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Abstract

Huawei is a Chinese company, which is considered to be one of the world's leading technology companies in the field of telecommunication, smartphones and data transmission. Starting in November 2018, Huawei has been under pressure from Western countries. The reason beyond was Article 7 of the Chinese National Intelligence Law, requesting all the Chinese citizens and companies based in China to hand over any kind data to the Chinese government upon a request. This blowback raised many eyebrows upon Huawei. By that time, the company had been negotiating contracts for installation of 5G networks in the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany and the USA. The situation escalated further after arresting of Huawei CFO in Canada in February 2019. Quite a few Western countries put their hands off from collaboration with Huawei. The USA went further imposed strong trade tariffs on China, as Huawei's country of origin (COO).

This was the background situation of this thesis. The thesis aims at shedding light on new possible insights in the field of political consumerism related to cybersecurity. A literature review prior to this thesis did not encompass much in this field, as it is a newly emerging topic. To obtain new data, 7 student-respondents (2 from Denmark, 2 from the Netherlands, 2 from the UK and 1 from the USA) from Aalborg University underwent semi-structured interviews. The interviews encompassed two parts: the first part analysed Huawei's advertisement published after the scandal broke out, the second part focused on China as COO, international and domestic of China and Western countries and the possible impact of politics on Huawei.

The analysis revealed a couple of following insights. Firstly, the respondents indicated that Huawei has a brand image of a high-tech company with reasonable prices of its products. But, the more they felt involved in the interview, the more they felt concerned about the scandal itself. Secondly, the data have shown a discrepancy in consumer behaviour. While the respondents felt anxious about being possibly spied on by a country in case of a 5G network (China), they willingly admitted not-minding handing over the data to a private company. However, the consumers are rather afraid of the notion being possibly spied on than afraid of the Chinese government itself. Lastly, the statements of female respondents revealed patterns that resonate with critical consumption.

All-in-all, the used theory illuminated new possible insights that may enhance the political consumption theories in relation to cybersecurity.

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Introduction

Starting in November 2018, a debate sparkled across media in Western countries. Chinese smartphone manufacturer and technological giant Huawei has been marked as a potential threat due to a new law that requires Chinese based companies to hand over the transferred data to the Chinese government upon a request.

Some governments voiced their concerns over cybersecurity in their countries since Huawei components were used in national communication systems. Canada has arrested Huawei's CFO Meng Wanzhou in relation to that, the UK and New Zealand governments have suspended using those systems and Huawei also lost future contracts on building the 5G network in those countries (BBC, 2019b). The USA stated that if Germany is not stopping using the Huawei systems, the confidential information transferring will be ceased (Fazzini, 2019). The most recent, the Netherlands followed the steps of the UK and did not allow Huawei to install a 5G network in Dutch telecommunication (Meijer & Sterling, 2019). All-in-all, it seems that Huawei may have lost the trustworthiness on the governmental levels in the Western countries based on politics in its country-of-origin.

Nevertheless, these political issues do not seem to bother regular customers. Huawei itself aims to be the biggest smartphone seller worldwide and to raise its market share by 10% to 30% in 2019 (Kawakami, 2019). This claim is supported by numbers Richter (2019) from Statista.com, which demonstrate that Huawei has almost surpassed Apple in 2018 and increased the sales by 50 million smartphones annually. Furthermore, discussions of Huawei Facebook pages are seemingly calm as well as the Reddit forums. Although, one can find Reddit discussions on topics related to Huawei in the US they are rather discussing the political situation than smartphone security.

To wrap it up, regardless of the scale of the political issue in Western countries, it could be a great opportunity to study attitudes of Western consumers towards possible espionage on their privacy. Based on numbers, Huawei is confident enough claiming to become the biggest smartphone company worldwide. Since from national politics stemmed problems of Huawei, one may assume that Huawei consumers may incline to politically-motivated consumption patterns.

Considering the fact, that social networks were not discussing much Huawei being a threat to cybersecurity of consumers but rather politics between the US, UK and New Zealand, one may find a parallel here. In fact, the consumers may perceive Huawei as an

ambassador of China in a way. Therefore, one should ask whether the political situation among Western countries and China matter to the consumers.

PF: How do Western students react to Huawei's attempts of fixing its brand image, how do they view the influence of politics of China and Western countries on Huawei's brand image and how does this contribute to prevailing understandings of politically-motivated brand consumption?

This thesis aims to find out whether the Huawei scandal follows the contemporary presumptions of politically-motivated literature. As mentioned above, the whole scandal is related to the cyber security of data. That means, the thesis may develop new insights in this field, as this could be one of the first scandals of its kind. The theoretical background should illuminate the meanings that occurred in the analysis.

Structure of the thesis

Based on the introduction, this thesis aims at developing new or updating already-existing insights for political consumption on the Huawei's scandal with data security. As mentioned in the Introduction, there were not that many reactions on social networks. Therefore, the author decided to interview AAU students to learn, how they perceive the whole situation and how do they react to that. Moreover, Huawei comes from China., which is one of the most populated and growing countries in the world nowadays. Moreover, their politics are built solely on the Communist Party of China and Western countries are dealing with China a few issues (e.g. human rights, surveillance of Chinese citizens, suppression of Uyghurs etc.).

In order to gather as much relevant data as possible, the following structure has been compiled. The project begins with methodology, then it moves to Huawei's history and literature review followed by data collection, data analysis, discussion and conclusion. Each of the thesis chapters is briefly described below following the order as they are in the thesis.

Methodology

The methodology has been chosen in accordance with the purpose of this thesis. A qualitative research design seemed to be the best fit, as the thesis aims at developing new or evolving already-existing knowledge of political consumption. Based on this, the semi-

structured interviews were conducted in order to obtain rich data. Those interviews followed the interview guides, which can be found in the methodology section as well. The interview guides were divided into two parts, as the author needed rich data and address each part of the research question separately.

The collected data were analysed by using thematic analysis pursuing interpretivist epistemology and constructivist ontology. The themes derived from the data became cornerstones for the following comparison with the reviewed literature in the Background section. Luckily enough, this structure of methodology allowed us to obtain new insides to the literature.

Background

The Background section combines a brief description of the Huawei company, excerpt of the law and literature review related to branding and political consumerism.

The section starts with an overview of Huawei's history and background, the scope of the smartphone market, followed by an explanation of Article 7 from Chinese National Intelligence Law, that has put Huawei in the spotlights of media and politics. Then the chapter turns to more academical review of the literature. It further consists of chapters related to politically-motivated consumption of brands; brand and its country of origin; brand image, identity, culture value and equity; brand avoidance, boycott and anti-consumption; brand-spill-over and negative publicity of brand.

Even though some of the chapters might not seem related to problem formulation and political consumerism, the author considers all of them important. Their importance lies in the delimiting the terms (e.g. brand image, identity, equity, culture) for thesis purposes.

Data collection

At the beginning of this chapter, one can find a table of interviewees the underwent the interviews. The table also contains data on their gender, age, study programme and brand of their mobile phone. Furthermore, the data collection chapter delivers an overview of the answers from the interviews. Each grand-tour question summarizes it's the most dominant answers, variations from the dominant questions and reasons for the variations.

Data analysis

Following the thematic analysis, the overview of themes and their meanings is in the data analysis chapter. The thesis achieved to distinguish approximately 14 codes and 5 themes that were further used in the discussion.

Discussion

The aim of the discussion section was to compare the obtained data from the interviews with the reviewed literature. Furthermore, a few new concepts were delivered and suggestions for further research.

Methodology

This research builds upon the current situation around the international company Huawei that poses a probable threat to nations and end-users. The problem formulation of this thesis implies to shed light on several terms and may deliver on new insights in brand image and political consumption studies. Henceforth, the methodology has been chosen in accordance with the possible delivery of as many new insights as possible.

PF: How do Western students react to Huawei's attempts of fixing its brand image, how do they view the influence of politics of China and Western countries on Huawei's brand image and how does this contribute to prevailing understandings of the role of political issues in consumption?

Figure 1 Problem formulation of this project

Research design

As mentioned in the previous section, this thesis should enhance already-existing or develop new insights for theories regarding political consumerism. The reason beyond this decision is the settings of the scandal. Referring to the text above, the Huawei scandal is present right now and still evolving. It encompasses the problematics of global data security, which may influence both countries and citizens. On the global scale, humankind probably experiences one of the first scandals that would combine data security, politics, consumption and clash one of the biggest countries in the world – China. There is not much existing literature on data security and political consumption, therefore, this thesis

could, in fact, improve the already-existing models or establish new concepts of this kind. To do so, it is necessary to employ *a qualitative research design.* By doing so, the author can generate new ideas for models of political consumption.

In conjunction with the qualitative research design, qualitative *semi-structured interviews* were utilized. As mentioned above, the purpose is to gain new insights for the political consumerism theory due to the new type of crisis. Henceforth, the interview guides were adjusted accordingly. After collecting initial data (see Table 1), three Huawei advertisements issued in the time of emerging scandal served as a point of departure. Subsequently, the topic of the interview turned to the politics of China, consumption of Chinese products and the politics of Western countries and China. As it turned out, this combination made the interviewees talk.

All of the interviewees were 7 Aalborg University students, aged 21-31, coming from Western countries. They all underwent interviews via Skype that followed the interview guide mentioned above.

The obtained data were analysed by thematic analysis. The emerged themes from data were subsequently put into the context of the interviews and followingly compared with reviewed literature and some insights.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews of Western AAU students should work well for the purposes of the qualitative research design of this thesis. Generally, students were chosen because of their early-adoption of smartphones, ability to find information and their higher willingness to participate in activisms. Moreover, the choice of students based on their Western nationality was intentional for the following purposes:

- Western countries such as the UK, the USA, Denmark and the Netherlands are/were actively dealing with Huawei as a possible 5G network provider
- Western countries took similar standpoint when it comes to politics towards China and Huawei (according to empirical texts)

Having mentioned the semi-structured interviews – those were chosen because they provide the interviewer with a possibility to steer the interview in case, there were some new patterns emerging (Bryman, 2016). Kvale (2007) stresses that success of the semi-structured interviews lies not only on the topics covered but on the 'second questions' – explanatory questions asked immediately after interviewee answer (e.g. what do you

think about it, how did you feel about that, etc.). Moreover, McIntosh & Morse (2015) explained semi-structured interviews should be suitable for politically engaged topics because the participants may be interested in enhancing their live-environment.

Interview guides in theory

Semi-structured interviews are built upon interview guides. Those are guidelines of an interview that encompass topics that should be discussed during the interview. (Morgan & Guevara, 2008) elaborated on that and defined topic-based and question-based interview guides. The topic-based guides should help the interviewer to keep track of the topics that have been covered during the interview, whereas question-based ones are to frame those topics in specific questions. Therefore, interview guides for semi-structured interviews serve only to keep the topics in mind. Nuances to the order of topics and/or elaboration on a particular topic are subject to change per certain interviews. As Bryman (2016) claims, this is one of the advantages of semi-structured interviews – one can gather required data and may obtain a deeper knowledge of some of the topics.

In order to retrieve some extra information from the semi-structured interviews, Kvale (2007) suggest translating the questions/topics from academic to vernacular language in order to maintain comfortable settings. Following Kvale (2007), (Morgan & Guevara, 2008) use the terms of grand-tour questions and mini-tour questions, where grand-tour questions contain the whole topic (e.g. What do you think about Huawei?) and mini-tour questions are more specific (e.g. What is it about this Huawei's advertisement that makes you/makes you not like it?). Kvale (2007) describes the mini-tour questions as 'an art of second questions', which may provide more specific answers.

Some may argue that Kvale (2007) distinguishes more sorts of questions than Morgan & Guevara (2008), but for purposes of interview guide description, the reader will be introduced only to grand-tour questions and topics. Probing questions, follow-up questions and others can be powerful tools, those will not be a subject to this chapter as they appear based on the situation.

As described below, the first part of the interview encompassed rather the empirical part, where the advertisements, mobile phones and the Huawei brand were discussed. In the second part, the interview focused rather on topics that had arisen from the literature review. By combining those two approaches, the author expected to gather data across

both parts of the interview, since the first part consisted of real-life topics. Employing this approach could reveal the data, that would be lost just by asking theory-based questions.

Interview guides of this thesis

In order to address the first two parts of the problem formulation, the interview guide was divided into two parts. Each of them addresses the specific part of the problem-formulation question. Hence, those two parts of the problem formulation have its own interview sub-guide. The last part exploring new implication to the political consumption literature will be subject to the discussion part. The presentation of interview sub-guides follows the order of questions in the problem formulation.

Part 1: How do Western students react to Huawei's attempts of fixing its brand image…

Originally, this part was supposed to evaluate the marketing efforts of Huawei, but the focus of the thesis has later on shifted towards political consumerism. The author has anyway decided to keep this part in the thesis due to the following reason. It tuned out that it worked as an initial ice-breaker and the interviewees more willing to talk when they could lean on a real case.

Central to this part were three Huawei advertisements from English-speaking countries. Those advertisements from the UK, USA and New Zealand may be attempting to fix Huawei's public brand image. These three advertisements were published on the Huawei's websites for each country and/or published in the newspaper (USA) or displayed on billboards (New Zealand).

All those three Huawei advertisements target the culture of those countries in various ways. New Zealand advertisement targets national rugby team called All Blacks with a claim that: '5G without Huawei is like rugby without New Zealand', the advertisement from the United Kingdom refers back to the industrial revolution and the US advertisement tackles fear. As per Sederholm (2017), fear is a part of contemporary American culture and may stem from experience gained in modern history.

Based on this, one may expect that interviewees might feel touched by the whole situation. As per the grand-tour question, it is expected to touch upon:

- A general overview of Huawei scandal

    This encompassed how much do interviewees know about the scandal and to what extent do they follow it.

- Huawei's brand image before and after the advertisements

  Prior to the interviews, the interviewees received the advertisement and were asked to summarize and write down their opinion on Huawei before opening the file with the advertisements. Then, they should open the file, go through the advertisements, pick something the most striking to them and evaluate the advertisements. Then, all the ideas were discussed and elaborated on their ideas during the interview.

- Personal opinions on those advertisements as on an attempt to fix the brand image

  This was the starting point of the conversation on brand image. It turned out this to be the moment when the interviewees got rid of their shyness and expressed their feelings fully.

- Cultural implications of the advertisements

  The author used the opportunity of discussing the advertisements to dig a bit deeper. Henceforth, the talk included the cultural implications that might be stemming from the advertisements.

Part 2: How do they view the influence of politics of China and Western countries on Huawei's brand image…

The current politics of China is rather a maxim for the Chinese law that requires submitting of users' data to the Chinese government upon request. Based on this law a couple of events happened that destabilized the international relations between China and Western countries. Academically, this part of problem formulation refers back to the brand, COO, political consumerism literature. At this point, it seems possible, that COO brand image spill-over causes damage the brand image of a company. Based on this implication from literature, the following topics were subject to the interviews:

- Interest in international politics

  This grand-tour question was supposed to delimit interviewee's level of engagement in politics. Moreover, the ways of following politics were discussed.

- Chinese domestic and international politics and its influence on consumption

  As the bullet-point above suggests, this grand-tour question specifically targeted Chinese politics from international and domestic politics. Since the scope of answers could be broad, the interview rather focused on what interviewees do

actually know about Chinese politics because there could a hidden trigger for political consumerism.

- China and its brand image as COO

  The theorem of COO encompasses all aspects of a country's characteristics. Based on Schroeder (2009), China used to focus on mass production for low prices, which resulted in a broken brand image. The trustworthiness of Chinese products crumbled for their low-quality and underpaid labour. Therefore, the centrally-directed communist economic model had to shift a bit in order to regain the COO brand of China back on track. The author expected this to be a crucial part, as the interviewees had most likely encountered a Chinese product in the past.

- Western countries and their international politics/politics towards China

- China vs Western countries in terms of consumption

  The last two questions discussed the current state of Western countries towards China in term of politics and consumption. The aim was to address the international politics of their home country and/or of Western countries in general because of possible discrepancies – the import of Chinese products is increasing to Western countries while Western countries fight China economically (e,g, trade tariff from the US) (China.org.cn, 2019).

Given these interview guides, one may expect to obtain new implication for political consumption literature.

Sampling of interviewees

Following McIntosh & Morse (2015) who suggest purposive sampling for semi-structured interviews. They emphasize that purposive sampling allows choosing interviewees with 'particular experiences, perspectives, or expertise, and not because they are demographically representative of the larger population' (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Henceforth, a researcher may choose the best-fitting interviewees available to obtain the most relevant data. The sampling of interviewees was decided upon following the research of empirical data.

Considering all the previous facts, 2 Danish, 2 Dutch, 2 UK and 1 US student were interviewed for the purposes of this thesis, as those countries were actively tackling the Huawei-related issues. One more condition for sampling was that interviewee was an English- language user.

Research strategy, epistemology and ontology

Given that this project is a qualitative study, employing semi-structured interviews of international AAU students, the research strategy, epistemological and ontological stances were taken accordingly.

Bryman (2016) suggests that deductive study rather tests theory whereas inductive study delivers a new piece of theory. Since the thesis does not strictly claim to neither to deliver new theory nor test the previous theory, the thesis is strategically somewhere in between. Henceforth, the best fit for this thesis seems to be the *iterative* research strategy. It allows 'weaving back and forth between the data and theory' (Bryman, 2016). In fact, this may be very beneficial while searching for new implications to existing theory and adjusting the interview guides in the process in order to collect the best data possible.

From the epistemological point of view, this research leans towards *interpretivism*. de Vries (2005) accepts the existence of multiple worlds and argues that those worlds are made of subjective constructions. In other words, interpretivists believe, that a human makes sense of the world by himself. Furthermore, interpretivists aim for understanding the world by analysing of those different realities. By doing so, a new theory may emerge (de Vries, 2005).

By reason of inspiring by interpretivism, this project utilizes the *constructivist* ontology. Bryman (2016) believes that constructionism is based on social actors who are the developers of the meaning of a phenomenon. Moreover, Watters (2014) explains, that constructionism aims to investigate one phenomenon, in particular, allows research to incorporate several perspectives of the phenomenon and to develop an interpretation of the phenomenon.

These approaches should allow this thesis to shed the light on interpretations of Huawei's attempts to fix its brand image, to understand the role of politics in the case and it may deliver a new meaning of politics in the consumption.

Data analysis

The data gathered in the interviews will be analysed in accordance with the principles of thematical analysis. The thesis follows Atkinson (2015), who employed the thematic analysis in tandem with interviews for political consumerism research. Thus, thematic analysis is expected to work similarly in this case.

Generally, the thematic analysis searches for themes, which are categories that are appearing from the text (Bellamy, 2018). Clarke & Braun (2017) also point out that the aim of thematic analysis is 'to identify and interpret key (…) features of data guided by research question'. Referring back to epistemology, this aspect supports the use of interpretivism in conjunction, since both thematic analysis and interpretivism aim for interpreting data. Moreover, they argue, that thematic analysis suits well inductive and deductive research design. Henceforth, it should work with iterative research design as well.

Clarke & Braun (2017) claim that codes are like atoms of themes. According to them, codes acquire the interesting segments of text – similarly to open coding. For codes derivation, Bryman (2016) advanced to search for searching reoccurring answers, similar and different answers, theory-related answers but also for missing data that theory provides but interviewees did not mention. Later on, the codes are grouped to bigger units - themes.

In the case of this thesis, the interviews were recorded, and the author listened to them a couple of times. While listening, he strove to extract the most important part of the answer and marked them to the Excel sheet. As Bryman suggests, the answers have mostly kept the way the interviewees said them. Furthermore, each of the grand-tour questions has been summarized as well.

Memos

Memos are researcher's notes taken during the data collection and analysis. Those consist of meta-ideas that might eventually help reach a better conclusion of a project. Memos may serve as tools, to begin with searching for themes, as utilized in this research (Bryman, 2016). In this case, the author utilized memos to collect new insights from interviews that might be lost in the themes.

Reflection on methodology

All-in-all, to employ thematic analysis should be beneficial for the following reasons. First, it allows the combination with chosen epistemology and ontology. Second, scholars suggest that thematic analysis fits well with both data-driven and theory-driven approach to analysis. Therefore, it should comply with an iterative approach as well. Third, as per Clarke & Braun (2017), thematic analysis has been embraced for its flexibility and

involvement of the author in the data analysis. As this is an interpretative and constructions thesis, to involve the author in the analysis is a logical necessity.

On the other hand, the author may be defining themes that other researchers would do. Therefore, the results would vary as well.

The interpretivist epistemology with constructivist ontology allows to explain the data by the researcher on one hand, when bringing new insights for theory, the researcher might consider the less hands-on approach and leave it for critical realism. Coglan & Brydon-Miller (2014) suggested that critical realism understands that people are creators of their lives but are limited by the social environment at the same time. This might be useful but interpretivism allows to understand it and dig deeper in the terms of the meaning. Interpretivism is not satisfied with acknowledging the barriers, it should explain them (Malmi, 2011).

The choice of interviewees has been done based on their nationality and convenience sampling. Their knowledge of the Huawei case might be limited. However, the fact the interviewees knew the author and vice versa might have been helpful as they might be less stressed about being interviewed.

Background

A brief history of Huawei

Huawei was founded in 1987 by Ren Zhengfei as a consultancy company for foreign trade. In 1997, the company first entered the global market with the first phone of their own manufacturing (SuccessStory, 2019). In 2004, Huawei entered the European market with a 3GSM mobile phone. Afterwards, Huawei became a holder of a few global firsts. For example, in 2011, Huawei introduced the global first cloud-enabled smartphone, in 2013, they presented the first 4GLTE smartphone and in 2019, Huawei unveiled the world's first 5G chipset (Huawei, 2019).

Based on the evidence, Huawei seems to strive for No.1 in the world's mobile technology and history suggests the same. In 1999, Huawei opened its first research and development centre in India and launched cooperation with IBM that lasted until 2003. Moreover, it was the first supplier of a 5G communication network to Norway (SuccessStory, 2019).

From its own beginnings, that company claimed to be fully privately-held but allegations of the founder being in close ties with the Chinese government has never been fully forgotten. Mr Zhengfei has been claimed to be a Chinese Liberation Army officer and a member of the Chinese Communist Party (Kuo & Lyons, 2018).

The size of the Huawei market share

Even though the scandal is primarily wrapped around 5G network installations, the data security of Huawei smartphones has been called into question by media as well.

According to Workman (2019), China exported approximately 50% of all the smartphones manufactured around the world. Moreover, among five top global smartphone companies are three of them Chinese brands - Huawei, Xiaomi Tech and ZTE – with Huawei being the biggest one (Workman, 2019). According to Deloitte's Global Mobile Consumer Trends report, more than 80% of all people in developed and developing countries owned a smartphone in 2017 (Wigginton, Curran, & Brodeur, 2017) and in 2018 more than 90% of adults aged 18-54 (Malmlund, Suortti, Behnk, & Klein, 2018). Based on this evidence, one may assume the size and scope of the international market that Xiaomi Tech, ZTE and Huawei target.

It is vital to point out that more than 80% of adults own a smartphone (Wigginton et al., 2017) and that more than 90% of Nordic adults aged 18-34 owns a smartphone

(Malmlund et al., 2018), one may find university students as an interesting consumer group. Firstly, most of the students will fit into the age span mentioned above. Secondly, they will be active smartphone and telecommunications users. Thirdly, they might be active even when it comes to politically-motivated activities. Based on the previous statistics, there is a high chance that students may own a smartphone made in China.

Chinese National Intelligence Law – Article 7

The media mayhem around Huawei has been caused by National Intelligence Law of the People's Republic of China and its Article 7 claiming the following:

"All organizations and citizens shall, according to the law, provide support and assistance to and to operate with the State intelligence work, and keep secret the State intelligence work that they know. The state will protect individuals and organisations that support, cooperate with, and collaborate in national intelligence work."
(Dackö & Jonsson, 2019; Kuo & Lyons, 2018)

This article came into effect in April 2017, with a revision and extension in April 2018. Dackö & Jonsson (2019) imply several issues with this article for global companies. From the citizens' point of view, the law applies to all Chinese citizens regardless of their current residence. From the organizational point of view, the law apparently encompasses all companies founded in China and parent companies from China and their subsidiaries abroad (Dackö & Jonsson, 2019).

In other words, Chinese citizens shall cooperate with Chinese intelligence work (CIW) anywhere in the world. Companies that are located and were founded in China shall cooperate with CIW. Companies that were founded in China and have subsidiaries abroad shall cooperate with CIW even from abroad. On the other hand, the Article 7 should influence only the subsidiaries of foreign companies located in China but shall not require the parental company to take part in cooperation with CIW (Dackö & Jonsson, 2019).

Given that Huawei is a parental Chinese-based brand with subsidiaries abroad, it shall comply with Article 7 of National Intelligence Law of the People's Republic of China.

Nation, politics and branding

As the story of Huawei illustrates, the problem encompasses simultaneously fields of branding, culture, national and international politics and politically-motivated consumption and country-of-origin phenomenon.

Politically-motivated consumption of brands

A consumption motivated by political actions may be manifested through boycotts (negative, brand rejection from consumption) or buycotts (positive, brand supported by consumption of its products) (Atkinson, 2015; Duman & Ozgen, 2018; Gao, 2012; Sandikci & Ekici, 2009; Stolle, Hooghe, & Micheletti, 2005).

Based on the research of Sandikci & Ekici (2009), one may assume that politically-motivated brand rejection is mostly based on the political brand culture rather than on attributes of the products. They support this claim with evidence from their own research when some Turkish interviewees rejected Coca-Cola after Cola Turka appeared on the market. The reason beyond was that Turkish consumers had a choice to buy a national product and not to support American imperialism. On the other hand, some of the interviewees have also rejected Cola Turka because of its strong religious and traditionalistic connotations. (Sandikci & Ekici, 2009).

Similar cases of consumer nationalism depicted also Gao (2012) with Chinese consumers. For instance, Chinese consumers rejected French supermarket brand Carrefour after an alleged financial donation from Carrefour's CEO to Tibet's Dalai Lama Moreover, China's government excluded the word 'Carrefour' from search engines until Carrefour in China released an announcement deprecating Tibet's independence and supporting the upcoming Olympic Games in Beijing 2012. Gao (2012) points out that international occasions (such as the Olympics) naturally triggered and amplified Chinese nationalism. Lastly, Gao (2012) mentioned that nationalism and patriotism are being strengthened due to the harm done to China by foreigners in the past.

On the other hand, Atkinson's research (2015) emphasizes the fact, that people may understand politically-motivated consumption as 'as either issue of civil liberties or issues of social welfare' and that politically-motivated consumption of brands is prevalent in European and North-American countries as a part of the political involvement – consumers may use consumption to demonstrate their political stance (Atkinson, 2015). Duman & Ozgen (2018) add that governmental organizations and general political ideology may steer the consumption to brand avoidance or boycott of brands as well. Nevertheless, governments mostly represent countries when it comes to foreign affairs, henceforth they might be mixed up with the product's country-of-origin.

As mentioned above, one of the incentives for brand consumption/avoidance may be politics. Koos (2012) points out that political consumerism can be used to support a

country or to boycott it for its political stances. Generally, political consumerism is understood as a tool to express political beliefs - in a movement, if necessary. By doing so, participants may attract the spotlight of media and enlarge the power of the movement, fighting for ethical, environmental or political values (Koos, 2012). Neilson (2010) sees political consumerism also as a tool to measure the trustworthiness of the country's politics.

Form the consumer's point of view, Strømsnes (2009) defines two theories for participation in political consumerism. According to the mobilization theory, political consumerists appear as soon as they are unable to express themselves by traditional political means (voting, participation in politics, etc.). Contradictorily, the supplement theory claims that those, who participate in political consumerism, also participate in politics by traditional means.

Strømsnes (2009) conducted research in Norway to specify the political-consumer profile, which revealed the upcoming claims. The conclusion of her research rather leans towards the supplement theory, as political consumerism appears rather among well-educated and politically active people. Based on Norwegian results, political consumerism is not influenced by the income of the participant. Strømsnes (2009) also disapproves the thesis that political consumerism is just a revolt against current political representation. Her research acknowledges that political consumerists understand that conventional ways of political participation might be the most effective but political consumerism attracts the attention and spotlight of media.

On the other hand, Koos and Neilson still understand the government to be the central target of political consumerism in terms of theory. But Ward (2008) leans rather towards Strømsnes (2009) and juxtaposes their assumptions of political consumerism to the assumption of modern days. In his opinion, global companies are, in fact, the target of political consumerism. Therefore, one can see a shift in calling for legal changes done by the government to call for changes in global corporate policy. This step may seem logical as some corporations are economical than some countries [e.g. turnover Walmart in 2017 was higher than GDP of Belgium (Belinchon & Moynihan, 2018)] and their influence is not that limited by physical borders.

Brands' country-of-origin (COO)

COO is an important concept for this thesis as consumers may find country-of-origin as an umbrella term related to stereotypes, culture, economy, welfare and politics of a certain country (Bruwer, Buller, Saliba, & Li, 2014). As Aichner (2014) emphasizes, brands should be aware that first point-of-reference that consumers use is stereotypes about brands' COO and adjust communication to that fact.

On the other hand, the COO image is a tool that may work as a brand halo, which allows a brand to utilize country characteristics in its culture and be recognizable by country and vice versa – a country known by a product (Bruwer et al., 2014; Guercini & Ranfagni, 2013). Furthermore, many scholars agreed that correlation country-brand may be mutually beneficial, in case images of brand and country positively influence one another (Aichner, 2014; Guercini & Ranfagni, 2013; Schätzle & Jacob, 2017).

Supramaniam, Gaur, Idris, & Cheng's (2018) research claims that COO helps consumers to 'recognise similar products' and 'assess product authenticity'. Madichie (2011) and Aichner (2014) further suggest that certain products simply belong to certain countries, e.g. Greece for yoghurt, Switzerland for making watches or the Netherlands for cheese. Therefore, consumers may recognize the brand of high quality by analogy – they believe that if watch-making comes from Switzerland, they are likely to be of high quality. But if watches were made in Greece, they might not be that popular as Swiss made ones (Aichner, 2014; Madichie, 2011). The similar idea suggested Mohd Yasin et al. (2007), who conducted research with electronics. They stress that countries with favourable country image help local producers to gain better brand image (Mohd Yasin et al., 2007). On the other hand, Khan & Lee (2014) twisted this existing idea of COO another way around. They claim that COO is, in fact, a compilation of product attributes that the consumer may utilize to create an image of a country in terms of 'innovation, technology, reliability, price, overall quality' (Khan & Lee, 2014). Henceforth, consumers may create an image of a country based on the products coming from that country.

All-in-all, COO is a construct as well as brands, therefore their effect depends solely on circumstances of certain country and brand (Aichner, 2014).

Importance of brands

The following section is dedicated to brands in order to delimit the basic terms in branding and their correlation with politics and overall philosophy behind this project. As described in the following chapter, a consumer plays a part in branding as well.

Generally, branding is understood to be not only a part of managerial and marketing decisions. It bears also symbolical, sociological, cultural, philosophical and political meanings of organization or individual (Holt, 2004; Ng, 2018). The political role of brands has been debated and related to income as shown by Belinchon & Moynihan (2018) explaining that earnings of Walmart were higher than the GDP of Belgium in 2017. Nevertheless, a brand is a complex construct that consists of many elements, that is being continually co-created with at least two parties – companies and consumers. Companies attempt to build a brand identity around a brand personality (Aaker, 2015; Brodie, 2017; Christensen & Askegaard, 2001; Shi, 2018), whereas the brand image is rooted in the consumer's minds (Forsyth, 2013; Stahl, Heitmann, & Lehmann, 2012).

Brand image and brand identity

As mentioned above, a consumer plays a part in a company's branding efforts. Since the problem formulation anticipates possible new implications for political consumerism of brands, the literature review on an understanding of brand image and identity was included. Moreover, the chapter on COO presumes, that COO could be a brand-image/brand-identity complement (Khan & Lee, 2014; Mohd Yasin et al., 2007).

Forsyth (2013) defines a brand image as a consumer's array of ideas of a brand including services and goods. That is a standpoint of the consumer. Contradictorily, brand identity is a value that a company chooses to put on display to represent the company to the public – the intended meaning of brand image (Brodie, 2017; Christensen & Askegaard, 2001). Scholars also emphasize that strong brand identity may be crucial for employees attraction, increase in brand loyalty and increase in product value (Christensen & Askegaard, 2001). Moreover, the brand identity includes other values such as 'symbolic, visual and physical representation with offer characteristics and brand personality' (Brodie, 2017). In fact, brand identity stems from brand personality (Shi, 2018).

According to Aaker (2015), one can understand a brand personality as a human person' personality, values and behaviour. Brand personality is a useful tool, that provides the

company with guidance with brand internal and external building and helps to the target group to easily grasp the brand (Aaker, 2015).

This may be the point, where a paradigm of COO interferes. Brand image, brand identity and brand personality may strategically build upon the brand's country-of-origin. As Madichie (2011) and Aichner (2014) emphasized, some country images pave the way for typical products coming from those countries just because of the COO (e.g. watches from Switzerland, Greek yoghurt). Both scholars also stress that COO may be a burden should the country's image be unpleasant in the required industry. If the COO influences brand image, identity and personality, it may also influence brand culture, loyalty, value and equity.

Brand culture, value and equity

Since brand culture, loyalty, value and equity stem from brand image and brand identity, one may expect COO to be influential on those values as well. Referring back to Madichie (2011) and Aichner (2014) – customers may be loyal to German car manufacturers for their precision and might be willing to spend more on German cars due to the country-of-origin and related meanings to that.

As per Holt (2004), brand culture is a set of meanings and stories around the product which is developed by firms, influencers, customers and popular culture. Whereas brand image is rather a 'flat' experience of the product, brand culture delivers the experience which one perceives. Schroeder, Borgerson, Wu, & Arbor (2015) explain that this experience mostly includes various forms of interaction with consumers (both symbolic and/or material). In this sense, brand culture co-explains company's brand identity to deliver better brand image (J. Schroeder et al., 2015). Furthermore, brand culture shapes brand in four dimensions: in terms of quality, relationships perceptions, consumer experiences and values and identities (Holt, 2004).

Holt (2004) suggests how to determine a 'healthy' brand culture based on four variables: behaviours, attitudes, relationships and equity. All of those variables assume a change in brands' value to be measured. Behaviours presume that with the increase of brand value brand loyalty increases as well. To measure brand loyalty may be tricky since there are many factors to consider when it comes to purchasing behaviour. Attitudes represent a set of values that brand consumers have in common and are gathered through market researches. Furthermore, when a brand is high in value, it may tend to build relationships

with customers, which are measured to determine brand strength. Lastly, Holt (2004) emphasizes brand equity as an immense asset of a company. Brand equity demonstrates the price at which customers stay loyal to the brand and do not care about competitive offers. The higher the brand value, the higher the brand equity (Holt, 2004).

Consumer-brand identification and disidentification

According to Bhattacharya & Sen (2003), it is crucial that consumers identify themselves with the brand image because it should help the brand to build a firm, long-lasting and purposeful consumer-brand bond. One can see consumer-brand identification from a few different perspectives, such as consumer's emotional bonding to the brand, brand's favourable halo as a part of the consumer's identity (Davvetas & Diamantopoulos, 2017), self-esteem of consumer (Lisjak, Lee, & Gardner, 2012) or other symbolic values (Wolter, Brach, Cronin, & Bonn, 2016). Therefore, brand identification could be an extension of the brand's identity. Having mentioned that, Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen (2012) argue that there are 3 aspects to be matched in order to make someone identify with a brand: the prestige of the brand, uniqueness and similar personality.

Although disidentification should be a direct antonym to identification, it does not seem to be the case of branding semantics. As Wolter et al. (2016) state, consumers may experience different kind of disidentification from a brand based on the strength of consumers' attachment to the brand. This may also mean, that consumer may not identify himself with the brand, but yet he still may be a brands' customer, e.g. due to lower price. Therefore, it is possible to experience partial identification/disidentification with the brand as the brand may just partly misinterpret the impede with the consumers' values. Having mentioned the possibilities of identification and disidentification, what could that mean for Huawei in this case? At this point, it yet remains unclear how will the respondents react during the interview. Nonetheless, their answer could be leaning full identification/disidentification or just partial identification/disidentification. Hence, their consumers' actions-taken may be on the same level as they feel to be engaged with the brand. The following chapter reveals cases of negative action towards the brand.

Brand avoidance, boycott and anti-consumption

Rindell, Strandvik, & Wilén (2014) argue that brand avoidance emerges even from moral reasons and consumers are willing to ditch a brand in case of further implications for society. Referring back to Ward (2008), who claims that global companies may 'take hits'

for their COOs, one may understand that consumers may not be in fact avoiding the brand, but the country that the brand represents. The researcher should this bear in mind why collecting and analysing data, as he might be about to define, what consumers are, in fact, avoiding.

According to Knittel, Beurer, & Berndt (2016), consumer brand avoidance means not to purchase the brand even though the brand's products are financially and physically accessible to the consumers.

Even though brand avoidance and boycott are often used interchangeably, it is vital to address the difference between those two terms. A boycotter refrains purchasing brands' products based on some current incentive or condition, as in the aforementioned case of Carrefour in China and alleged funding in Tibet. Boycotter is willing to come back to the brand after the condition has been met. Whereas, brand-avoider refrains from brand purchase from his identity reasons. One way or another, both brand avoidance and boycott occur with negative connotations to the brand, may occur simultaneously but their length differs (Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009).

When consumers face unpleasant experience with a brand, they are more likely to share that than positive comments on brand, especially on social media. (Knittel et al., 2016) One would expect that since social media are a platform where everyone can share their opinions, even with a fake identity. But Chiosa & Anastasiei's research (2018) proposes something else. It claims that consumers will disconnect their identities from the brand with negative experience rather than posting something on social media. Researchers claim that consumers must have rather a stronger incentive to post something online and inform other people of their disgrace to the brand (Chiosa & Anastasiei, 2018). Therefore, people may be silently avoiding brands.

Scholars have identified several reasons why consumers boycott or avoid brands. Firstly, it is purely based on previous experience with the brand. For instance, when the quality of the product or service is poor or the environment of the shop seems to be unpleasant (Knittel et al., 2016). Lee et al. (2009) ascertained that experiential avoidance may be rather related to abstract unmet expectations of products and service. Generally, it is the customer's own dissatisfaction based on his own experience.

Secondly, some customers do not want to be related to a brand for its symbolic connotations or for the fact that the brand is not aligned with one's personal beliefs (Lee et al., 2009). This identity avoidance was nicely depicted by a case in Chiosa & Anastasiei's

research (2018), where consumers purchasing ROM chocolate rather hid from the public when eating it or ceases purchasing it in order not to be related to the negative connotations of a brand.

Thirdly, concepts of ideology and morality fuel one's moral avoidance. Based on the literature, moral avoidance is used interchangeably with anti-consumption. However, both terms correlate with COO of the brand and consumers' connotations to COO. Consumers may use the COO to predict the quality of products, morality, ethical behaviour and also to reflect on the current political situation between consumers' country and COO (Lee et al., 2009). In fact, consumption may reflect on the animosity of 'home-country' towards iconic brands' COO, as depicted in the research of Lee et al. (2009). Researches there interviewed Pakistani consumers regarding their feelings towards McDonald's. Some of them saw consumption of McDonald's product as support of the American economy, culture, marketing and bombing – which is probably an anti-war sentiment (Lee et al., 2009).

On the other hand, Rindell, Strandvik, & Wilén (2014) suggest, that avoidance of global brands may be just an act of anti-hegemony of global brands and support of local producers. In fact, consumers may decide to deliberately consume their country's brand products, as they want to financially support their own country (Khan & Lee, 2014), such as the preference of Swedes to Swedish meat (Knittel et al., 2016).

Brand spill-over

In the previous chapter, one have discussed the issue of brand avoidance and boycott. These could be consequences of so-called brand spill-over. Generally, scholars defined brand spill-over as transferring of perceptions (mostly negative than positive) of one brand to brand's extensions (Lane & Fastoso, 2016), whole brand alliances (Herm, 2014) and to competitors' brand in case of unethical behaviour in case brands are comprehended on surface level of a brand only. (Trump & Newman, 2017). What this may mean is that if a pro-environmental consumer realizes that brand's A chocolate is made using palm oil from rain forests, he is likely to blame all other chocolate makers for that. Lane & Fastoso (2016) argue that brand spill-over from parental brand to brand extension works vice versa as well. According to Herm (2014), brand spill-over occurs when the brand transgresses (a breach of bespoken or explicitly expressed precedents in brand's relationship management}, loses trust not just for unethical reasons but also for

unfulfilled expectations that a brand had previously declared (e.g. delayed launch of a product).

This kind of literature understands brands just in the sense of companies. But what if this could apply to our problem formulation? What if, China's flawy brand image of COO influences Huawei's own brand image?

Academics found an answer to this hypothesis. They discovered a direct correlation between COO's brand image and brand image of the company. Dependent on the country, those COO and company's brand images mutually influence each other to the extent that subject admit their belonging to one another. In other words, IKEA strives to be perceived as truly Swedish by its brand colours (blue and yellow), Swedish product names and restaurant dishes – some scholars even argue that IKEA co-authors modern country's image. On the other hand, if a new German car manufacturer is founded and admits Germany as its COO, it might get a competitive advantage while entering the market due to German's history in car-making, engineering precision, politics and economic stability (Magnusson, Krishnan, Westjohn, & Zdravkovic, 2013). All-in-all, brands and COOs have a mutual relationship, from which both may benefit or not.

In relation to brand spill-over, Magnusson et al. (2013) concluded 'that brands associated with the COO of a transgressing brand are likely to experience negative effects despite having done nothing wrong.' The most important part is that the link between the brands is COO and that COO is directly connected with brands. In fact, just the spill-over of COO's brand image may then transfer the negative image on a brand in COO, regardless of the brand's identity. To put that in the China-Huawei context, if China has issued such a law, Huawei should receive a negative brand image.

Negative publicity of a brand

As Rindell, Strandvik, & Wilén (2014) noted consumers may reject a brand based on their moral reasons. Zhou & Whitla (2013) specify that: 'consumer reactions to negative (…) publicity may be rooted in their ethical principles that judge the actions leading to the publicity in terms of how it conflicts with their own sense of morality and whether they perceive the action as damaging to society as a whole.' Therefore, one could expect the scale of interviewees' reactions depending on their morals and on the possible impact of Huawei scandal on society in their minds.

Generally, Wang (2016) claims that negative publicity is a serious threat to the brand's reputation. Based on Pullig, Netemeyer & Biswas (2006), brand negative publicity appears when either value of a brand are breached (values related) or brand's performance has failed the customers for some reasons (performance related). Furthermore, Zou & Li (2016) explain that brands are understood holistically when the crises occur.

Zou & Li (2016) specified incentives when a brand will likely receive negative publicity. Brand fails when its product does not comply with required safety standards; its product. Moreover, when the brand receives negative publicity, both brand image and brand identity are at stake. Referring back to Magnusson et al. (2013), negative brand publicity can be also received due to a brand spill-over in its COO or brand spill-over of COO itself. According to Christensen & Askegaard (2001) when the brand breaches ethics, the brand identity and image are likely to dissipate in favour of boycotting or avoidance of the brand.

Theories on possible consumer reactions

This last chapter of background aims to synthesize all the main expectations for the data collection that the literature review suggests.

Based on Sandikci & Ekici (2009), one may expect political consumerism based on political brand culture. As per Duman & Ozgen (2018), people tend to mix up the 'governmental brand' with the product brand in case of trouble in the COO. Furthermore, the respondents might identify two possible targets political consumerism: either the government of global company's COO (Koos, 2012) or the global company itself as it may bear more influence that the COO itself (Strømsnes, 2009; Ward, 2008).

Based on the literature, the respondents may depict a country image based on the attributes of the products originated from that country and vice versa. Since COO-company correlation works both ways, the country's politics may, in fact, cause some damage to the company's brand image (Khan & Lee, 2014; Ward, 2008). Should this occur, consumers may abandon the company for its immoral image (moral avoidance referred to as anti-consumption), even though the company may be just suffering from brand spill over from its COO (Magnusson et al., 2013). In the case of a global company, the avoidance may occur to favour local producers (Rindell et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, consumers may identify or disidentify with the brand. Based on Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen (2012) the consumer identifies with the brand for

its uniqueness, prestige and brand personality. Disidentification occurs for not fulfilling the consumers' expectations or bad brand halo. Nevertheless, it does not necessarily mean that consumers stop purchasing the brands' products whatsoever, they might remain the brands' customers for e.g. lower price - by contrast to boycott and brand avoidance. All three terms mean to cease the consumption of the brand but they differ in length. Putting that to the context of the Huawei scandal, it would mean that:

- A respondent-boycotter would lose its consumer intentions to buy Huawei until the scandal is resolved or over.

- A respondent-brand-avoider would lose or have lost its consumer intentions to buy Huawei once forever due to Huawei's unwanted brand influence on his personal image.

Both boycott and brand-avoidance stem from similar reasons (in literature): previous experience with the brand, undesirable symbolic connotations of the brand and moral avoidance (anti-consumption). As mentioned above, moral avoidance may be related to the brands' COO (Lee et al., 2009). However, as this is a theoretical standpoint, one should expect this to be rather a precaution to possible interview outcomes. The respondents may not react this way.

These negative effects may also put the brand equity to an imbalance, as the price may no longer play a role in case of ethical breach (Holt, 2004).

Nevertheless, none of the literature above has been related to cybersecurity, data security and political consumerism together since not many publications on this topic have probably ever been published. Based on the author's research, this could be a new kind of political consumerism as it is related to politics and cybersecurity. Therefore, the thesis may shed light new consumerist patterns and this literature background is rather a starting point for the whole data collection and analysis. This is also the reason for the choice of iterative research design, as the researcher is allowed to go back and forth between the theory and discussion of newly emerged patterns.

Data collection

Interviewees

As mentioned above, the interviewees were chosen based on their nationality and on student status. All the interviews lasted approximately 30-35 minutes and interviewees had a chance to take a glance on the advertisements (Appendices 1, 2, 3). All the interviews were conducted via Skype calls from the convenience of their homes and were realised between April 24th and May 6th, 2019. Basic data on the interviewees can be found in the table below (name, age, nationality, the major and brand of their own mobile phone).

	Gender	Age	Nationality	Studies	Brand of mobile phone
Respondent 1	female	22	British	Language and International Studies	Apple
Respondent 2	male	31	Danish	Culture, Communication and Globalization	Apple
Respondent 3	male	23	British	Entrepreneurial Engineering	Huawei
Respondent 4	male	26	Danish	Culture, Communication and Globalization	Sony
Respondent 5	female	27	Dutch	Culture, Communication and Globalization	FreeTell
Respondent 6	male	28	Dutch	Culture, Communication and Globalization	Apple
Respondent 7	female	24	American	Culture, Communication and Globalization	Apple

Table 1 Basic information on the respondents

Part 1: How do Western students react to Huawei's attempts of fixing its brand image...

The Huawei advertisements

As mentioned above, the first part of the interviews was related to the Huawei advertisements, that emerged on the Huawei websites in the UK, USA[1] and New Zealand as an initial reaction to the scandal. The contents of all three advertisements are described below.

The New UK's Industrial Revolution with Huawei

The advertisement of the Huawei United Kingdom contains three central topics. First, Huawei encourages the UK to 'grow together'. In this part, Huawei refers back to its past successes and collaboration with UK universities and R&D institutions. Huawei also emphasizes that it helped to support education and to develop job opportunities.

In the second part, Huawei highlights being 100% privately-held company. Furthermore, the company stresses its contribution to secure digital infrastructure.

In the last part, Huawei summarizes its past and current operation in the UK. Huawei mentions that it has been cooperating with major telecommunication companies, investing in the UK largely and positioning itself as the largest source of investment from China. Lastly, Huawei emphasizes its support to students and study stays in China.

5G network without Huawei like New Zealand without the All Blacks

Unlike in the UK advertisement, the New Zealand one accentuates the benefits of a 5G network for New Zealand. Huawei also reminds of the past collaboration with telecommunications operator Spark on the fastest Internet connection test and supports its further usage for the Internet of Things, Virtual Reality, streaming and wireless robotics. Moreover, it claims that in case of exclusion of from building NZ's 5G network the whole building and operating process will become more expensive.

The second part is almost similar to the UK advertisement. Huawei emphasizes being privately-held and connecting over one-third of the world's population. Furthermore, the company stresses the emphasis on data and cybersecurity.

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[1] The US advertisement appeared as a full-page advertisement in the Wall Street Journal on February 28th, 2019.

The pattern repeats in the third part as well, as Huawei New Zealand depicts its activities since 2005 and cooperation with major telecommunication providers.

Don't believe everything you hear… in the USA

Comparing to the previous advertisements, the US advertisement contains a different narrative. It is a first-person open letter to the US media written by Catherine Chen – a Director of the Board at Huawei. In this personalized letter, Mrs Chen invites the US media to come to Huawei because the company has, according to her, nothing to hide.

Huawei highlights that it operates in 170 countries and works in locations where other companies did not want to go. Furthermore, it emphasizes its significance to the US market.

The interview topics: Part 1

Importance of mobile phone brand

This was an opening topic to the whole discussion in order to find out, how interviewees value the brand when it comes to purchasing of a mobile phone. To respondents 1 and 7, the brand did not seem that much as functionality was. Both, respondent 2 and respondent 3, also underlined the importance of functionality but one could see how those two men were different. Only respondent 6 highlighted the price as the main value. Respondent 2 admitted himself to be Apple enthusiast, regardless of the Apple pricing policy. On the other hand, respondent 3 admired Huawei since it offers the same technology (maybe even better) as Apple but for significantly lesser price. The similar goes for respondent 4 and respondent 5 who favour Sony.

On Huawei scandal

When it came to question "what do you know about the Huawei scandal with data security?", it rang bells to all interviewees, but nothing precisely came to their minds. Almost all of them knew something on Huawei in the USA from Mr Trump's rhetoric and about the arrest of Huawei's CFO in Canada. Only Respondent 6's was concerned mainly with the relation of Huawei and the Dutch government. Moreover, respondents 2 and 6 had a deeper knowledge of the situation as they follow worldwide news every day. On the

contrary, respondent 7 admitted she focuses on the 2020 presidential election and she read about the UK executive fired. [2]

Huawei's brand image before the scandal

Before the interview started, all interviewees had been requested to write down their sincere opinions on Huawei. After doing so, they were permitted to take a look at the advertisements. Regardless of their attitudes towards mobile brands, all of them positioned Huawei as a producer of high-quality, innovative products with an affordable price tag.

Respondent 7 based her image view on Huawei on her friends – some of them are Huawei supporters but some are reluctant to Huawei as they are afraid of their data privacy. She also pointed out that Huawei became sketchy these days. Moreover, respondent 7 would rather have a slower Internet connection than being spied on.

As a former Huawei user, respondent 5 emphasized its qualities. Nonetheless, she mentioned she hardly believes that a Chinese company can be solely privately-held. Based on the academic data for her master's thesis, almost all companies are somehow connected to the Chinese government.

Respondent 6 shares respondent 5's suspicion towards Huawei being 100% privately held. Furthermore, he based this notion of the founder of Huawei being a Chinese army engineer.

Huawei's brand image after the scandal

In this part, the advertisements were discussed from three different positions. The whole discussion always came across interviewees' personal opinions on the advertisements, cultural implication that might them from that and also if there was any shift in the brand image. All the advertisements can be seen in the Appendices section.

General opinions

Even though this part is rather evaluating marketing of Huawei, it was used a space where the researcher could mine some data that would be otherwise lost or not said explicitly.

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[2] According to BBC, the UK's former defence secretary and current council representative Gavin Williamson has been fired based on allegations that he leaked documentation for the building of 5G network to Huawei(BBC, 2019a). The news is from May 1st – the interview with Respondent 7 has been conducted on May 2nd.

Regardless of their attitude towards Huawei, the majority of the interviewees claimed the advertisements as smart or even brilliant. Nevertheless, as the interview went a bit deeper in it, the opinions started to differ. Respondent 1 acknowledged that Huawei knows its audience, but she pointed out that it is rather a CSR approach as Huawei emphasizes mainly its previous work and glosses over the main problem of data security. Respondent 2 and respondent 6 claimed the same. On the other hand, they also highlighted the professional manner of the advertisements which emphasize mainly the importance of Huawei more than anything else. Respondent 4 and respondent 5 claimed those advertisements generic and weak, as some evidence and deeper information are missing in the advertisements. Respondent 7 emphasized, that the UK and NZ advertisements were sketchy and 'normal', only the US advertisement was something new. She sees the open letter to media as preventative in order to fix their bad reputation.

Cultural implications

From the cultural point of view, the interviewees' ideas were not in line either. As per Respondent 1, employing the cultural elements in the Huawei's advertisements is smart but might be insulting at the same time, especially, when it came to its Industrial Revolution. Respondent 5 would agree with on respondent 1 on cultural elements, but she means that explanation of the situation to American media might actually worsen Huawei's brand image, as they are vague in the letter.

On the other hand, respondent 3 sees the accentuations of All Blacks and the Industrial Revolution as a smart move that might bring together the consumers as a nation. Although advertisements being generic, respondent 4 pointed out the focus on national pride. Respondent 2 claimed that this approach is supposed to make the consumer feel like 'a part of something bigger than a man'. Respondent 2, respondent 3 and respondent 4 also claimed the letter advertisement from the USA as a brilliant choice of rhetoric which was friendlier than of the current president of the USA. Conversely, respondent 6 found the letter to US media as the sincerest and argues that it helped Huawei to be seen as a bit more transparent. As per the UK and New Zealand advertisements, respondent 6 claims them weak and generic and as something you should do to connect with your target audience and polish your own image.

As per respondent 7, the notion of distrust towards media, companies and government is rather present in the US culture these days than the fear itself. She claims that all the

adverts are 'too much a bit' because they use the parts of the cultures by giving no new information.

Change in the brand image

Regarding the change in Huawei's brand image, one could not find many shifts in it. Only respondent 1 marked Huawei as less trustworthy due to missing information in the advertisements. Respondent 2 and Respondent 3 claimed that same level of likeability towards Huawei. Furthermore, respondent 3 stressed the fact, that this scandal means nothing to him since he believes that other countries and companies may be already 'spying' the same way. Respondent 5's opinion on Huawei has aggravated a bit, as she considers Huawei's ad claims weak and without any solid proof. Having mentioned, she added: 'I wouldn't be really surprised if Huawei was really spying because of China'. Also, respondent 6's opinion has not enhanced, even with lifting the veil on possible secrets of Huawei.

Conversely, Respondent 4 and respondent 7's attitude has not changed since they do not care much about the brand.

Part 2: How do current politics of China and its clash with the Western countries influence Huawei's brand image in their eyes…

The second half of the interview turned to international politics of Western countries and China and their possible influence on Huawei. The opening gambit to this part were questions related to China.

The interview topics: Part 2

Interest in international politics

To start the second part, it was vital to determine the level of knowledge of international politics. Apart from respondent 3, all of the interviewees showed even a limited degree of interest in international politics. Some of them through conventional media and/or through academic texts, as it is part of their studies or theses.

Politics of China

In terms of Chinese politics, the majority of the respondents were rather critical towards it. In general, interviewees pointed out the issues of human rights, social ranking system and communism. Based on her academic data from bachelor's thesis, respondent 1

predicts serious troubles with incoming automatization of human work and that Chinese are not that much apologetical about people losing their jobs and about social welfare generally. Respondent 2 and respondent 7 expressed their discomfort with current president Xi Jinping and with China trying to appear democratic, which is not. Respondent 4 also stressed China's position in terms of their aggressive economy which might pave the way to become a new economic superpower. Respondents 4, 5, 6, and 7 see China as a country of surveillance, based on which Respondent 6 expressed his concern on decreasing freedom.

China as COO

Several scholars have already discussed the Chinese economic expansion, which has been previously built upon low price but also lower quality. Since this project addresses the problem of a Chinese company, it might be interesting to see the point of view of the young generation in 2019. All the interviewees claimed, that the quality of 'made in China' products has risen in recent years. Respondent 7 explicitly claimed that the idea of Chinese products being cheap and bad is false these days. Furthermore, all of them agreed on the fact, that it is practically impossible not-to buy products made in China.

Both Respondent 1 and respondent 5 argued, that China as COO does not really matter for them in case of purchasing product complements (e.g. mobile phone case or screen protector) but when it comes to the product itself, they would rather prefer 'non-Chinese brand'. From all interviewees, only respondent 2 claimed to willingly avoid Chinese products, if possible, due to their safety and chemicals used in production.

Politics of Western countries towards China

Having mentioned this grand-tour question, almost all the respondents started with the USA and Mr Trump. The majority of them agreed that China is seen as a threat in terms of its growing economy, pollution, global (cyber) security and human rights in the eyes of Western countries. According to them, Western countries point to China and strive to find an alternative. Respondent 5 stressed the major difference between China and Western countries, as the West is more liberal on politics.

In respondent 6's opinion, Western countries may see China as a neo-colonial power, that expands its power in weaker countries (e.g. African countries). According to him, the Chinese government provides them with loans that are bigger than the weaker economies can afford to pay back. By doing so, China strengthens its position among them, and

Western countries see it a potential danger. Respondent 7 also underlined the Chinese investments in Africa and the general interdependence of China and other countries. According to her, a relationship with China is something that 'a country has to have' in modern days.

Western countries vs China in terms of consumption

Following the previous question, the interviewees claimed that politics of Western countries is redolent of bipolarity in their actions. On one hand, they despise China for being a communist country, not caring about social welfare and human rights and being aggressive in terms of domestic politics (e.g. social ranking system).

On the other hand, Western countries keep business ties with China. Respondent 1 found that fact frustrating but respondent 3 compared this kind of 'bipolar' politics to international approach towards Saudi Arabia. According to him, countries buy oil from Saudis regardless of their politics anyway. Respondent 6 positioned this as developed interdependence of the Western countries on China and vice versa. He compared to the relation of European countries towards Russia – European countries sort of tolerate Russian expansion to Crimea because they are dependent on Russian gas and Russia needs its consumers of the gas.

As per respondent 2, one must distinguish, whether consumers buy cheap clothes from China or whole 5G infrastructure for the whole country. According to him, in case of cheap clothes, it is just a regular 'textbook' market behaviour when consumers turn to the cheapest offer with the best use of it. Respondent 1 and respondent 5 unintentionally confirmed with this claim in China as COO grand-tour question above.

Respondent 4 compared the Huawei situation to H&M scandal with inappropriate text on a T-shirt and African boy wearing it. He claims that people threatened not to ever buy H&M again, but their public approval ratings are the same as before the scandal.

Actions of China and impact on brand image of Huawei

Lastly, the discussion the Huawei's brand image in relation to Chinese politics. The respondents admitted, that Huawei is the obvious target as telecommunication company that has access to a huge amount of data. Respondent 3 claimed that: 'people are caring more about the company and impact of the products; therefore, Huawei is the obvious target. China just tries to protect the party'. Respondent 7 though, that Shenzen is close to

Hong Kong and some people might not be affected by Article 7. Nevertheless, in her opinion, Huawei will have to follow whatever the Chinese government says.

Contradictorily, respondent 2 found a resemblance in so-called Bribery Act of UK, that has a similar effect, as Article 7. Hence, he claims that if there is damage, it will fade away soon.

Respondent 4 summed up the Huawei scandal followingly: 'If the US keeps accusing Huawei this way, it will probably damage them in the long run. But their innovation will help them to turn it around.'

In accordance with respondents 1 and 5, Huawei lost on the trust of the brand image. All like Huawei's phones, but would feel insecure about owning them.

Furthermore, respondent 6 represents the fraction of interviewees, who would not mind buying the Huawei phones but does not trust Huawei in terms of 5G network due to Article 7.

All-in-all, the clear majority of respondents regarded Huawei as a high-tech company with affordable prices, nonetheless, with the Chinese government in their back losing its trustworthiness.

Data analysis

Following the methodological section, this thesis utilizes thematic analysis. As mentioned above, this kind of theme-derivation provides the researcher with openness to the data. The categories emerged from the coding will be re-grouped to larger themes with a common denominator.

Overall tendencies of answers

Before jump to the fragmentation of the data to codes and themes, this chapter summarizes the main tendencies of the answers. Part 1 and Part 2 are discussed below separately.

Part 1

As mentioned above, Part 1 consisted mainly of discussion of the Huawei advertisements and the Huawei brand image. Therefore, it was mainly about respondents' opinion on Huawei.

In the beginning, the interviewees understood Huawei as a price-friendly, high-tech company, which was regarded as a competitor of regular mobile phone manufacturers (i.e. Sony, Samsung or as a cheaper alternative to Apple).

Then, the interview proceeded to the Huawei scandal, on which people had not much information. But when it came to the discussion of the advertisement, respondents divided themselves into 2 groups by their opinions. The first group regarded the advertisements as smart and well-thought. On the other hand, the second group considered the advertisement as generic. Both groups, however, found peculiar the notion, that Huawei is probably purposely omitting some information. Moreover, more than half of the interviewees called into question of Huawei being 100% privately held despite being located in China.

At this point, it is necessary to address the fact, that a shift in respondents' opinion on Huawei occurred throughout the interviews. The respondents have gotten more concerned about the issue as the discussion progressed.

Part 2

Part 2 referred to the discussion of China in terms of politics, COO and its position towards western countries. Before discussing those topics, the respondents stated their level of interest in international politics. All the interviewees claimed some degree of interest in international politics and gathered data either from empirical or academical or both.

Regarding Chinese politics, respondents mostly regarded China to be a communist dictatorship of the current president Xi Jinping. Furthermore, respondents emphasized surveillance over their own citizens and aggressive international economy. As it came to China as COO, most of the interviewees claimed a huge improvement in the quality and technology of 'Made in China' products.

Considering the Chinese and Western international politics, the respondents depicted China as a country that aims to become a superpower by any means. Moreover, some of them saw it as a neo-colonialist power, since China 'heavily invests' in the third-world countries. Nevertheless, they described it as a must-have relationship for countries due to Chinese economic power. Nonetheless, they also addressed a bipolar politics of Western countries which, on one hand, criticize China for human rights violation and on the other hand continue the business with China. At the end of this part, the respondents expressed their opinion on the impact of Chinese political actions on Huawei. Most of them saw Huawei as an obvious target for consumers without having done anything wrong. Nevertheless, some of them distrusted Huawei based on its founder, who used to be a Chinese army engineer.

Codes

Table 2 consists of codes found in the interviews. It is followed by an explanation to each of the open codes. The codes refer to both Huawei advertisements and to the Huawei scandal and international politics as well. Therefore, all the codes stemmed from both parts of the interview.

Codes
Indifference
Insecurity
Fondness to Brands
Smartness
Unity
Credibility lost
Missing information
Technology
Growth
United States of America
Impact of China
Transparency
Surveillance

Table 2 Codes

Indifference

Although the vast majority of interviewees recognized this scandal as problematic, they seemed indifferent towards it. They mostly argued that this problem will either fade away or other companies and countries are already doing that.

Insecurity

Insecurity was a crucial topic throughout both parts of the interviews. In relation to Huawei, cyber security was discussed and in terms of politics, the security of economies, public and army was mentioned.

Fondness to Brands

Quite interesting is the fact, that some of the interviewees were fans of specific brands. Both Danish interviewees, one British and one Dutch admitted their fondness towards one brand.

Smartness

Despite their Huawei's brand image in their mind, interviewees admitted the elegance and cleverness of the advertisements. They expect them to work, even though some of the interviewees found the advertisements 'generic'.

Unity

By respondents 2, 3, 4 and 5 the advertisements targeted the cultural values (All Blacks, the Industrial Revolution and fear) in order to unite the nation and support Huawei.

Credibility lost

Even though the interviewees considered the advertisements done well, the credibility of Huawei and China were at stake. Apart from respondent 3, all of them at least partially lost belief either in Huawei or in China.

Missing information

Quite a few interviewees noticed, that the advertisements were missing information on the data security problem. Rather than addressing this problem directly, Huawei emphasized its previous and future collaboration with local companies and their key values.

Technology

One could find mentions on technology in the description of Huawei's brand image. Almost all interviewees positioned Huawei as a technological star with reasonable price.

Growth

This code was prevalent especially in the 'Politics of China' and 'China as COO' grand-tour questions. The interviewees often mentioned the economical, quality and power growth in their answers.

United States of America

It is vital to point out, that almost all non-US interviewees linked the Huawei data security scandal to the USA or president Donald Trump. Sometimes, they knew more about the situation in the US than in their own country.

Impact of China

One way or another, the interviews revealed the impact of China on Huawei. According to the respondents, they would reconsider buying Huawei's products themselves, should the allegations with Chinese Intelligence Services proved right.

Different Approach to COO of Male/Female Respondents

One of the codes that emerge from the data addresses a slight difference in approach of male and female respondents. All three female respondents claimed, that they do not care much about Chinese products in case they are only product complements (e.g. they do not care about COO in case of mobile phone cover but when it comes to mobile phone itself,

they do care). Moreover, all female respondents underlined human rights and surveillance of the Chinese government over their citizens.

Surveillance

With regard to China, one of the most prevalent topics of the interview was the Chinese civil surveillance and social ranking system. The respondents disapproved those actions and it made them feel insecure.

Themes

Based on Bryman (2016) and Clarke & Braun (2017), once the codes are established, they were synthesized to themes. Codes were grouped together based on their contextual meaning and possible theoretical kinship. Some of the codes became a basis for two themes due to their semantics. All-in-all, five main themes were identified. In the following paragraphs, each of the themes has its description and its origin. For better imagination, please see Figure 2 Diagram of Codes and Themes below.[3]

Huawei's pros

The theme of Huawei's pros consists of 4 codes. In the first part of the interviews, some of the respondents depicted as a smart company with high-end technology that strives to bring people together for a technological future. Moreover, one of the respondents was a Huawei supporter, which is the reason for the link between the code *Fondness of a Brand* and *Huawei's pros.*

Feeling Indifferent about Huawei

Seemingly a small theme which sneaked through the interviews as the respondents admitted, they do not care much about Huawei. As the following themes will show, it is not because of a lack of responsibility for their personal data. Some of the claim, that other companies and government 'spy' the same way, other that this is just a temporal crisis which will disappear. Lastly, a couple of respondents were enthusiasts of a different brand (Apple or Sony).

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[3] Each of the codes bears the colour of the theme that the code mainly belongs to. As some of the codes are related to more themes, their additional connection bears the colour of the theme linking to.

Political Consumerism of Female

At this point, a slight difference in approach to COO and political consumerism was found between men and women. Women seem to care more about the political situation and country of origin if the product price is higher and if they buy the main product, not the product complement. As depicted in Figure 2, this theme includes the code of Surveillance as well due to the aforementioned reason.

Distrust towards Huawei

Unlike feelings of indifference about Huawei, this theme unites more codes. Generally, respondents found it hard to believe Huawei its rhetoric. The respondents mostly condemned Huawei for no clarification on the scandal so far. Moreover, they would feel insecure in case Huawei was responsible for the 5G network installation. As shown in the diagram below, the possible impact of China and surveillance played a significant role as well.

The Politics of China and the US and Their Impact on Huawei

This theme combines the politics of China and the US from a few different perspectives. First, most of the respondents disagree with Chinese politics in terms of human rights and the upcoming social ranking system. Some of them even expressed their thought of being spied on the way as China will on its own citizens, therefore, they do not trust Chinese politics.

Second, a clear majority of respondents agreed that the Chinese economy is booming and growing in terms of volume but in terms of quality as well. As per respondents, they mostly consider Chinese products to be on the same level as Western products for an affordable price. This description fitted well with Huawei as well.

Third, quite a few respondents commenced their talk on Chinese politics with US politics towards China and trade tariff imposed by the president of the USA. Respondents used it as a point of reference around which they shaped their opinions. Interestingly, some of them did not know about the political stance on Huawei in their home countries but they knew about the US.

Lastly, the interviewees concluded with the claim that they find it hard to believe Huawei because of vague transparency of Chinese government and Huawei itself. None of them, in fact, explained sufficiently the situation.
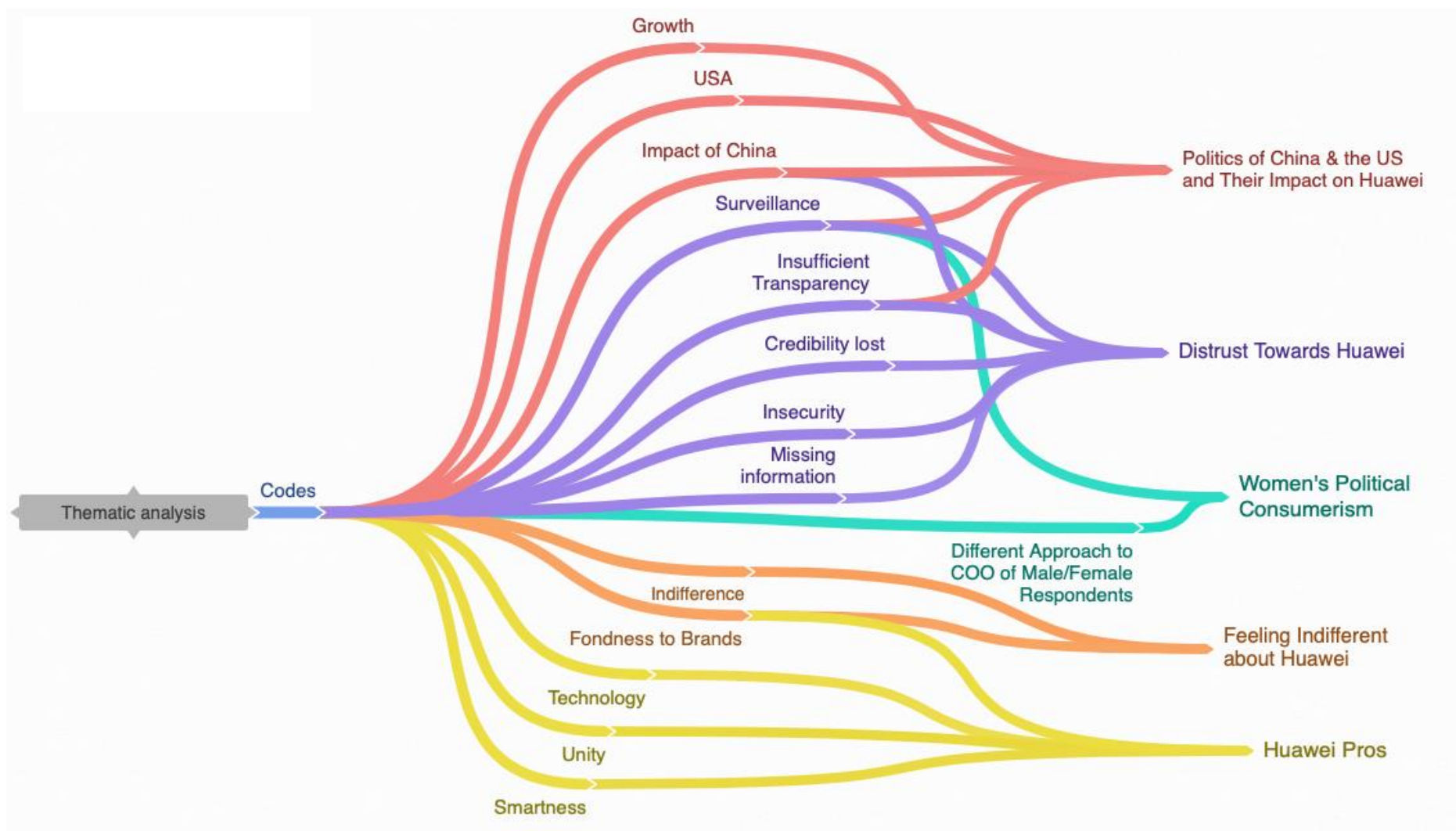
Figure 2 Diagram of Codes and Themes (the most right) In the Thematic Analysis

Discussion

The discussion has been divided into a discussion of findings and discussion of themes in literature. As the name suggests, the first part encompasses the findings from the interviews. The second part refers back to the literature and compares it with obtained themes.

Discussion of findings

As described in the analysis, one may find a couple of discrepancies in the obtained data. On one hand, respondents do acknowledge Huawei as a global well-working technological company. On the other hand, they feel insecure when it comes to the spying by China – Huawei's country of origin. This subchapter is addressing those inconsistencies in the following lines.

First, it turned out that respondents see Huawei's brand image in a rather positive light. A clear majority of them mentioned, Huawei appears to them as a high-end technology company whose products are reasonably priced. This could be assigned to Huawei's COO. Reasonable or low pricing could be apparently one of the signs China as COO.

However, they did not know much about the scandal prior to the interview. With most respondents, their opinion changed throughout the interview as they learned more about the data security scandal. The deeper the interview got; the more Huawei kept losing its credibility. The respondents seem to consider Huawei to be a regular company in the beginning, but with digging into Chinese domestic politics on data sharing and unclarities in the advertisements, it seemed that Huawei kept losing its integrity in their eyes.

It is vital to point out, that interviewees themselves mostly said that there is nothing wrong the Huawei products, but just the notion of being spied on by a country makes them feel worried. Putting that together, one may arrive at the following. Huawei stand-alone would be probably perceived well if it weren't for the National Intelligence Policy of its COO.

Second, one could notice the role of China in this scandal. Based on the findings, China is seen as a growing economic power. To have a relationship with China became a must-have necessity. Moreover, the quality of Chinese products has increased despite still being perceived as reasonably-priced. From the material point of view, there should be nothing wrong doing business with China. Be that as it may, the respondents seemed to be worried about Chinese politics more. They picked up the Chinese neo-colonial efforts, human

rights violations, social ranking system and citizen surveillance. Adding up to the previous point, what does it say about the politically-motivated brand consumption? It appears that respondents starting to despise Huawei, not because of traditional values or technology. But due to the domestic and international politics of its COO and the notion of being spied by a country. According to the interviewees, Huawei has not sufficiently explained the whole situation which has added fuel to the fire.

The last paragraph brought to light another issue necessary to address. As mentioned above, most of our respondents felt insecure due to possible spying ordered by the Chinese government. Nevertheless, some of the respondents acknowledged that their data are being used by private companies and there is nothing they can do about it.

Pragmatically, this is a sort of discrepancy. Consumers do not care about being under surveillance by a private company (which Huawei claims to be) that may easily hand over the data to third parties. But when the third party is a country, they felt insecure. Some may admit, that Huawei is rather a case international data security. The author acknowledges this argument, on the other hand, the data of end-consumers are at stake as well.

All the above-mentioned issues arisen from the analysis and discussion are subject to scrutiny in the following chapter.

Discussion of themes in literature

Huawei's Pros

As mentioned above, Huawei could exemplify a typical contemporary Chinese manufacturer. This hypothesis support Supramaniam et al. (2018) based on whom the attributes of other products also coming from China can be assessed.

Moreover, at least half of the respondents thought of the displayed advertisements as of well-thought with a smart way to approach the consumers through nationalistic values.

Referring back to Gao (2012), motivation for consumption could be amplified through nationalism. Therefore, this could have been an attempt to 'de-politicize' the whole scandal.

Nevertheless, it is not the ultimate aim of this thesis to decide whether it worked or not. Rather than that, this theme emerged from the effort to make the respondents talk during the interview and henceforth, it seems rather irrelevant for the rest of the discussion.

Feeling Indifferent towards Huawei

Even though the theme itself does not appear to provide us with probing of new understandings, in fact, there are a few implications for consumerism and political consumerism.

First, some of the interviewees felt indifferent towards Huawei as they identified with a different brand for their phones (Apple or Sony). Therefore, they might not feel the urge to do anything about the scandal. In accordance with Park, Eisingerich, & Park (2013), indifference towards the brand is given by 'self-relevant cognitive and affective (personally meaningful) memories about the brand'. Until then, the consumer might feel no reason to change its stances. Nevertheless, should be the first relevant 'memories' on Huawei regarding data security and espionage by Chinese, one might assume that Western consumers might not be indifferent anymore.

Second of all, some of the respondents claimed that other companies act similarly, just Huawei got caught red-handed. On the other hand, it does not mean that they do not care at all about China, Chinese politics and Huawei.

As the following theme is named *Distrust towards Huawei*, one should bear in mind, that Chiosa & Anastasiei's research (2018) suggests, that consumers may be just silently avoiding brands instead of taking strong, visible actions.

Distrust towards Huawei

The deeper the interview got; the more Huawei was losing its credibility. The respondents seem to consider Huawei to be a regular company in the beginning, but with digging into Chinese domestic politics and unclarities they found in the advertisements, it seemed that Huawei kept losing its integrity in their eyes. Based on the codes and data obtained, a couple of potential problems were identified.

Insufficient transparency and missing information

Based on the interviews, Huawei might have lost its chance to clarify the situation. Respondent 1 said the following: 'Huawei just glossed over the problem, (...) even though national security is at stake.' Moreover, some of the respondents became suspicious with the Huawei claim of being 100% privately held. The respondents found that almost impossible to solely own a company in China without any mandatory interference of the Communist Party of China.

Should this considered as breaching of moral values, scholars argue that brand could earn negative publicity for that (Pullig et al., 2006; Rindell et al., 2014; Zhou & Whitla, 2013) which might result in boycott or anti-consumption (Christensen & Askegaard, 2001). Nevertheless, the situation seems not to be touching the respondents that much to take serious action. But based on the information, they would be willing to start with anti-consumption or boycotting should the problem get any worse.

Surveillance and insecurity

Although they believed in high quality of Huawei 5G infrastructure, quite a lot of interviewees felt insecure about having it nationally due to possible espionages on their personal and national data.

Having collected this kind of data, the reader can witness a unique opportunity to compare to existing research on consumer surveillance. Zurawski (2011) conducted a research on consumer 'soft-surveillance' through loyalty cards. To obtain a loyalty card at the shop, a consumer usually hands over his personal data (name, day of birth, E-mail, address, etc.). Companies mostly provide discounts on products or different benefits. Also, the companies can use, or even trade, the consumers' data for marketing purposes. Based on the evidence in the Zurawski's (2011) report, most consumers understood this sort of soft-surveillance as a 'necessary evil' which is part of the data-for-benefit deal. In some cases, the Zurawski's (2011) respondents even claimed that they are well aware of the fact, that their data are being sold to the third parties but there is nothing they can do about it.

Having mentioned the perceived mismatch between spied on by a company or by a country, it rather seems that the crux of the matter is in politics of China than Huawei itself. As could be seen in Dackö & Jonsson's (2019) law interpretation, the information should be handed over to Chinese Intelligence Work upon a request. As this law has been issued by the Chinese government and requires all Chinese citizens and Chinese-based companies to cooperate, one could assume, that Huawei can be hardly blamed for its COO politics.

Nonetheless, the whole problem stemmed from cybersecurity. But if the problem was just about cybersecurity, would the consumers blame Huawei for it?

Sandikci & Ekici (2009) tried to define politically-motivated consumption as a revolt to the (international) political representation or as a revolt to traditionalism. However, the

Huawei case does not seem to fit under any of those terms. Why? The distrust is not entirely targeted on a politician and it does not stem from disdain to traditional Chinese values. The majority of the respondents mentioned the surveillance and social ranking system in China. Moreover, Western countries may be shadowing the US with their stance towards China. Put this together, one may arrive at the notion of fear. Fear of China growing in power, stemming from the news.

COO-Brand spill over

Given the information above, the Chinese COO image has most likely spilt over to the brand image of Huawei in terms of cybersecurity and possible surveillance. As per, Magnusson et al. (2013) 'that brands associated with the COO of a transgressing brand are likely to experience negative effects despite having done nothing wrong.' Based on the interviews, respondents consider China to be the problem, therefore its unpleasant brand halo spilt over to Huawei.

Based on the interviews, one could assume that happened what Duman & Ozgen (2018) predicted – that people tend to confuse 'governmental brand' and a company brand in case of problems of COO. Since the Communist Party of China, the president of China Xi Jinping and the Chinese government represent the COO, their decisions may significantly affect the brands located in China. As mentioned above, consumers may be more afraid of the notion of being spied on by the Chinese government. Should this be the truth, the thesis can partially agree with Ward (2008), as Huawei takes hits for the Chinese government but the government itself takes some hits as well.

Additionally, Bruwer et al. (2014) pointed out the COO brand halo, that should be of help to product or brand. In the case of Huawei, it seems to work another way around. Instead of supporting the product, the brand halo of China appears to be rather negative as it is linked to exacted surveillance by the Chinese government.

Politics of China and the US and Their Impact on Huawei

One of the indications of involvement of politics in the Huawei scandal were the stances of the president of the USA, Mr Donald Trump, towards China and Huawei. Interestingly enough, in clear majority of cases, that was the first thing that came to minds of the Western-European respondents. Could it be that Western students shape their minds by the closest counterpart (the USA) of China?

According to researchers, it could. Kotzur, Torres, Kedzior, & Boehnke (2017) conducted research on incentives for political consumerism also among German students. Based on this research, the authors claim that political consumerism is likely to be 'associated with a specific political value structure, largely independent of the cultural context' (Kotzur et al., 2017). In other words, students may likely incline towards the political consumerism of the 'party', that holds similar values. Following Kotzur et al. (2017), Allison (2017) compared basic cultural and political differences between China and the USA. He juxtaposed China and the USA as direct counterparts. According to him, the USA are passionate for individual independence and liberty, whereas the Chinese would do anything for a harmonious society, where individualism is not praised unless it is good for the community.

Given the reasons above, there might be an explanation for the possible inclination to the US. As mentioned above, the Western students might feel insecure just by the notion of being limited on their right, as they might be pursuing Western values – most likely similar to the US values. This could be also an explanation for the codes of insecurity and surveillance.

Domestic and international politics of China seemed to be a bit bigger problem. When it came to China, the respondents mostly mentioned the violation of human rights, the Communist Party of China and the social surveillance system. Furthermore, the current president of China Xi Jinping appears to be an embodiment of untrustworthiness. Despite leading country towards economic growth, he represents an era of surveillance, suppression of human rights and strengthening of his 'eternal' Chinese president in the eyes of some interviewees. Some of them even consider him to be a dictator.

The above-given statement resonates with Atkinson's research (2015) suggesting that people may perceive political consumerism as a problem of human rights or social security.

Political Consumerism of Women

Based on the data, the analysis of this thesis sheds light on a phenomenon of women's political consumerism. The information emerged from the interviews claims that women might be more likely involved in political consumerism than men, which could be supported by their definition of the fiscal and product boundaries where they care/do not

care about the country of origin and its political situation (e.g. compliance with human right, child labour, surveillance of people).

In other words, this research shown that women tend to care about brand COO in case, they are to purchase a mobile phone or laptop. In the case of laptop/mobile phone complement (such as a cover case), the COO seems to be insignificant. Since those claims emerged, they should be compared with currently existing literature on this topic to illuminate new implications for political consumerism.

Micheletti & Stole's (2005) research suggests that women are keen on being involved in political consumerism as their incentives for it stems from human and animal rights. The authors explain that politically-motivated consumption 'makes politics tangible' (Micheletti & Stole, 2005).

Considering those inputs, a signs critical consumerism may illuminate the discussion as well. As per Yates (2011) critical consumerism 'involves consideration of the political or ethical implications of one or more episodes of the production, or of the perceived effects of the consumption, of any product or service.' He specifies that critical consumerism is usually triggered by issues of human and animal rights, work rights, governmental movements with respect to citizens issues (Yates, 2011).

Putting that together, it seems that Western female students might tend to critical consumerism in case of intended purchase of the product. When it comes to the product complement, Western female students might not be searching for that.

Conclusion

This thesis was based on the Huawei scandal regarding cybersecurity. The whole problem has stemmed from Article 7 of the Chinese National Intelligence law, which requests to hand over consumers data to the Chinese government upon a request. Therefore, this project scrutinized the following problem formulation:

PF: How do Western students react to Huawei's attempts of fixing its brand image, how do they view the influence of politics of China and its clash Western countries on Huawei's brand image and how does this contribute to prevailing understandings of the role of political issues in consumption?

In the following lines, each part of the problem formulation has been answered separately.

How do Western students react to Huawei's attempts of fixing its brand image …

As mentioned in Methodology, this section served primarily as an ice-breaker to the following discussion. Nevertheless, it helped to establish a starting point for the rest of the interviews. Three advertisements were chosen as Huawei's attempts to fix its brand image. Thanks to the advertisements, Western students depicted as Huawei as a company developing high-tech equipment. Based on their analysis, some of the Huawei's ideas were not that bad. Even one theme related to the Huawei brand has arisen (Huawei Pros). Nevertheless, some information was missing which made the interviewees more interested in the whole scandal. In fact, Huawei's advertisements made the respondents more aware and even more concerned about the scandal.

In relation to that, it is necessary to address one methodological issue. The students had not that much interest in the scandal prior to the interview. Moreover, as they became more aware of their brand image on Huawei has shifted towards being negatively perceived.

Henceforth, one may conclude with the following implications. Firstly, after displaying the Huawei advertisements, students became more aware of the problems that the company faces since the information was missing. They reacted by being more aware of the problem. And secondly, it turned out that students were, in fact, more worried about the political background of the story than of the commercials and Huawei.

...how do they view the influence of politics of China and its clash Western countries on Huawei's brand image...

Following the previous paragraph, politics seems to play a crucial role in this scandal in a few different perspectives.

The Chinese political stances regarding human rights violation, citizen surveillance and social ranking system were central topics to the summarization of Chinese politics by the students. With a combination of growing economic and neo-colonial power of China, this is probably the strongest influence on the Huawei's brand image.

As the biggest Chinese economical counterpart, the USA contributes to the influence on Huawei's brand image. Based on the interviews, the standpoint of the US international politics seems to be important because a majority of students build up their opinion upon it. From the theoretical perspective, this may be due to the value similarities of Western countries and the US. Practically, it could be due to easier access to Western media.

...and how does this contribute to prevailing understandings of the role of political issues in consumption?

On the basis of the analysis, a couple of new remarks for political consumerism emerged. In the case of Huawei, the students find a strong connection between the company and its COO, regardless the brand image (high-tech company) and brand identity (Huawei claiming to be 100% private). As the scholars argued, Huawei takes hits on behalf of China despite doing anything wrong. The brand spill-over from the untrustworthy government to a global company is prevalent here. All-in-all, those political issues may result in disharmony in brand equity and brand image, which may followingly disrupt their purchase intentions.

However, the country-company brand spill-over was prevalent with the interviewees as well. Having presented that as a methodological issue, the students were aware more of Chinese politics that of the Huawei case. It could also mean that consumers are not afraid of the company and its advertisements as much as they are afraid of the country behind it. Having found almost no literature on cybersecurity and politics, the thesis commenced with Sandikci & Ekici (2009) and their delimitation of political consumerism. While analysing the data, it turned out that consumers are rejecting neither Huawei because of its products nor the Chinese government. In fact, they felt insecure about the notion of

being spied on by a country. On the other hand, the findings discovered a discrepancy - students do not feel worried about handing data to a private company (i.e. for marketing reasons). But if they were supposed to provide the data to the country, they would feel insecure.

Lastly, the analysis showed that women may be more critical toward consumption. The female respondents depicted specific patterns in the consumption and triggering topics that may influence their consumption habits.

Limitations of this research

The author recognizes a couple of limitations in this thesis. First and foremost, the Huawei scandal is still ongoing and escalating. This thesis could not encompass the whole scandal; therefore, the standpoint is rather related to the earlier stages of the scandal (December – April). With that being said, the author recognizes that there are many different perspectives which this thesis could have encompassed. At the same time, it opens space for further researches.

Second, epistemology and ontology, this thesis is leaning towards interpretivism and constructionism. The choice of the stances put the interviewees to the position of social actors in the scandal. Some may argue, that politics of China, the USA and Huawei are 'too abstract' and a human being cannot do much about them. On the contrary, the whole scandal may most likely influence the end-consumer as well. Should the 5G network be installed in a country, the end-consumers (mobile phone users) will use it anyway.

Third, the interviewees were chosen on the basis of convenience sampling and nationality. Due to the number of interviewees, the thesis can guarantee representability neither of the nationalities per se nor the Western countries involved in the interview. As mentioned in the beginning, the research should shed light on political consumption using an ongoing scandal that may influence the end-consumer as well.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The advertisement of Huawei New Zealand
Retrieved on March 25th, 2019 from: https://www.huawei.com/en/facts/huawei-new-zealand

New Zealand, New Thinking: why NZ will benefit with Huawei's 5G

With the progress of new technologies, comes great expectations. 5G is all about increased speed, which brings exciting new ways to stream, download, share and connect: very high-definition video (ie. 8K TV and gaming), immersive communications (ie. video calling, augmented reality & VR) and smart-city services (ie. safety & security through hi-def video).

As one of the largest investors in research and development globally, Huawei started working on 5G as early as 2009. Today, we're the only vendor able to provide end-to-end 5G systems. In March 2018, Huawei and Spark built New Zealand's first 5G test site in Wellington, achieving over 9 Gigabits per second. Two months later, another 5G test was conducted with Spark in Auckland: this time, achieving over 18 Gigabits per second. These tests demonstrated the true potential of 5G: wireless robotics, multiple 4K/8K streams, Internet of Things and live Virtual Reality.

From the performance tests, it's clear that Huawei can deliver the most advanced 5G technology available. Our 5G speeds stand at several times greater than the competition. Yes, other brands can offer similar 5G systems, but these lower-performing 5G technologies mean you're not getting what you're paying for. If Huawei is excluded from developing New Zealand's 5G infrastructure, NZ consumers will likely end up paying more. When digital access costs go up, it impacts the overall economy – it's something to consider for the connectivity journey ahead.

About Huawei

Huawei is a 100% privately held company, with nearly 97,000 employee shareholders. Huawei has built more than 1,500 telecommunication networks, helping connect over one-third of the world's population. We help organizations and industries go digital by providing them with open, flexible, and secure information and telecommunication (ICT) infrastructure platforms. With our smartphones and other smart devices, we are improving people's digital experience in work, life, and entertainment.

We put cyber security and privacy protection at the very top of our agenda. In our 30 years of business we have never had a single significant security breach and we will work tirelessly to maintain our track record so countries, businesses and individuals can rest easy.

About Huawei New Zealand

Huawei opened its first New Zealand office in 2005. We serve all of New Zealand's major mobile and fixed line broadband providers including Spark, 2degrees, Vodafone, Chorus, UFF and Enable, amongst others, taking on a key role in broadband projects. Over half of the New Zealand population depends on Huawei for their daily telecom needs.

Huawei New Zealand's activities directly contribute more than NZD72.5 million annually to the local economy through wages, partnerships with local suppliers, and subcontracting for major infrastructure projects.

In 2017, during a meeting with the NZ Prime Minister, Huawei made the commitment to invest over NZ$400million in the local economy over the next five years in recognition of the special relationship the company has had with New Zealand and the 'fair-go' it has had since it arrived in 2005.

5G is in reach and it's a great opportunity for New Zealand. But New Zealanders will only be able to experience true 5G with Huawei.

Huawei UK: Let's Grow Together

At Huawei, we believe in the transformative power of open collaboration. Whilst we exist to serve our customers, we also believe in every one of them by listening to their needs. Side-by-side, we've been growing together with our clients, business partners and local employees to achieve a better digital future through shared innovation. We've partnered with UK universities, research institutions, and network carriers, to embrace the next wave of digital transformation. As long-term investors, we're committed to helping create jobs and opportunities, sponsoring education, building partnerships and supporting local communities. By growing together, we can unleash a far greater potential than we ever imagined.

About Huawei

Huawei is a 100% privately held company, with around 97,000 employee shareholders. At Huawei, we have built more than 1,500 telecommunication networks, helping connect over one-third of the world's population. We assist organizations and industries 'go digital' by providing them with open, flexible, and secure information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure platforms. With our smartphones and other smart devices, we are improving user's digital experience in their work and social life.

We put cyber security and privacy protection at the very top of our agenda. In our 30 years of business we have a good track record and we continue to work tirelessly to maintain it so that businesses and individuals around the world can rest easy.

About Huawei United Kingdom

We've been a part of the fabric of life in the UK since opening our first office in 2001. We work with all of the major UK telecommunication operators and we have built two joint innovation centers focusing on wireless, enterprise and cloud technologies.

In the 18 years we've been in operation in the UK, we've grown alongside our customers, partners and employees. At present, we employ 1,500 people who are focused on building a more prosperous, productive and connected future for the UK. To that end, we are proud to have exceeded the target as £2 billion five-year investment and procurement target for the UK (as announced in 2012), thereby becoming one of Britain's largest sources of investment from China.

Every year, Huawei invests into R&D partnerships with British universities and currently work hand-in-hand with UK's top academic institutions. In 2011, we launched our 'Seeds for the Future' program to develop local ICT talent and to date, this program has assisted 250 students, and created the opportunity for a four-week study trip to China for dozens of students each year.

Our long-term investment in the UK has allowed us to grow together in many dimensions and share our success in many ways. By continuing to grow together, the future can be brighter – and better for us all.

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Appendix 3: The advertisement of Huawei US
Retrieved on March 25th, 2019 from: https://www.huawei.com/en/facts/open-letter-to-us-media

Don't believe everything you hear. Come and see us.

An open letter to the US media

I am Catherine Chen, a Director of the Board at Huawei. I'm in charge of public and government affairs.

The US is a shining example of how to inspire passion for technological innovation and development. We too have been inspired by your history of creativity and hard work.

I am writing to you in the hopes that we can come to understand each other better. In recent years, the US government has developed some misunderstandings about us. We would like to draw your attention to the facts.

We operate in more than 170 countries and regions, including countries like the UK, Germany, and France. We provide innovative and secure telecoms network equipment and smartphones to more than three billion people around the world.

Huawei was founded over 30 years ago, and we are proud of our people's willingness to work in the world's most difficult and dangerous regions. We have put our hearts and souls into connecting the unconnected and bridging the digital divide in underserved locations around the world – places where many other companies aren't willing to go.

We build base stations in the harshest environments, like the Arctic Circle, the Sahara, rainforests in South America, and even on Mount Everest. In the wake of disasters like the tsunami in Indonesia, the nuclear disaster in Japan, and the massive earthquake in Chile, our employees were some of the first on the ground, working tirelessly to restore communications networks and support disaster relief.

We work with many leading US companies on technology development, business consulting, and procurement. In addition, we support university research programs in the US, helping them make significant progress in communications technologies, which we believe will benefit the whole world.

There are only so many people we can reach out to. On behalf of Huawei, I would like to invite members of the US media to visit our campuses and meet our employees. I hope that you can take what you see and hear back to your readers, viewers, and listeners, and share this message with them, to let them know that our doors are always open. We would like the US public to get to know us better, as we will you.

If you would like to visit us, please send an email to corpcomm@huawei.com

Don't believe everything you hear. Come and see us. We look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chen

Catherine Chen

Corporate Senior Vice President
Director of the Board
Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd.

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