their legitimacy. Kent and Taylor (2002) suggest that in order to build international relationships with consumers, organizations need to engage in dialogues with their publics and build mechanisms to facilitate conversations with their public. On a social media landscape, Kent and Li (2020) argue that on the most basic level, a dialogic approach in public relations includes efforts to hold conversations that involve trust and address issues of risk, power, and hierarchy. Bonobos showcased certain levels of a dialogic approach with the public on Twitter; however, the brand did not address or acknowledge opposing arguments. This one-sided approach does not create a true sense of social presence or engagement of the brand that is built on nurturing relationships, trust, and mutuality (Kent & Li, 2020). By engaging in supportive conversations and acknowledging differing opinions, brands like Gillette and Bonobos may be able to gain legitimacy to address controversial issues while maintaining relationships with participants who may not agree with their messages.

Implications for Branding During Social Movements

This study contributes to the research on brands that want to articulate their positions about controversial social issues. Reports and studies show that consumers demand businesses to have purposes and address social issues (Neff, 2019; Pankowski, 2020). However, as social issues often involve deeply held values and core beliefs, public opinions about them tend to be polarizing, which leads consumers to have different responses to cause marketing campaigns. For controversial issues, such as #MeToo, consumers who are skeptical rely on these main logics

to interpret related messages: *economic*, *congruence*, and *authority logics*. By being aware of and understanding these logics, brands can better anticipate the possible backlash they may face and prepare a response.

From an institutional theory perspective, despite the risk of putting out controversial messages, businesses should continue conforming to the normative force of the marketplace to pursue a responsible, ethical image. Cunningham (1998) argues that advertisers' ability to influence the media and consumer access to the flow of information makes them morally responsible to act ethically. In addition, advertisers' power status also depends on the consensus of the media and consumers, reinforcing their obligations to act responsibly. Addressing social issues to add more voices and raise public awareness can serve as an approach for brands to act responsibly and ethically. Hence, by conforming to the moral obligation in the market (normative force) and addressing social problems, brands also contribute to this normative force and reinforce the market's expectations regarding social marketing. From examining the three institutional forces and comparing between participants' *congruence logic* and the Gillette and Bonbos existing images, this study proposes several suggestions for brands that want to address controversial issues in their advertising:

Listen to Social Dynamics to Avoid Injecting Contradictory Narratives

According to institutional theory, powerful institutions, such as governmental agencies on a societal level and market leaders on a sub-organizational field level, have the ability to change the discourse about the issue of question (Beckert, 1999). Therefore, it is important for brands to identify the existing narratives and discourses put out by these forces about the issue that they intend to pursue. By keeping up with the dominant discourses, brands can avoid adopting messages that contradict popular beliefs which lead to potential backlash. This recommendation

also applies to companies that may not wish to employ cause marketing but have products/services used by people who are affected by the issue.

Identify Brand's congruence When Addressing A Social Issue

While it is important and practical for businesses to adopt cause marketing, not every brand should do it. When the message or narratives that brands choose to focus on do not match with the dominant narrative pushed down by other powerful institutions, skeptical consumers are quick to identify the mismatch, which prompts them to examine any gaps between the brands' existing images and the new messages. These gaps can lead consumers to interpret the marketing effort as abusive and exploitative. Therefore, businesses who want to join a social cause should conduct an image audit about their customers' perceptions of their trades and values and consider whether these areas and values can fit in the dominant narrative.

Educate Consumers About the Issues Through A Dialogic Approach

As the findings suggested, consumers who had knowledge and the language to discuss gender issues were more open to #MeToo-related branding messages. Hence, by addressing social issues, brands can provide consumers with the necessary language and information to become familiar with the topics and to better understand their positions in relation to such issues. Brands can facilitate this process by adopting a dialogic approach on social media with their responders and acknowledging all viewpoints, even the dissenting ones. Through this dialogic approach, brands can build interpersonal and trusting relationships with consumers, which contribute to a higher level of cultural support for the brands that ultimately leads to a higher legitimacy for these brands to pursue cause marketing messages.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the use of institutional theory in cause marketing to examine the interactions among powerful organizations, brands, and consumers in a structure of power. This qualitative project may help set early foundations for subsequent research to examine and categorize additional logics in consumers' responses to cause marketing or in other contexts. Understanding the logics is important, as consumers' cognitive processes involve complex sense-making mechanisms. Another area that future research can examine is measuring the gap between brands' and consumers' logics and examining this gap's influence on consumers' interpretations of advertising messages. In addition, this study offers an examination of consumer perceptions of #MeToo in relation to gender issues, brands' messaging, and power structure, which contributes to the study of the #MeToo movement as a gender, marketing, and power issue.

As the findings suggest a relationship exists between consumers' knowledge about #MeToo-related issues and their use of logics to interpret brand messages, this study may also offer interesting implications for research in power structure with a dialogic approach. Dialogic theorists (e.g., Freire 1968/2000) point to the importance of having the words to describe one's socio-historical status in the world. These theorists identify dialogue as an essential tool for oppressed members of society to achieve liberation. As institutional theory explains the social structure through a hierarchy of power, and themes emerged from both data sets suggesting that participants sense a struggle for power (against men/not against men, through political agendas, etc.), future research might further examine the connection between consumers' vocabulary about gender issues and the logics they adopt to interpret brand messages. This focus could reveal important insights for understanding consumers' access to the language to define

injustices in the market and how this influences their responses to brands that draw from social causes.

Conclusion

Although some people would argue that the influence of the #MeToo movement on society has faded after reaching its peak in 2017, the movement is still a significant cultural resource for social actors to refer to when they encounter discussions about gender issues, equality, and social justices. As a movement rooted from a long and complex history of gender inequality and representation, #MeToo maintains a relevant and important topic for businesses and brands to pay attention to when disseminating gender-related messages. Despite the general perception that #MeToo is a women's empowerment movement, advertising content that addressed this issue were mostly masculine brands, which suggests that businesses and brands listen to both regulative and normative forces in the market and utilize their own logics to interpret the root of the problem in a way that is congruent with their brands' focus. Consumers also employ their own sets of logics to examine the messages' authenticity, and eventually, brands' legitimacy to pursue such messages. Although consumers have varying levels of acceptance that #MeToo was an important topic for businesses to address, they may not give the movement "too much credit" as a cause that stands out from other CSR efforts. These findings have implications for brands that seek legitimacy as responsible businesses for addressing the #MeToo movement and social activism. As a whole, the study contributes to a better understanding of the influence of #MeToo and other social movements on the assigning and interpreting of meanings between institutional agents and social actors within the marketplace.

Limitations

The researcher adopted various strategies to limit factors that could affect the interpretation of the findings in this study, such as developing a coherent coding scheme throughout the data analysis process. Some major phenomena observed on Twitter, such as the infiltration of similar messages and participation from the brands' internal actors, could not be verified by the researcher. Hence, such observations were made in the discussion section instead of being listed as findings. Lastly, due to a small participant sample and qualitative analysis, this study's findings are not generalizable to a larger population, and it should serve as an early theory-building effort for future projects.

Conflict of Interests

The researcher had no conflict of interests in conducting this study.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Warm-up

1. What influences your buying decisions for everyday products?
2. Where do you get information/references for those everyday products?
3. Do you follow any brand/product on social media?
 - a. If yes, please share about the brand(s), platform(s) you use, and reason why you follow.

Transition to social movements and advertising content

4. What kind of social issues/movements do you pay attention to?
5. Please share about a social issue/movement that you care about.
6. How do you think those social issues/movements are presented in the media?
7. How do you think those social issues/movements are used for commercial purposes, such as marketing and advertising?
8. What are your thoughts on brands' addressing social issues and movements in their marketing/advertising campaigns?

Focus on #MeToo and the Gillette and Bonobos' ad campaigns

9. Are you a Gillette/Bonobos brand user?
10. Do you know about the Gillette's ad "The Best A Man Can Be?"
11. Do you know about the Bonobos' "Evolve the Definition" campaign?
 - *(Show the ads if participants do not know about them).
 - a. What do you think of the campaigns?

- b. Do the ads affect your brand choice in any way? How do they affect your brand choice?
12. Are you aware of the #MeToo movement? What do you think about the #MeToo movement?
- a. Have you participated in any discussion involving the #MeToo movement?
 - b. If yes, explain the context of the discussions (or most memorable discussions).
13. Are you aware of any advertisements/marketing campaigns that address the #MeToo movement?

Focus on gender perception:

14. What does it mean to you to be masculine? What does it mean to be feminine?
15. How do you think masculinity and femininity are portrayed in the media? In advertising and marketing?
16. What is your opinion of these portrayals?
17. How do you think masculinity and femininity should be portrayed?
18. (Show tweets) These are some of the tweets in response to the ads you just watch. What do you think about them?

Focus on the connection between #MeToo and the ads

19. Some of the popular press have suggested that Gillette and Bonobos ads campaigns are a response to the #MeToo movement. What do you think about the relationship between the #MeToo movement and the Gillette and Bonobos ads?
20. How do you think the #MeToo movement has influenced advertising content?
- a. What is your take on this observation?

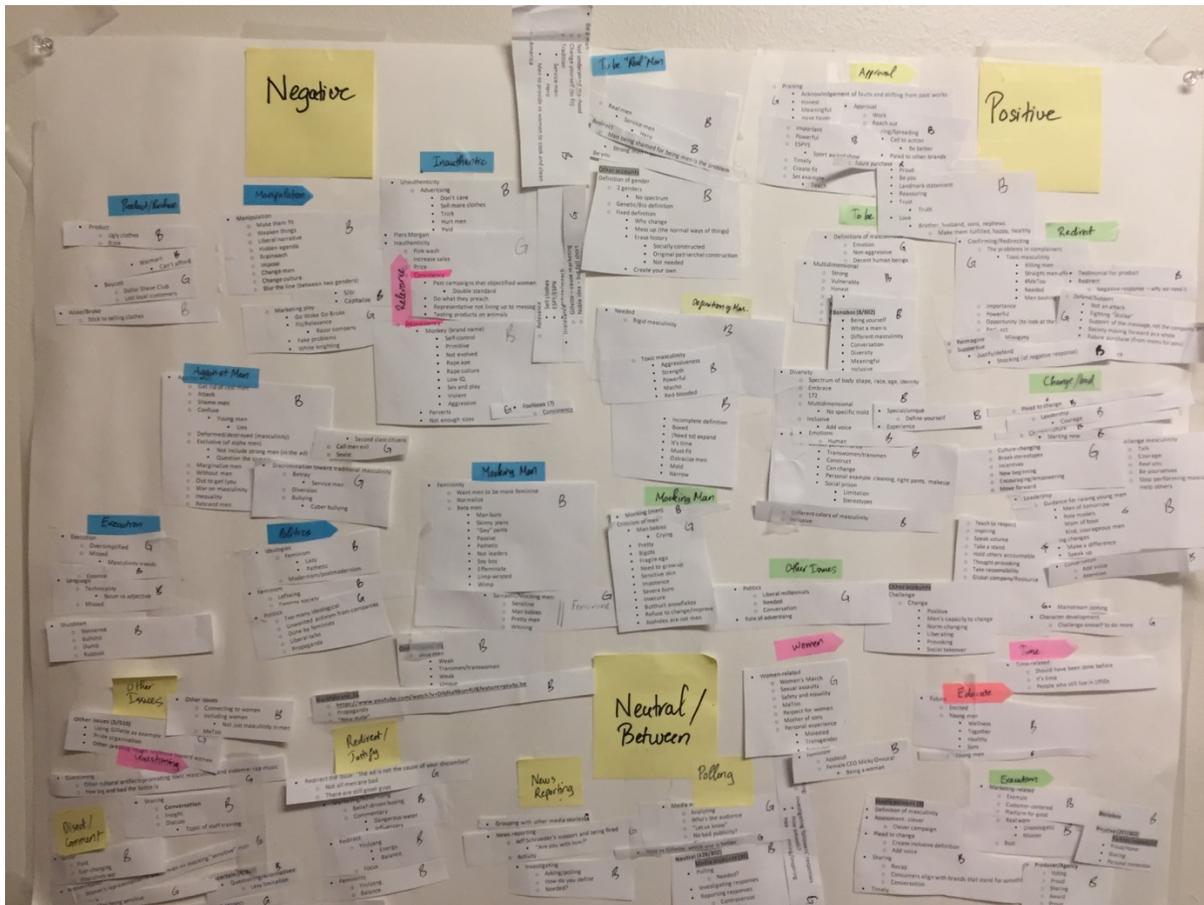
b. What is your suggestion for marketers in doing their job during the time of the #MeToo movement? In time of social movement in general?

Wrap-up

21. Do you have any additional thoughts on the topic that you want to share but did not have the chance to speak about during the interview?

Appendix 2

Open Coding Process Based on Keywords.



VITA

Born on May 4, 1997, in Hanoi, Vietnam, Phuong Thao Pham is the daughter of Pham Quang Long and Hoang Thi Van Phuong. She graduated from Thang Long High School in Hanoi, Vietnam in 2015. She then pursued her college education at Texas Christian University and earned a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Strategic Communication in May 2019.

After receiving her bachelor's degree, she became a full-time master's student in the Strategic Communication program at Texas Christian University. During this time, she worked as a graduate assistant under the guidance of Dr. Julie O'Neil and Dr. Catherine Coleman. She plans to earn her master's degree in May 2020 and work as an advertising professional after graduation.

ABSTRACT

INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS AND CAUSE MARKETING A STUDY OF TWITTER USERS AND CONSUMER RESPONSE TO #METOO-RELATED CAMPAIGNS

by Phuong Thao Pham, M.S., 2020
Department of Strategic Communication
Texas Christian University

Thesis Advisor:

Dr. Catherine Coleman, Associate Professor of Strategic Communication

Dr. Julie O'Neil, Professor of Strategic Communication

Dr. Eunseon (Penny) Kwon, Assistant Professor of Strategic Communication

The #MeToo movement has brought increased scrutiny to sexual harassment-related issues, such as justice, gender equality, diversity, and woman representation. Although a substantial connection between the #MeToo movement and the advertising industry exists (Bell, 2018), little or no research has been conducted on the effect of #MeToo on brand messaging and consumer response. This study offers an examination of the relationship between the #MeToo movement and consumers' responses to #MeToo-related brand messaging in the context of two masculine brands, Gillette and Bonobos. This study asks the central question: What has been the influence of #MeToo on brand meaning? Using institutional theory, this study found that consumers utilize two main logics, economic and congruence, to make sense of the message. However, different prioritization of the logics and individual's knowledge of #MeToo-related and gender issues led consumers to reach different conclusions about the brand's legitimacy to put out such messages and, hence, they have dissenting attitudes toward the messages.