



ARLA - AN ACTIVIST BRAND?

A SINGLE CASE-STUDY OF THE DANISH
BRAND ARLA AND ITS ACTIVIST BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

The aim of the present thesis is to investigate the new phenomenon of brand activism and how it asserts itself in the context of the Danish rooted, but international, dairy company Arla. Arla is not a self-proclaimed activist brand, and the present research will therefore seek to identify brand activism based on the company's content on three selected external communication channels - Twitter, Facebook, and Arla's self-published press releases. Furthermore, the present research will explore which type of brand activism that are present in Arla's external communication efforts and how each of them is emphasized. Through the case of Arla, the present thesis will contribute new knowledge about the concept of brand activism and its application possibilities, especially for companies outside the United States.

The theoretical framework of brand activism proposed by Christian Sarkar and Philip Kotler will be applied as a tool for interpreting which types of brand activism that can be identified in Arla's external communication as well as how Arla is affecting the global political - and societal agenda by lobbying for specific causes. As an addition to the Sarkar and Kotler's theoretical framework, other relevant academic studies with relation to brand activism will be applied as a knowledge foundation included in the discussion of the analytical findings and will furthermore explain the evolution of other theoretical concepts which have led to brand activism framework.

The research design composed with the aim of answering the problem statement is based on a qualitative, single case-study as the data sampling consists of textual content collected on the three mentioned communication channels which offers an in-depth understanding of brand activism in the context of Arla. The data will be collected using purposive sampling and will hereafter be analyzed by applying coding to categorize the topics evident in the data and furthermore to identify specific patterns related to the concept of brand activism. The codes will consist of both concept-driven and data-driven codes.

The overall research findings conclude that four different types of brand activism can be identified in Arla's external communication including environmental brand activism, political brand activism, social brand activism, and workplace brand activism. The codes identified as environmental brand activism are sustainable resources, sustainable business management, and environmental innovation. Additionally, a majority of the content identified as environmental brand activism compose an element in Arla's overall sustainability campaign, for which reason this campaign is interpreted as Arla's main approach to being a progressive activist brand. In the context of political brand activism, the data-driven codes of political participation and cooperation between scientists, politicians, and the business world are found. Social brand activism is identified based on Arla's effort to advocate for the cause of consumer education and improved living conditions and health in Nigeria. Finally, the code of sustainable supply chain management is identified as workplace brand activism. Arla is thereby seeking to impact several agendas through its brand activist communication, however, the handling of climate related issues is considered the most emphasized agenda that Arla is seeking to impact. These findings contribute

new knowledge on how brand activism assert itself in real life while shedding light on the possibility that brand activism is widespread within the business world despite the fact that only few companies identify themselves as brand activists on a global level.

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1.0 Introduction

At the present time, the world's population is facing some severe issues that are constituting a threat for our global society. One of these challenges is climate change which has become increasingly visible to us via floods, droughts, rising temperatures, and melting glaciers. All of these changes are examples of how the climate is changing and of issues that constitute a source of great concern for the population (Global Climate Change 2020). As a result of climate change, environmental concerns are constituting an increasingly important role in the global society. This concern is affecting both consumers' behavior and their demand for sustainable products made by environmentally responsible brands (Ottman 2011 p. 4). The changing focus and demand of the consumers implies that there is a need for new business models that enhance and promote sustainability (Johnsson-Sederholm & Du 2016).

Previously, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been applied as a tool for corporation with a desire to move in a more responsible direction: *"CSR is one of the most important issues in the 21st century because of financial crises, climate change, environmental impacts, and ecological imbalance"* (Wang et al. 2016). Despite the fact that this quote only dates back to 2016 it is argued to be outdated by some researchers. CSR lacks the impact that is demanded for fostering a significant change in today's modern society, and for this reason, CSR is expected to play a very limited role in the context of sustainable business in the future (Galloway 2018, Hart 2018). CSR simply is no longer enough (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). During the recent few years, the perception of CSR has thereby changed and some of the newest scholars now argue that brand activism is the future. Brand activism is an expression for companies that take responsibility for improving the "common good" conditions within different global issue areas, e.g. environmental activism or political activism. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). Brand activism is furthermore related to the concept of Corporate Political Activity (CPA) where corporations are considered important actors in global politics contributing solutions to complex issues (Garsten & Sörbom 2017). Through campaigns and activist behavior, the world's international brands are increasingly making use of their influential role in society to drive political, environmental, and social change. Many of the largest international companies are directly declaring that they are activist brands, including the American brands Ben and Jerry's and Nike. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018).

The present study seeks to investigate whether and how brand activism can be evident in companies that do not declare that they are intentionally being activist and furthermore, whether brand activism can be identified outside of the boarder of the United States. In 2019, the Danish rooted international dairy company, Arla, published a new sustainability campaign with the main goal of producing CO₂ neutral milk by 2050. Arla has attracted a great amount of attention as a result of their recent sustainability campaign and through this increased the environmental concern in the Danish society. The question is whether this can be interpreted as brand activism and whether other aspects of brand activism assert itself in the case of Arla when looking deeper into their eternal communication.

1.1 Problem Statement

Based on the problem area described in the introduction above, the present study seeks to investigate the following problem statement:

To which extent can it be argued that the international concept of brand activism is present in the Danish dairy company, Arla, based on Arla's external communication content and which agendas are Arla seeking to impact through its activist behavior?

1.1.2 Research Question

Which global issues does Arla address in their external communication on Facebook, Twitter, and in their press releases and how can the handling of these issues be interpreted as different types of brand activism?

2.0 Literature Review

As an introduction to the present research, the existing relevant literature within the topic of brand activism and sustainability will be presented with aim of identifying the knowledge gap of the existing literature. The literature applied in this literature review is primarily based on academic articles with no date range limitation. In the following, themes related to the research question, found in the existing literature, will be presented including the concepts of CSR, CPA, brand activism, sustainability, and social media. The literature review will be applied later in the thesis in relation to a discussion of the findings precured in the analysis. The structure of the literature review will be based on a chronological approach.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The problem statement above takes its starting point in the concept of brand activism and in order to grasp a complete picture of what this concept consist of, it is necessary to look deeper into the concepts prior to brand activism, and how these are related. This section aims to investigate the existing literature related to CSR as CSR has played an essential role in the formation of the conceptual framework of brand activism.

2.1.1 Defining CSR

The concept of CSR can be defined in a number of ways, but generally CSR is a term used for describing the relationship between business and society. Notions of the CSR concept have undergone substantial changes – from being considered a tool for maximizing profits to the more recent perception of CSR as a tool for societal and organizational development. (Govindasamy & Suresh 2017).

Attempts have been made by the European Commission and International Standardization Organization (ISO) to define CSR. According to the European Commission, CSR is defined as *"the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society"* and entails that companies should integrate their social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis (European Commission 2020a). ISO defines social responsibility as *"acting in an ethical and transparent way that contributes to the health and welfare of society"* (ISO 2020). CSR is thereby defined as a company's obligation to consider its impact on society while acting in an ethical and transparent manner. This includes the perception, that a company should be held accountable for the affect that the company's action has on the environment, the communities, as well as the people of the communities, and through CSR a company thereby obligate itself to apply resources in way that is beneficial for the society (Graafland & Van de Ven 2006). Studies have established a positive relation between CSR activities and building consumer trust which implies that CSR activities have a positive impact on company reputation (Fatma et al. 2014).

2.1.2. The Evolution of CSR

In a study conducted by Cuervo-Cazzura (2018), it was argued that CSR is a concept that evolves along with the development of society. Back in the 1980ies CSR constituted a limited concern in the business world, however, this changed during the 1990ies and 2000s where business started to implement CSR and issuing CSR reports (Carroll & Swartz 2008). In the traditional understandings of the concept of CSR there has been a clear separation of economic and political domains, however, this has changed during the past decade, where the studies of CSR increasingly are focusing on the political effect of CSR (Scherer et al. 2016). Furthermore, there exists some increasingly blurred lines between what is considered mandatory environmental regulation and what can be considered as voluntary 'beyond the law' CSR interventions, and CSR efforts can for this reason be considered as an actual political influence for companies (Frynas & Stephens 2015). This has led to the concept of Political Corporate Social Responsibility (PCSR), which can be defined as:

"[...]those responsible business activities that turn corporations into political actors, by engaging in public deliberations, collective decisions, and the provision of public goods or the restriction of public bads in cases where public authorities are unable or unwilling to fulfil this role" (Scherer et al. 2016, p. 276).

In other words, CSR efforts are increasingly considered a political activity where companies become political actors with an actual impact on the political agenda. CSR has thereby evolved from the traditional view of CSR as corporate charity to CSR as a business foundation with competitive advantages (Cuervo-Cazzura 2018). The reason for this change in the view of CSR might be found

in the critique that the CSR concept has been met with during the past years. According to the Professor of Marketing at NYU, Scott Galloway, CSR at large has been a failure and vastly overestimated. Furthermore, he states that CSR, in the traditional sense, has failed to yield the expected benefits. (Galloway 2018). This critique is supported by the American theorist and writer, Stuart L. Hart, who argues that the core premise of CSR - profit spending for the "greater good" - is fundamentally flawed. He considers today's CSR programs as little more than self-serving public relations gambits designed for the purpose of assuaging corporate guilt. (Hart 2018). CSR has become an exercise in public relations and producing "glossy" CSR reports as a tool for avoiding regulations and negative publicity (Cuervo-Cazurra 2018). The traditional perception of CSR as a corporate charity has thereby been challenged which has forced an evolution of the CSR concept.

2.2 Corporate Political Activity (CPA)

As mentioned above, CSR is increasingly evolving in a political direction, however, besides a political impact based on CSR, many companies also operate political in a more traditional sense (Hond et al. 2013). In this section, the concept of corporate political behavior will be investigated based on the existing literature within this field.

2.2.1 Defining CPA

Corporations have always been seeking an influence on the political infrastructures in which they operate in as well as on the decisions for the regulatory frameworks, however, this tendency has been strongly intensified (Garsten & Sörbom 2017). The concept of CPA was initially defined in the 1980ies as a corporate attempt to shape government policy in a way that is favorable to the firm itself (Baysinger 1984), however, this understanding has been developed up until today where CPA is understood in broader terms as disciplines that are related to strategic management, sociology, political science, economics, and finance (Hillman et al. 2004). CPA is a research field that is occupied with the behavior of companies in activities of political nature (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019). Furthermore, CPA is "... *an important nonmarket strategy aimed at advancing a firm's interests by influencing public policy*" (Hadani et al. 2013). CPA can be seen in different corporate activities as a way of conveying policy preferences to policymakers, e.g. information provision, financial contributions, and constituency building. A company's political involvement can be motivated for defensive reasons, e.g. to impact governmental processes that might constitute a threat to the company's competitiveness. (Hond et al. 2013). A successful policy change thereby occurs when a company's CPA efforts lead to existing laws and policies being modified in a manner that benefits the company (Lux et al. 2012). Companies applying CPA in their businesses are considered important actors in global politics as they build networks across national borders and contribute to multi-stakeholder's solution to complex issues (Garsten & Sörbom 2017). In the context of the present study, the concept of CPA will be defined as a company's

strategic management which seeks to influence public policy and contribute solutions to complex global issues, e.g. climate change.

Despite the fact that CPA and CSR are occupied with different areas of business management, they do, however, have something in common. In a study on the effects of CSR and CPA it was found that both concepts have an effect on company reputation as they impact whether a company is evaluated as being good, admired, or held in high esteem. The study furthermore concluded that an alignment between CSR and CPA amplifies positive company reputation while it mitigates the negative reputation impacts procured by CSR and CPA. (Hond et al. 2013) It is thereby considered beneficial to align CSR and CPA in a company which entails a combination of corporate responsibility and political activities. Hond et al. (2013) argue that an alignment is present when there exists a consistency between the policy areas that a company targets in its CSR and CPA.

2.2.2 The Impact of Climate Change

Two main aspects have had a dominant impact on the development of CPA, is globalization and climate change. As globalization has become an indisputable part of the world's development, the dynamics of the global business life has transformed and affected the management of companies which include adding political issues on their agendas (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019). Climate change has likewise had an impact on the spreading of CPA, as climate change, global warming, and the environment in general have been considered a fertile ground for positioning political brands and behavior as a way of signaling a commitment to causes for the common good (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019). In other words, climate change has increased the focus on ethics and sustainability within strategic management while applying these topics as a ground for political, activist behavior.

2.3 Brand Activism

As explained in the two previous chapters about CSR and CPA, it is considered beneficial to align these two concepts, and one possible way of doing so can be found in the concept of brand activism. Brand activism is a new phenomenon which was introduced to academic literature few years ago; hence, a limited amount of literature is occupied with the concept brand-induced activism. In the following, the relevant, existing literature within this specific topic will be presented.

2.3.1 Defining Brand Activism

Brand activism was first mentioned in academic literature back in 2018 by Christian Sarkar and Philip Kotler as an attempt to define the phenomenon of companies trying to solve the global issues facing and concerning society (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). According to the Cambridge dictionary, the concept of activism is defined as *"the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one"* (Cambridge Dictionary 2020). Activism in the context of

business has been given a lot of attention in the United States where the concept is increasingly composing the foundation of companies, including many large internationally known companies such as Nike, Patagonia and Starbucks (Chatterji & Toffel 2018). Brand activism is thereby mainly rooted in the United States. As a concept, brand activism is defined as something that takes place *“when a company or brand support or promote social, economic, environmental, cultural and social issues and align it with its core values and vision of the company”* (Shetty et al. 2019). The phenomenon covers a company's efforts to assume an activist mode where the company openly express its opinion about a cause or issue (Shetty et al. 2019). In the theoretical by Sarkar and Kotler (2018), brand activism is defined as a *“business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society”* (Kotler & Sarkar 2018¹). Brand activism in its core is thereby about promoting solutions to societal issues by emphasizing specific values in a given company.

Practically, brand activism takes place in the form of making open statements in the public, lobbying for a cause, donating money for a good cause etc., and making a cause-related statement through marketing - or advertising communication efforts (Shetty et al. 2019). Hence, brand activism involves the application of messages, slogans or other content that is based on political values (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019). It is furthermore argued, that campaigning plays a significant role, as brand activism is *“a strategy that seeks to influence citizen-consumers by means of campaigns and created and sustained political values”* (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019). Hence, brand activism is often campaign-based or implemented by applying campaigns as a tool for pursuing brand activism (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019, Shetty et al. 2019).

2.3.2 The Demand for Brand Activism

Brand activism is a further development and an evolution of the concept of CSR (See section 2.1.2), as CSR no longer is considered sufficient and brand activism is for this reason considered the future (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). Today consumers, especially progressive consumers, demand that companies make a difference in the world by trying to solve the most urgent problems facing society - like income inequality, corruption, and climate change (Kotler & Sarkar 2018). This new consumer mindset forces the corporate world to adopt new strategies that demonstrates a brand's core values and its sincerity in fighting for a specific cause (Shetty et al. 2019). Hence, brand activism is considered a concept that contributes the design and implementation of new communication management strategies in corporations (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019). In a research carried out in 2019, it was furthermore concluded that it is imperative for the brands to have a strategic approach to activism and to navigate the brands carefully in the turbulent waters of activism and furthermore to demonstrate the brand's core values and sincerity towards the specific

¹ The accessed publication file does not include page numbers. Applies for all references to this source.

cause that the brand is occupied with (Shetty et al. 2019). The implementation of brand activism thereby demands a careful navigation of the brand.

Brand activism is thereby driven by a large-scale concern, not only for the corporative aspects, but for the overall society. In modern society, a transformation is taking place, moving from marketing-driven to corporate-driven, or CSR-driven, and on to societal-driven which is where brand activism is located. In the past, companies have selectively been choosing the specific issues that they found desirable to engage in, however, with a society-driven concern, there is an absence of the selection of issues as the companies should only be concerned with the biggest and most urgent issues that society is facing. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018).

Furthermore, the consumers are demanding that companies take public stands on both social and political issues. Consumers want brands to take stands on important issues, such as climate change, and 58 percent of the consumers believe that this should take place on social media. The consumers' reaction to brands that are doing so is positive and it is suggested that it is related to a greater reward than risk for the brand. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). Hence there exist a positive interrelation between brand activism and applying social media as a communication channel for the brand's stand on important issues.

2.4 Differences and Similarities of CSR, Brand Activism, and CPA

The previous sections have dealt with the concepts of CSR, CPA, and brand activism which are concepts that are all related to brands, society and communication practices. The concepts of CSR and CPA are both related to brand activism, however in two different ways. In the following the main differences will be summed up.

CSR and brand activism are both concerned with corporate responsibility and actions that are promoting the common good of society (see section 2.1.1 and 2.3.1), however, brand activism differs from CSR because it is driven by a fundamental concern for the *biggest* and most urgent *problems* facing society (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). CSR can, e.g., be concerned with the health of their employees or decreasing the number of sick days in an organization. Issues like these would never be considered brand activism as they are not associated with the biggest and most urgent problems that the world is facing. As CSR, as mentioned, increasingly is characterized by political aspects with the movements of PCSR it is moving towards the definition of brand activism. However, CSR is lacking one important aspect central to brand activism – communication. Brand activism, is based on a brand's communication about their stances and opinions on societal concerns and thereby includes the notion of corporate visibility in public affairs. (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019).

In continuation hereof, CPA and brand activism are also two related concepts as both concepts are concerned with the impact of a brand on the political agenda. Like it is the case with CSR, CPA is lacking the aspect of communication and corporate visibility as the focus remains on the political achievements rather than marketing. Furthermore, the two concepts differ in their

relation to the market, as CPA is a nonmarket strategy whereas brand activism is a strategy directed at the market and the impact of consumers (See section 2.2.1 and 2.3.1). In other words, the aim with CPA is to achieve a political impact in favor of a brand where the aim of brand activism is to achieve an influential role in society and to promote and impede improvements in society in general.

Based on these differences and similarities, brand activism is, in the context of the present thesis, considered the result of the evolution of CSR and CPA and thereby the implementation of a social responsibility along with a political participation in a business context. Brand activism is thereby built on a combination of aspects from CSR and CPA with a contemporary adaptation to the new demands of society.

2.5 Sustainability

As elaborated, the concept of CSR, CPA, and brand activism often appear in the context of climate related issues in order to promote sustainability for which reason the following section present the existing research and findings within the topic of sustainability. In the context of sustainability, this section will look into the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable food consumption as well as sustainability in the world of business, but firstly a brief definition of the concept of sustainability will be presented based on the established knowledge in the existing academic literature.

2.5.1 Defining Sustainability

The idea of sustainability began back in the mid 1980ies and has since undergone a substantial evolution (Portney 2015). The term originates from a literal interpretation as an "ability to sustain" and is today interpreted as "[...]the *changing ability of one or many systems to sustain the changing requirements of one or many systems, over time*" (Manderson 2006 p. 96). Thus, sustainability is anchored in the interaction of a population and the carrying capacity of its environment (Ben-Eli 2018). According to the research of Manderson (2006), sustainability is considered a universal principle that can be applied in any context or situation. The development of sustainability as a concept has given the rise to efforts that addresses issues such as climate change through reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases (Portney 2015). In this context, the sustainable actions are present in the proactive designs of new structures and mechanisms that are demanded in order to yield an affective change and to promote the sustainability agenda (Ben-Eli 2018).

2.5.2 Sustainable Development

Related to the concept and definition of sustainability is the concept of a sustainable development, which consist of economic-development activity that "*meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to their meet their own needs*" (Portney 2015 p. 3). A sustainable development demands the discovery of new, innovative approaches

and research indicates that this is best achieved with a “quadruple helix” model. This model implies networking and co-working between four different institutions – community, universities, public bodies, and business actors. (Riccaboni & Cavicchi 2019, Peris-Ortiz et al. 2016). Based on the combination of these four actors, a sustainable development is given the best conditions.

Another approach for fostering a sustainable development is the United Nations’ sustainable development goals (SDG) which consists of 17 goals that constitutes the best plan for building a better world and planet by 2030. The initiative was adopted in 2015 by all United Nations member states and is a “call for action” to promote prosperity while protecting the environment. (United Nations 2020). The UN SDGs identifies what society needs, and by that, what the global economy must deliver (Kendall & Rich 2019), which emphasizes a sustainable development where businesses must find new, innovative solutions. The UN SDGs thereby supports a sustainable development through clarification of issues that *“are often characterized by a lack of clarity, uncertainty, ambiguity, high risk, and limited understanding”* (Riccaboni & Cavicchi 2019).

2.5.3 Sustainable Food Consumption

Sustainable food systems form the core of the UN SDGs, as food is directly or indirectly connected to all of the SDGs (Valentini et al. 2019) and sustainable food systems are thereby an essential for a sustainable development. Sustainable food efforts, including sustainable food consumption, implies a focus on altering the behaviors of the individual consumer while addressing and influencing the consumer behaviors through governments and public policies (Portney 2015). A sustainable food system is defined, by the European Union, *“as encompassing a range of issues such as security of the supply of food, health, safety, affordability, quality, a strong food industry in terms of jobs and growth and, at the same time, environmental sustainability, in terms of issues such as climate change, biodiversity, water and soil quality”* (European Commission 2020).

The world’s consumption of food *“... is the largest freshwater user, accounts for one third of GhG emissions and is responsible for land degradation, biodiversity loss and pollution”* and it is thereby evident that the food industry is in a need of a profound changes (Bombelli et al. 2019). In this context, several studies are raising critique towards animal-based products in relation to supporting a sustainable development and consumption of food, which is measured both on the water consumption and the CO₂ emission of the production (Nierenberg 2018, Rocha & Spagnuolo 2019). Here, beef production creates a carbon footprint of more than 20,000 grams of CO₂ per kilo, one kilo of fish releases 4,500 grams, beans and dried fruits less than 2,000 grams of CO₂ per kilo, and, finally, vegetables and seasonal fruit create less than 1,000 grams of CO₂ per kilo produced. Livestock production and dairy is responsible for the highest environmental footprint measured on the CO₂ emission. (Nierenberg 2018). As a result hereof, cow milk has larger impact on the climate than plant-based milk beverages and dairy products are thereby considered less sustainable food items.

2.5.4 Sustainability in the Context of Business

The sustainability concept has, as an addition to the sections above, furthermore had an impact on the business world contributing new sustainable business models, or corporate sustainability, e.g. CSR strategies (elaborated in section 2.1.2). Since the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published "Our common future" back in 1987, there has been an increasing interest in conceptualizing and applying sustainability which has led to several new initiatives from, among others, business leaders (Riccaboni & Cavicchi 2019). Sustainable business practices imply that businesses attest that their operations can be trusted by suppliers and customers while setting an example for their competitors (Kopnina & Blewitt 2014 p. 8) which is in line with the concept of brand activism, as elaborated in section 2.3.1. The way that businesses apply the sustainability concept to their strategies is highly discussed in the literature, as it is both considered a positive and a negative contribution to the business world.

On the negative side, it is considered easy for big companies and other actors to selectively emphasize a particular aspect of sustainability to further advance their own agendas and thereby prioritize business outcomes over societal concerns (Manderson 2016, Hahn et al. 2017). Furthermore, many companies have launched marketing campaigns where they claim to be sustainable, due to the increased focus on sustainable businesses. However, without meeting the criteria for sustainable behavior which leads to greenwashing campaigns, i.e. when a company conduct misleading activities in order to appear more environmentally friendly than what is the actual case (Baran & Kiziloglu 2018). The problem occurs when a company is spending more resources on communication about their level of greenness than it does on conducting an actual green conversion. There is a tendency for companies to focus on the isolated green successes achieved and making them appear as crucial steps in a greener direction when they are in fact baby steps (Søndergaard 2020). In order to achieve a successful combination of business and sustainability, the motivation for sustainability must therefore go beyond the company's own interests. (Baran & Kiziloglu 2018).

On the other side, researcher have also pointed out that the concept of sustainability should be considered a positive contribution in the business world. As mentioned in section 2.5.2, the world's businesses are part of the "quadruple helix" model whereby they constitute a central part of the sustainable development in society (Riccaboni & Cavicchi 2019, Peris-Ortiz et al. 2016). Seen from the businesses point of view, a green focus can function as a tool for a sustainable business development and for strengthening brand image (Sarkar 2012). Furthermore, a business model with focus on sustainability can create a competitive advantage that can help a company to increase their profitability (Johnsson-Sederholm & Du 2016). Both society in general and the business can thereby gain advantages by implementing a sustainable focus in the business strategy.

2.6 The Impact of Social Media

Social media is defined in the literature as an internet-based media that functions as a highly interactive mass communication platform and which, unlike traditional media, “[...] *reduces limitations on the creation and release of content by users*” (Qiu et al. 2018 p. X). Hence, social media is considered platforms that “[...] *facilitates the disseminations of content through social interaction between individuals, groups, and organizations [...]*” (Scheinbaum 2012 p. X). This provides the opportunity for companies and large organizations to participate in online debates and interaction with e.g. customers which is considered both a benefit and a risk for the participating companies. User-generated content, including organizational users, is considered more trustworthy and to have a greater impact on the consumer behavior and purchase decisions (Sharma & Verma 2018). Furthermore, applying social medias entails the benefit of a personal interaction with the customers while risking negative comments and critique directed publicly at the brand (Scheinbaum 2012, Sharma & Verma 2018). The number of organizations adopting social media as a tool for corporate communication is increasing (Reilly & Hynan 2014) and the power of social media as a political and social force has likewise been increasing (Carty 2015).

2.6.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM)

In relation to the development and application of social media in modern society, the term of social media marketing (SMM) has appeared. SMM can be defined as the application of social media platforms for promoting a company, or brand, and its products (Sharma & Verma 2018). Thereby, social media has transformed from being a platform for social interactions into a business tool for marketing as “*marketers are increasingly leveraging social media to influence customer decision making*” (Sheth 2018). Hence, social media has permanently transformed the marketing media.

In a study on corporate communication, sustainability, and social media, composed by Reilly and Hynan (2014), it was found that many companies are applying social media as an outlet for external and internal communication about sustainability. Hence, social medias are providing “*the opportunity to convey a message linking a parent company with broader humanitarian causes, environmental solution, or economic issues*” (Reilly & Hynan 2014). By that, social media has become an instrument for sustainable and social responsibility marketing activities. In their study, Reilly and Hynan (2014) furthermore, found that companies with a green profile are more active on social media and more likely to include sustainability in their corporate communication.

The application of social media can furthermore be applied for promoting specific desirable behaviors. Environmentally responsible behavior (ERB) is considered as actions or ways of engaging in protecting the environment. ERB behavior can vary depending on the extent to which the behavior is e.g. active or public. Active ERB includes environmental activism. Social media generates pathways to enhancing environmentally responsible behavior. (Ballew et al. 2015.)

Thus, social media constitutes a marketing tool for companies to promote environmentally responsible behavior and thereby take on an activist role.

2.7 Research Gap

Based on the literature review conducted above it becomes evident that there generally is a lack of knowledge within the topic of brand activism and its application possibilities which, e.g., can be explained by the newness of the topic. As brand activism was first defined few years ago, it is logic that there is a limited amount of literature present which emphasizes the need for further research within this topic. Furthermore, there exist a knowledge gap in the literature of brand activism in a geographical context outside of the United States as brand activism is often associated with large, international, American brands.

3.0 Theoretical considerations

In the following, the theoretical framework of the present thesis will be presented in order to define the frame in which the social phenomenon, in this case brand activism, should be understood and researched. The purpose of the theoretical framework is to define the key concepts found in the literature review while proposing the interrelations between the concepts. (Bryman 2016 p. 18). The theoretical considerations are what constitutes the framework of the research, thus it plays an essential role in the path to the final results and findings of the study. In the present thesis, the theoretical framework will be based on the concept of brand activism elaborated by Christian Sarkar and Philip Kotler in their publication "Brand Activism - From Purpose to Action" (2018). Brand activism is considered the focal point of the present research with the aim of investigating how a brand can be applied as a mean to impact the political agenda in society. The brand activism framework contributes a new approach for interpreting a company's external communication seen from an activist point of view, thus brand activism allows the optimal framework for conducting the desired research in the context of the present thesis. A deeper investigation and discussion of the brand activism concept will take place later on in the research.

3.1 Brand Activism Framework

As elaborated, brand activism was first defined as a concept back in 2018 by Christian Sarkar and Philip Kotler where they described the phenomenon of companies that are trying to solve global issues causing concerns in society - brand activism. Hence, their framework is composed based on a desire to define and frame an observed phenomenon. Sarkar and Kotler claim that the existing efforts to solve global issues, including CSR, are not enough - what is needed today is activism for the common good. Thus, the purpose of their book is to inspire companies to take on this new activist role through their proposed guidelines. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). As described in section 2.3.1, Sarkar and Kotler define brand activism as *"business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or*

impede improvements in society” (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). In their theoretical framework, Sarkar and Kotler explain several concepts, however, for the purpose of the present research, only parts of the framework will be employed selected based on relevance.

One aspect that is found relevant to include from Sarkar and Kotler’s framework, is the definition of the six categories of brand activism which are; *social activism, workplace activism, political activism, legal activism, economic activism, and environmental activism* (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). Sarkar and Kotler’s six categories are listed in table 1, found below, with word references associated to each category.

Table 1: Brand Activism Categories	
Social activism	Equality, gender, race, age, education, healthcare, social security, privacy, consumer protection.
Workplace activism	Governance of corporate organization, CEO pay, workers compensation, labor and union relations, supply chain management.
Political activism	Lobbying, privatization, voting rights, policy
Environmental activism	Conservation, ecocide, land-use, air and water pollution, emission control, environmental laws and policies.
Economic activism	Wage and tax policies that impact income inequality and redistribution of wealth.
Legal activism	Laws and policies that impact companies, such as tax, citizenship, and employment laws.

Source: Sarkar & Kotler 2018

These six categories will be employed as a guideline for a thematic coding process setting the frame for conducting an analysis of the collected data, hence the data set will be coded in relation to the six brand activism categories allowing an understanding of which types of brand activism that can be identified in the case of Arla.

Another relevant aspect of Sarkar and Kotler’s framework is their theoretical conceptualization of regressive and progressive brand activism which is closely related to the definition of the six categories of brand activism described above. A regressive brand is a brand that actively pursues policies that goes against the common good, whereas a progressive brand is a brand that actively pursues policies promotes the common good. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). According to Sarkar and Kotler (2018), it can be determined whether regressive or progressive brand activism is present in a given company by answering a series of question – also known as the *brand activism*

mapping tool. Measuring and mapping the common good concern of each of the six categories of brand activism is suggested as a tool for deciding whether a brand is progressive, neutral or regressive. The common good measurements vary from category to category. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). In the context of the present thesis, only four brand activism categories are found relevant to include for which reason the remaining categories has been left out in the following description. Furthermore, only the measurements found relevant to consider in the context of the present research topic have been included, i.e. Sarkar and Kotler's framework included additional suggestions for measurements which have been left out due to a lack of relevance.

Social activism can be measured on the degree of which an organization is working to improve access to, and quality of, public goods and services like healthcare, education, safety, and food security for all members of society as well as the degree of which the brand is working to improve the standard of living (Sarkar & Kotler 2018).

Workplace activism is determined based on the degree of which the employees' voices are integrated in the business model, equal pay and equal work are promoted, and the degree of which the company provide the employees with living wages and the opportunity of forming unions. Additionally, workplace activism can be measured on how a brand encourage a democratic workplace and open and freely discuss integrity concerns. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018).

Political activism is, among others, measured on the degree to which the brand is promoting a transparent and open government that allows for the meaningful participation of all stakeholders in the development and implementation of public policies. Furthermore, political brand activism is measured on whether there is an alignment between a brand's lobbying efforts and its stakeholder values as well as whether there is a support for long term policies in technological development. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018).

The degree of *environmental activism* can, among others, be measured on the degree of which an organization stand against a destruction of entire ecosystems and embed sustainability into all activities and future plans. Other measurements are the redesigning of the supply chain around a circular economy, an awareness of the impact of biotech and its ramifications on the environment, and whether the organization has an action plan to eliminate water and air pollution, and is applying energy from clean, renewable sources. Finally, *environmental activism* can also be measured on the degree of which the brand is placing effort into leading the industry in environmental stewardship. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018).

In other words, it is determined whether a company is progressive, regressive, or neutral based on how the company is approaching some of the current and emerging issues of society. The more a company is stressing to contribute solving the issues, the more progressive it is considered. Additionally, considerations must be given to how the issues are approached on three locational levels: local, national, and worldwide. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). Combined with the six categories of brand activism, these measurements allow a more extensive understanding of how each category assert itself in the case of Arla and this approach will therefore be employed as a supplementary tool for data interpretation and discussion of findings in the present thesis.

3.1.1 Critical Reflections of Brand Activism

Given that Sarkar and Kotler's theoretical framework is a new theoretical approach to branding there is a limited amount of academics that have been occupied with the concept of brand activism, hence the critique directed at their framework is limited. However, some critical reflections can be established.

Sarkar and Kotler's framework has been critiqued in a study by Shetty et al. (2019) as the researchers pointed out the difficulties in distinguishing between the concept of brand activism, defined by Sarkar and Kotler, and standard marketing and advertising efforts: "... *On the negative side of the brand activism, if the activism of the brands is not in complete sync and match with their core values, ethics and vision, it may be seen as mere advertising and marketing gimmick*" (Shetty et al. 2019). In other words, brand activism is considered too vague in its definition. In their research, Shetty et al. (2019) furthermore argues that "... *brand activism is partly science and partly arts*", indicating a lack of scientifically grounded knowledge and research about the concept as Sarkar and Kotler's framework is founded on observations. This critical approach is considered when employing Sarkar and Kotler's theoretical framework for the purpose of the present research and is interpreted as a demand for more research within the topic justifying the existence of the present thesis.

4.0 Methodology

This chapter aims to present the methodological considerations associated with the present thesis, including the philosophy of science, the research approach- and design, sampling- and collection of empirical data, the data analysis method, ethical considerations and, finally a discussion of the methodological possibilities and limitations.

4.1 Philosophy of Science

In the following section, the ontological and epistemological considerations of the present thesis will be presented.

4.1.1 Ontological Position

Ontology is concerned with the nature of social entities with a focus on whether social entities should be considered as entities with an external reality, or as social constructions built on the perception and actions of social actors (Bryman 2016 p. 28). The ontological position of the present research is constructivism which entails a dynamic perception of the social world which is constructed through social action and thereby is in a constant state of change (Bryman 2016 p. 30). By this, there exist numerous realities and meanings which means that the idea of a universal truth can be excluded. As described above, post on Arla's social media platforms, Twitter and Facebook, along with press releases will constitute the source for empirical data which allows a

representation of Arla's perceptions and meanings of topics such as climate change. The empirical data thereby make up a construction of the social world seen from the perspective of Arla. In the context of the present thesis, the concept of brand activism in the context of the international dairy company, Arla, is not constructed as a fixed social fact, but on the other hand as something that can be ascribed to a particular meaning on an individual level or as a social construction. The research design of the present study, including the collected data, is thereby consistent with a constructionist ontological position.

4.1.2 Epistemological Position

Epistemology deals with the question of what should be considered acceptable knowledge, including the question of how the social world should be studied (Bryman 2016 p.24). In the present research, the main purpose is to gain a deeper understanding and insight into Arla's external communication rhetoric and whether this is related to aspects of brand activism. This will be achieved, as previously described, through an analysis of data collected on Arla's social media accounts and it will thereby be based on an interpretation of this data. Hence, the epistemological position of the research will be interpretivism, as interpretivism is built on a desire to reach an understanding and interpretation of an individual actor (Bryman 2016 p. 26). Interpretivism thereby allows the generation of subjective data that compose the object for interpretation which will allow the desired insight into Arla's socially constructed world and point of view. Applying an interpretative position is consistent with the choice of a constructionist ontological position given that both positions exclude the concept of a universal truth.

4.2 Research Approach

The process of investigating and answering the problem statement of the present thesis entails elements of both an inductive and deductive approach to the relation between research and theory. Applying an inductive approach entails that the theoretical considerations derive from the collected data rather than being formed prior to the collection of data (Bryman 2016 p. 23). The deductive approach, on the other hand, entails that the starting point of the research is based on a hypothesis deduced from an already existing theory which is then tested (Bryman 2016 p. 22).

In the context of the present thesis, the inductive elements can be seen in the choice of a qualitative research design and thereby a data set deriving from selected external communication channels for the purpose of contributing new knowledge to the research field. Hence, the qualitative research design entails the derivation of new theory or contributions to an already existing theory. On the contrary, the deductive approach can be seen in the impact that existing literature will have on the coding of the collected data, as the existing knowledge constitutes a kind of hypothesis for what will be found in the data analysis. The relationship between theory and research is therefore considered neither inductive nor deductive, but iterative.

The iterative research process is characterized by going back and forth between theory, the problem formulation and identification, and the collected data. (Bryman 2016 p. 23). In this specific research, the iterative process has been taking place given that the problem formulation has continually been updated and adjusted throughout the research process. Initially, the problem formulation had a focus on the consumers response to Arla's brand activist approach present in the communication with the consumers. However, as the collection of data progressed it became clear that the amount of data available was limited and lacking variation. For this reason, the focus shifted towards investigating the concept of brand activism and how the concept assert itself when looking into a large enterprise like Arla. Another example of the iterative process, is the changing emphasis on sustainability. Initially, focus was mainly on the topic of sustainability and the environmental brand activism, but as the data revealed that other elements of brand activism also were present in the case of Arla it led to a wider perspective including both social - and political activism. Changing this focus implies that both the problem statement as well as the data collection were changed and adapted underlining an iterative process.

4.3 Case Description of Arla Foods

This chapter seeks to present the case that has been chosen as the empirical source for conducting a research of the business phenomenon, brand activism. The case will provide the data needed for achieving an in-depth understanding of the concept within a real-life context. In the following, the case will be presented along with an argument of its relevance to the present thesis.

4.3.1 Arla

The research of the present study will take its starting point in the international dairy company, Arla, which will constitute the case of the study. Arla is a cooperative, initially established back in 1888, when dairy farmers in Denmark joined forces. In the year 2000, Arla merged with its Swedish counterpart which later expanded to the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, whereby Arla has been transformed into the large, international corporation, Arla Foods. Today, Arla Foods consists of 10.300 farmers and occupies more than 18.000 people in 10 countries. (Arla 2020a).

In the recent years, Arla has increasingly been focusing on sustainability as a result of the climate changes that the world is facing. Arla is actively working with CSR and publish a yearly report to communicate about their efforts, goals, and achievements. The first CSR report was published in 2007 (Arla 2020b). On their homepage at Arla.com, Arla states that *"Farming and dairy carries a responsibility, but also a great opportunity to contribute positively and help solve that challenge. At Arla we want to be part of the solution"* (Arla 2020c). In this context, Arla has presented a sustainable dairy farming strategy which entail four focus areas, the first one being the climate. Here, Arla's goal is to have reduced the climate footprint per kg milk with 30 percent by

the end of 2030, measured compared to the amount of 1990, while increasing the share of renewable energy (Arla 2020d). According to Arla's Chairman, Jan Toft Nørgaard, this is an ambitious goal that has been well-received by both customers, consumers, politicians, and organizations (Nørgaard 2019). The second focus area is the animals including animal welfare. The third focus point is to improve resource efficiency, e.g. by reducing waste. Finally, the fourth focus area is to protect nature and promote biodiversity. These are the four main focus areas of Arla. (Arla 2020d).

Looking more specifically at aspects related to sustainability, Arla is operating with five different environmental focus areas which are sustainable packaging, minimizing food waste, carbon net zero operations, protecting nature, and finally, sustainable dairy farming. These five areas are mentioned as the "stronger planet" initiatives. In September 2019, Arla published a new sustainability campaign for the purpose of sharing Arla's climate ambitions and journey to climate neutral milk with the Danes. The campaign was shared with the Danes on train stations, tv adverts, online, and on social media. Arla's main goal with the campaign is to make milk carbon dioxide neutral by 2050 – Arla's most ambitious strategy within sustainability to date. (Arla 2020d).

As an addition to Arla's sustainability efforts and goals, the organization furthermore has a focus on the United Nation's 17 sustainable development goals (SDG) as a guideline for evaluating activities in accordance to the impact on society that Arla is matching with ambitions of the UN SDGs. According to the company itself, they evaluate where the company activities have the greatest impact on society while matching it with the ambitions of the SDGs (Arla 2020d). Several of the UN SDGs is emphasizing the protection of the environment, thus Arla's integration of the goals in their strategy indicates a high degree of environmental concern within the organization. The efforts related to the SDGs are employed in Arla's social media communication (See appendix B3)

Apart from Arla's sustainability efforts, Arla is furthermore emphasizing its role as an influential leader with the company values of "lead", "sense", and "create". These three values indicate that Arla is company that is constantly seeking new knowledge and innovative solutions in order to meet the expectations of society and that being a first-mover is highly prioritized. Chairman, Jan Toft Nørgaard, explains that "*Arla is committed to being a leader and a role model when it comes to sustainability with the global dairy industry*" (Nørgaard 2019). He furthermore elaborates, that as sustainability continues to impact the public debate and consumer choices, Arla will launch new initiatives in order to build trust and relevance for the dairy industry. (Nørgaard 2019). Arla's focus on sustainability is a response to the increased focus on sustainability in the Danish society in general.

4.3.2 Arla in the Context of Brand Activism

As it appears from the description above, Arla is a traditional company that is facing changes and new ways of adapting to the development of society, especially to the increased focus on climate

change and sustainability. Arla's recent sustainability campaign is an example of the efforts they make in order to move in a more sustainable direction. This campaign does, however, also raise the question of whether the campaign is a way of impacting the political environmental agenda, and thereby the result of Arla being an activist brand, or whether it mainly is a result of Arla adapting its strategy to the norms and expectations of modern society. Arla thereby constitutes an optimal case for investigating aspects of brand activism in a real-life context.

Brand activism is, as previously mentioned, mainly related to large, international corporations which Arla is an example of and thereby a relevant candidate to apply for investigating the concept of brand activism. Furthermore, brand activism is highly associated with the United States and American businesses (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019, Sarkar & Kotler 2018) and it is therefore found interesting to investigate the concept of brand activism in a different geographical context in order to contribute new knowledge to the already existing literature within the topic. Arla thereby constitutes a case of a large, international, Danish corporation that is emphasizing sustainability and responsibility in their external communication, however, without being perceived or self-proclaimed as an activist brand. The present thesis thereby seeks to investigate whether a Danish company can be considered an activist brand based on their external communication and how the concept asserts itself applying the specific real-life case of Arla.

4.4 Research Design

As the overall aim of the present research is to achieve an in-depth understanding of Arla's external communication rhetoric and whether, and how, this is related to brand activism, the present thesis will be conducted as a qualitative single case-study. The nature of this topic is thereby consistent with a qualitative research strategy that is sensitive to how participants interpret their social world (Bryman 2016). Qualitative analysis seeks to enhance the data and increase the density and complexity of it, as it adds more nuances and layers to the data (Gibbs 2007). Thus, a qualitative research strategy facilitates an understanding of a complex topic with various individual perceptions and responses for which reason a qualitative research design is considered the most suitable in the context of the present research.

Qualitative research is flexible in its nature; thus, research questions can be decided late in the research process, i.e. if the original questions make little sense in the light of the perspectives of those you have studied (Gibbs 2007 p. 4) as it has been the case with the present research. The present research strategy is based on a qualitative research design, an interpretivist epistemological orientation, and a constructionist ontological orientation, whereby the qualitative design is consistent with both the epistemological and ontological orientation, as elaborated in section 4.1 (Bryman 2016 p. 32).

As described, the research design is based on the application of a single case-study in order to achieve a detailed and intensive analysis of a specific case, more specifically, the case of Arla, and the focus will therefore be on one single organization. The fact the present thesis is

focused on investigating one single case entails that there will be an absence of generalization of the findings into a broader context (Schaper 2016). Single case-studies can, however, often be applied as a knowledge that can enter into a collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or society (Flyvbjerg 2007 p. 10). Based on Flyvbjerg's assumption, formal generalization is an overvalued source of scientific development, whereas the force of a single-case study, or an "example" from the real world, is underestimated. Single-case studies can both contribute the possibility of generalizing the findings as well as contributing a scientific development, though that this will not be possible if applying randomly selected cases. The generalizability of a case study will, however, increase through a strategic case selection (Flyvbjerg 2006). For this reason, a single case-study is considered highly valuable for the purpose of contributing the generation of new knowledge based on the case-related findings of the present thesis.

4.5 Sampling of Empirical Data

When conducting a qualitative research, as it is the case with the present thesis, it is important to take into consideration the sampling method in order to find the most adequate way of answering the research question (Bryman 2016 p. 408-409). In the present case, data will be collected from various communication channels for the purpose of achieving the most reliable set of data possible. None of the data will be researcher driven, i.e. the data has not been produced for the context and purpose of the present research. The data will be gathered from selected social media platforms and press releases shared on Arla's website, where the social media platforms are considered a less formal communication channel than the press releases. In both cases, the sampling will consist of textual data as the visual images present on the social media posts are considered irrelevant to include. The textual content will be translated from Danish into English for the purpose of the present thesis.

Data deriving from social media will be collected on Arla's Danish, primary social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook as the highest sequence of content identified as brand activism is found on these platforms. Arla is furthermore active on the social media Instagram which, however, has been deselected as this platform is applied for communication on products, recipes, and food in general, thus there is an absence of content identified as brand activism. Another possible communication channel is LinkedIn which, as opposed to Instagram, does offer some relevant data in relation to brand activism, however, it has been deselected in order to adapt the size of the data set to the framework of the present thesis.

The Facebook site, "Arla" will constitute the source of data from the social media platform Facebook. This site has more than 1,1 million, mainly Danish, followers and is thereby considered the main platform for communication between Arla and the private consumers. The content on Arla's Facebook site consist of recipes, sharing of events, and sharing of brand information. (Facebook 2020). In the context of the present research, data collected on Facebook will be referred to as appendices A1-A10. For the data collection on the social media, Twitter, the

account "Arla Danmark" will be applied. Arla's Danish Twitter account has 4.000 followers with a mix of followers from the business world as well as Danish and foreign private accounts (Twitter 2020). The data derived from Twitter will be referred to as appendices B1-B22. As opposed to Facebook, the content on Arla's Twitter account is of more political character with an increased focus on sustainability (Twitter 2020). Based on the relevance to the problem statement of the present research Facebook and Twitter have thereby been considered relevant sources of data for identifying themes associated with brand activism in Arla's external communication.

There is, however, a reduced amount of text attached to each post shared on their social media platforms, and press releases will therefore constitute an additional source of data which will be referred to as appendices C1-C9. Social media explains what, how, and to who Arla's communication is directed at. The press releases, on the other hand, constitutes a deeper elaboration of the content shared on social media. Often, the social media posts link directly to the press release regarding the specific topic, for which reason it is highly relevant to include both. The press releases contribute more extensive information and data to the present research while this data source, like it is the case with Facebook and Twitter, allows an understanding of which topics that are present in the company's external communication. Hence it is considered essential to include press releases in the sampling of data. Social media and press releases thereby constitute the source of two different types of data which together allows an in-depth understanding of brand activism in the case Arla. Furthermore, collecting data from different sources facilitates a comparison of the different communication channels and the relevance to brand activism found on each of them.

The sampling of empirical data will be conducted based on purposive sampling, and thereby sampling data with a direct reference to the research question (Bryman 2016 p. 408). Purposive sampling is often related to a qualitative research design and is guided by the research questions, i.e. the data is collected based on criteria that allows these research question to be answered (Bryman 2016 p. 410). This is a sampling method where emphasis is placed on applying the theoretical reflections on the data as opposed to emphasizing a statistical adequacy on a data sample (Bryman 2016 p. 412). Data identified as possible brand activism will thereby be collected for the purpose of answering the problem statement.

The data will be sampled focusing on the newest data available at the time of conducting the research. The data collection will continue until theoretical data saturation is achieved which is considered the point of which *"new data no longer stimulate new theoretical understandings or new dimensions of the principal theoretical categories"* (Bryman 2016 p. 411). Hence the amount of posts, tweets, and press releases will constantly be evaluated until data saturation is achieved. In this case, data saturation was achieved after collecting 10 posts on Facebook, 22 tweets from Twitter, and 9 press releases as no new topics related to brand activism were identified on either of the three communication channels after this point.

4.6 Method for Data Processing

For the purpose of processing and analyzing the collected data, thematic coding will be applied which provides a way of identifying data that are linked by a common theme and thereby splitting the collected data up into categories. Coding entails that data are broken down into component parts where the researcher's interpretation of data contributes the shaping of the codes. (Bryman 2016: 573). In the process of data coding, the researcher has identified themes and patterns based on a thorough read-through of the data collection. The codes applied for the present research are a combination of concept-driven and data-driven codes (Gibbs 2007: 8-9). The concept-driven codes originate from the already existing literature and is based on four out of the six different types of brand activism proposed by Sarkar and Kotler (See section 3.1). The data-driven codes, on the other hand, are emerging as part of the process of analyzing the collected data where new themes and relationships appear. The data-driven codes are thereby generating new knowledge that goes beyond the already established concepts.

Below, table 2 presents the concept-driven codes derived from the empirical data collection. These are the codes identified in relation to the conceptual framework elaborated in section 3.1 and thereby the concept-driven codes.

Table 2: Concept-driven codes related to brand activism						
Concepts	Social Activism	Workplace Activism	Political Activism	Environmental Activism	Economic Activism	Legal Activism
Codes	Education Healthcare Social Security	Supply chain management	Lobbying	Ecoside Emission control Environmental laws and policies	<i>Not identified</i>	<i>Not identified</i>

As an addition to the concept-driven codes identified in table 2, some new, data-driven codes have also been found in the data sample from Arla's external communication channels. The following codes have been identified based on data:

Table 3: Data-driven codes related to brand activism						
Concepts	Social Activism	Workplace Activism	Political Activism	Environmental Activism	Economic Activism	Legal Activism
Codes	Knowledge sharing	Innovation	Cooperation between politicians and businesses	Campaigning Innovation	<i>Not identified</i>	<i>Not identified</i>

When analyzing the data some topics or codes will, as it appears from table 3, be applied more than once in different contexts of the analysis due to a thematic overlap in the codes. Hence repetition will appear in the analysis of data, which is considered an important way of identifying patterns in the data sampling (Bryman 2016 p. 586).

4.7 Quality Criteria for Research

The qualitative research design of the present thesis implies that quality criteria are essential to address. Measuring the quality of the present thesis and its findings is based on the concept of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is based on four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the context of the present thesis credibility, transferability and confirmability have been taken into consideration in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

Credibility entails that the research has been carried out based on good research practices and furthermore, that the findings of a study is confirmed by members of the researched social world (Bryman 2016 p. 384). In the context of the present research, credibility is achieved through the good research practice of applying different sources for data as it allows a deeper understanding of Arla's external communication efforts. The different communication channels employed for collecting data ensures that the final findings of the present thesis are considered credible. Confirmation of the findings by members of Arla is absent in the present research as this method for ensuring credibility is less relevant to include in a qualitative research where observations and interviews are not employed as data sampling methods (Bryman 2016 p. 384).

The concept of transferability is concerned with whether the findings of a research can apply in a different context, or in other words, whether the findings can be transferred into investigating a different issue (Bryman 2016 p. 384). In the present thesis, the final findings conclude how the brand activism concept is evident in one specific company for which reason it will not be possible to transfer the findings directly to a different company. However, the findings also include some new findings that can add to the knowledge about brand activism and the contexts that it appears in. The theoretical findings, as well as the methods designed for reaching these

findings, can thereby be transferred into the context of a different company, whereby transferability asserts itself in the present research.

Confirmability is based on ensuring that the researcher has acted in good faith when conducting the investigation by setting aside the researcher's own personal values and personal stances (Bryman 2016 p. 386). The present thesis has been conducted based on a continuous consideration for reducing a subjective perspective on the findings – both when collecting data and while coding the data – and the researcher's personal perception of Arla or relation to the environment has therefore been set aside. However, the researcher is also aware of the fact that a complete objectivity is impossible (Bryman 2016 p. 386) and therefore acknowledge that the findings to some extent will be impacted by the researcher's point of view.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Conducting the present research is related to some ethical considerations or issues which will be elaborated in the following.

The Danish dairy company, Arla, is constituting an essential and central part of the present thesis. In this context it should be emphasized, that the research has been carried out without any involvement of Arla, i.e. that the researcher has not been in contact with any representatives from Arla while conducting the research. Thereby there is a lack of "approval" from Arla's perspective which can be related to some ethical issues as the company has not been presented the content. Furthermore, when researching aspects of a specific company it involves the risk of causing harm to the company, e.g. by creating a negative impact on the company's self-esteem or leaving a negative impact on the image produced of the company (Bryman 2016:126). However, the harm to the participant, in this case Arla, is minimized by applying a constructive approach to the investigation of the company in relation to brand activism.

5.0 Limitations of Thesis

The present thesis is not the result of a cooperation between Arla and the researcher which constitutes some limitation in relation to the research process as well as the final findings of the present thesis. The findings and empirical data will much likely have been different if the researcher had been in contact with a representative from Arla as it would have contributed subjective data seen from Arla's point of view. However, a less biased approach to the research is considered more beneficial given that it allows an interpretation of what Arla's is expressing with their rhetorical communication rather than how they portray themselves.

In accordance with this, applying social media as a source for collecting empirical data is associated with some limitations as it makes it difficult to determine whether the social world constructed on social media platforms correlates with the offline reality. The data collected and analyzed in the present thesis represent an online reality with an absence of consideration for the offline reality. Content published on social media tends to be "polished" as social media in some

context functions as a tool for staging an individual or organization. Hence, there is a risk of applying data with a poor consistency between the offline reality and the one posted and communicated on social media. (Bryman 2016 p. 447). As an addition hereto, social media is a constantly changing media which means that content might be deleted or edited constituting a limitation of the reality that the collected data represent.

The topic of brand activism in the context of Arla offers several possible research directions including a perspective on how it has been affecting their corporate reputation. However, the topic has been limited down to investigating *whether* and *how* brand activism is present in this specific company, as there exist no information about this. It is thereby considered more logic to investigate *whether* and *how* brand activism is present in Arla's social media communication prior to researching how this affects Arla's reputation. This is, however, considered a highly interesting topic for a further research approach.

As described in section 2.4, brand activism, CPA, and CPR are all related phenomenon, though brand activism has been chosen as the main focus as a result of limited theoretical considerations that are occupied with brand activism. Brand activism is the most recent topic of these three in the academic literature and is thereby also the least investigated topic which made brand activism an attractive topic to investigate with the aim of contributing new knowledge within the topic. Thus, the main topic has been narrowed down to the concept of brand activism, however, with a knowledge contribution from the two remaining aspects.

A final limitation of the research is present in the selection of communication channels for data sampling where Facebook, Twitter, and press releases have been selected. As the overall aim of the present thesis is to examine Arla's external communication it can be considered relevant to include all their external communication channels in the data sampling, however, the researcher has selected and reduced this to three communication channels. This increases the relevance of the data while adapting the data sampling to the frame and extent of the present research for which reason it is considered an essential deselection of communication channels.

6.0 Analysis and Discussion

The following chapter contains an analysis of the empirical data collected on the social media platforms Twitter and Facebook and through Arla's press releases. The analysis will be structured based on the data-driven codes presented in table 2, thus the following sections represent the different types of brand activism that are identified in the collected data.

6.1 Environmental Activism

As described in table 1 available in section 3.1, environmental activism is related to the topics of conservation, ecocide, land-use, air and water pollution, emission control, and environmental laws and policies (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). According to the framework proposed by Sarkar and Kotler (2018), environmental activism can be measured on the degree of which an organization

stand against the destruction of ecosystems, embed sustainability into all activities and future plans, redesign supply chain around a circular economy, is aware of the impact of biotech and its ramifications on the environment, apply clean energy, and lead the industry in environmental stewardship. This section investigates which of these topics that are present in Arla's external communication as well as looking into the context in which these topics appear.

6.1.1 Sustainable Resources

One of the codes derived from the empirical data in relation to environmental brand activism is sustainable resources which is apparent on Arla's Facebook account, Twitter account, as well as in Arla's press releasees (See appendices A1, A2, A7, B17, B18, B20 B22, C4, C6, and C8). Here, Arla is communicating about the efforts and initiatives which are related to a sustainable approach to the resources applied in their production, more specifically, the resources used for packaging, i.e. plastic.

Climate friendly cheese packaging is one of the topics related to sustainable resources that Arla's communicating about externally on Twitter and Facebook (see appendices A1, A7, and B22). In a Facebook post Arla explains that *"From today, 21.5 million cheeses will be wrapped in more climate friendly packaging. Look for the new logo"* (Appendix A1). This statement illustrates an awareness of the environmental impact of each part of Arla's value chain. As it appears on appendices A1 and A7, Arla has designed its own label that will be placed on the new cheese packaging. Changing the packaging along with adding a label constitutes a visual tool for emphasizing a relation between sustainability and Arla as a brand and for promoting a sustainable cause. It is thereby considered a way for Arla to take a stand on the environmental issues related to employing plastic in their production while sharing it with the consumers via the product itself. On Twitter, Arla elaborates that the *"...new climate friendly cheese packaging ensures a yearly CO2 reduction of 173.000 kilo grams"* (Appendix B22). This number should be seen in the light of the 15,8 billion kilograms of CO2 emitted from Arla's milk production on a yearly base (Arla 2020e). Based on these numbers, it can be argued that the cheese packaging initiative has a low degree of environmental impact, as it constitutes a reduction of the total emission.

Similar to the case of the cheese packaging, Arla has taken an additional initiative that reduces the environmental footprint of their production by applying a sustainable approach to resources. As illustrated in appendices A2, B18, and B20, Arla has replaced their original green milk carrying box with a new, more sustainable, black milk carrying box. On Twitter, Arla tweets that:

"In the future, our green milk carrying boxes will be produced in 100 percent recycled plastic. For this reason, they will now be black, and this gives us a yearly CO2 reduction of at least 30 percent. This initiative is a step on our path to becoming completely CO2 neutral by 2050" (Appendix B18).

As it is the case with the cheese wrapping, the milk carrying boxes is a way of visually emphasizing the relation between sustainability and Arla as a brand while sharing Arla's circular approach to resources with the public.

In a tweet from October 9, 2019, Arla proclaims an additional initiative with focus on sustainable resources: *"Arla is ready with a new sustainable initiative: More than 200.000 plastic containers for organic food can now be reused"* (Appendix B17). In a press release (see appendix C4) Arla elaborates that they have added a label on their plastic containers allowing customers to reuse the containers for food storage as opposed to being disposed, which *"all in all will contribute a reduced plastic consumption and thereby reduce the environmental footprint in the kitchens"* (Appendix C4). This initiative can be interpreted not only as a concern for applying resources in a sustainable manner, but also as a way of urging the customers to save the plastic containers and thereby extend the life cycle of the containers. This indicates an awareness of the importance of redesigning their supply chain around a circular economy, which according to the theoretical framework by Sarkar and Kotler, is a sign of the presence of environmental brand activism.

The three initiatives of cheese wrapping, milk carrying boxes, and plastic containers are all considered ways for Arla to take a stand on which mindset about sustainable resources that is the most optimal within the food production industry. All three initiatives are interpreted as ways of leading the industry in a more environmentally friendly direction, as it increases the pressure on Arla's competitors to go follow Arla's footsteps and they are thereby considered examples of applying the Arla brand for an activist purpose. In these three posts, Arla is presenting itself as a brand that takes responsibility for the world's resources and how to employ them in a sustainable manner. By doing so, Arla is positioning itself as brand that is employing an activist voice in order to affect consumers as well as competitors in a more sustainable direction, hence it can be argued that it is a sign of environmental brand activism being present in Arla.

6.1.2 Sustainable Business Processes

Milk is one of the beverages with the highest environmental footprint (see section 2.6.3), however, therefore milk constitutes the core of Arla's products which constitutes an environmental conflict in the process of making their production more sustainable. On March 5, 2019, Arla launched three new plant-based beverages (See appendices A9 and B1). The launch was shared in a tweet where Arla states that *"Arla is launching three organic plant-based beverages under the brand of JÖRD, which will consist entirely of plant-based products. Behind the launch is a clear ambition to take upon us the leading role within this category in the future"* (Appendix B1). Based on this tweet it can be deduced that Arla is not only aiming at accessing a new market, they are furthermore aiming at becoming the leader of this market. This indicates an awareness of the environmental challenges related to milk production. Part of the solution for reaching their goal of becoming CO2 neutral by 2050 might therefore be found in minimizing the production of cow milk and replacing it with the production of plant-based beverages. Arla is thereby willing to adapt their strategy to

what serves the common good of society on the expense of what constitutes the entire foundation of the company – milk. This can be interpreted as a sign of Arla not being too proud to face that their core product, is inconsistent with the demands of the future and the interest of the common good. By presenting plant-based products to the consumers, as a dairy company, is a way of “approving” for these plant-based products by which Arla is applying an activist voice that advocates sustainable food habits among the consumers. Taking on this new market is therefore considered a sign of environmental brand activism, however, without showing a complete commitment as their main focus remains on the milk-based products. However, Arla does take a positive stand to plant-based products.

Another aspect that indicates an emphasis on adapting business processes to serve the common good of society is Arla’s initiative involving organic fertilizer as fuel (See appendix A6, B14, and B15). Arla states that *“our ambition is that all our distribution trucks must drive on 100 percent green energy as soon as possible. Biogas is one of the exciting options that we are testing”* (Appendix B14). This focus on a more sustainable fuel source indicates that Arla is working with a circular approach to their supply chain management which implies environmental improvements reducing the CO2 emission as a result hereof. A holistic approach to reaching a sustainable supply chain can therefore be argued to be present in the case of Arla. In a tweet of October 11 2019, Arla furthermore states that *“Today we are working throughout the entire value chain from farm to table. On the farms, the dairies, in our transportation and production so that we step by step will reach our ambition of becoming climate neutral by 2050”* (Appendix B16). In relation to working with a sustainable supply chain management, Arla is integrating value chain thinking into the supply chain. By reducing the environmental impact in different steps of the production, Arla is thereby seeking to achieve an added value of sustainability to their products. The sustainable fuel initiative is thereby argued to constitute an element of environmental brand activism as it is interpreted as a way for Arla to express its opinion about the need for finding better alternatives for sustainable transporting of goods which has a positive effect on the environment and thereby the common good of society.

6.1.3 Environmental Innovation

On their Facebook and Twitter accounts, as well as in their press releases, Arla is displaying a willingness to take an environmental responsibility based on innovation. Innovation is the key to developing new solutions to the issues of society and Arla’s is displaying a responsibility in relation to fostering these new solutions as it appears from appendices A3, A8, B13, and C3). On a Facebook post, Arla states that: *“Our planet is facing a climate challenge which the farming industry has a great share of the responsible for. As one of the largest dairies in the world we have a great obligation to solve this challenge”* (Appendix A3). By this, Arla is taking responsibility for the negative impacts that their business has on the climate which manifest itself in Arla’s dedication to finding innovative solutions to combat climate change. Sustainable resources and sustainable

supply chain management, as investigated in the sections above, are both examples of Arla's innovative solutions to solve the issues of climate change. Arla is sharing an additional innovative initiative in their external communication – a climate check – which stresses the importance of innovation in relation to the environment.

“Our climate check is a tool for helping the farmers identifying the emissions on their farms and providing them with a clear understanding of the initiatives they can take to increase the CO2 reduction” (Appendix C3). The climate check thereby entails a guideline for farmers to check up on the emission on their farms, identify the problematic areas, and find ways of reducing the emission (Appendix B13). According Arla, their farmers have reduced the CO2 emission per kilo gram milk by 24 percent since 1990, however, this process will be speeded up in the coming years as the goal is to reduce it by additionally 30 percent by 2030 (Appendix A8). The climate check is one of the innovative tools that Arla has implemented for the purpose of increasing the speed along with initiatives like applying organic fertilizer as fuel, and focusing on sustainable resources, as elaborated in the sections above. Arla further elaborates:

“With data from potentially 9900 European milk producers in 2020 and a yearly production of 14 billion liters of milk, Arla is building up one of the world's greatest set of verified climate data from milk production. This is constituting a solid foundation for benchmarking, knowledge sharing across the dairy industry, and correlation analysis” (Appendix C3).

This new, innovative approach to reducing the environmental footprint of the dairy industry on farming level is something that will benefit dairies all over the world, and is thereby serving the common good of a global society. Based on the fact that Arla is communicating about these initiatives in public it is argued that Arla is creating an image of the company as a progressive and innovative company that is taking the lead in developing new solutions to combat climate change and thereby is constituting a role model. Arla's innovative approach to solving the climate change related issues can therefore be interpreted as environmental brand activism.

6.1.4 Arla's Sustainability Campaign

As it appears from the previous sections, the data coded and identified as environmental brand activism all have one thing in common – they are manifestations of sustainable initiatives that all are included Arla's recent sustainability campaign. As previously described, this campaign was launched in September 2019 and is presenting the steps in Arla's mission of producing CO2 neutral milk by 2050. Considering all the data collected with relevance to environmental brand activism, it appears that a majority of the data is directly linked to Arla's sustainability campaign. This is specifically evident when focusing on the data collected on Arla's Facebook account as all of this data (Appendices A1-A10) can be linked directly to the campaign. On Twitter, however, the

amount of data related to Arla's sustainability campaign is limited to composing 10 out of 26 data sources (Appendices B1, B13, B14, B15, B16, B17, B18, B19, B20, and B22). It is thereby argued that Arla actively is communicating about these new initiatives to the public in order to increase the public's awareness of their sustainability efforts while taking an environmental stand. The campaign itself thereby has the function of constituting a tool for branding Arla as a sustainable player, that, despite their climate conflicting products, is displaying a great responsibility for the future and common good of society.

The role of Arla's sustainability campaign is thereby consistent with the theoretical reflections proposed by Manfredi-Sánchez (2019) which entails the perception of campaigns as a tool for pursuing brand activism (See section 2.3.1). It can be argued, that Arla's sustainability campaign offers a way of gathering their initiatives in one shared purpose emphasizing the impact of each initiative. Communicating about the new CO₂ reduced cheese wrapping, as mentioned in section 6.1.1, would, for example, have a less significant impact on the perception of Arla as brand, however, when the impact of this initiative will increase significantly when considering as part of an overall effort which furthermore includes the milk carrying boxes, plastic containers, organic fertilizer etc. In a tweet Arla states that *"You must be able to drink a glass of milk without placing a strain on the environment. That is Arla's goal. Today we launch a large campaign focusing on the efforts we make in order to reach our goal step by step"* (Appendix B19). Reaching the goal of CO₂ neutral milk by 2050 will thereby be achieved based on several solutions and in a gradual process. Arla's emphasis on the fact that the goal will be reached step by step indicates and understanding of the complexity of adapting a supply chain to meet the criteria of sustainability. Based on Arla's sustainability campaign Arla is thereby displaying a willingness to embed sustainability into all activities of the company, even the activities that have a minimal impact, and furthermore the campaign indicates that sustainability is strongly emphasized in Arla's plans for the future. Seen in the light of the theoretical framework, the campaign can therefore be interpreted as a sign of the fact that environmental brand activism is present in the case of Arla. The extend of the campaign implies that it furthermore can be argued that Arla is an activist driven brand applying its activist role in favor of the environment. In the context of Arla's sustainability campaign, brand activism is transferred into tangible actions.

6.1.5 Summary of Findings

Based on an analysis of the environmental brand activism evident in Arla's external communication it is found that the activist behavior consists in Arla's efforts to improve the environment – both by reducing Arla's own environmental impact as well as reducing the environmental impact caused by the consumers and the production industry. Arla is found to take on an activist role in relation to the environment and thereby affecting the agenda within the topics of sustainable resources, sustainable business practices, innovation, and by launching their recent sustainability campaign.

6.2 Political Activism

Political brand activism is another category of brand activism proposed in the theoretical framework by Sarkar and Kotler (2018) which is related to the topics of lobbying, privatization, voting rights, policy. Topics related to political brand activism have been identified in appendices B3, B4, B5, B6, B7, B8, B9, B10, B11, B12, C2, and C5. The present section aims at analyzing how political activism can be identified in Arla's external communication.

6.2.1 Political Influence on the Environment

In relation to section 7.1 about environmental brand activism, this section investigates how Arla can be considered a political activist driven brand based on the efforts to promote the political conditions in favor of the environment. This approach to brand activism is primarily present in Arla's external communication on the social media platform Twitter (See appendices B5, B6, B7, B8, B9, and B10). As elaborated in section 2.5.4, networking and co-working between community, universities, public bodies, and business actors is in favor of a sustainable development (Riccaboni & Cavicchi 2019, Peris-Ortiz et al. 2016). This perspective is consistent with the one presented in Arla's external communication as the company states that *"Arla is stressing that 100 percent climate neutral milk demands a strong cooperation and a helping hand from the Danes, the politicians and scientists"* (Appendix C5). According to Arla, a sustainable development is only a possible achievement if the Danish society as whole is contributing solutions whereby Arla is demanding more cooperation between the different institutions. In this context, Arla elaborates in press release that:

"It demands a strong team spirit to make Denmark climate neutral. Arla cannot reach this goal alone. The consumers can help by sorting our packaging so that it can be recycled. They can focus on reducing food waste of milk and other dairy products [...] We do, for example, need even more world class research in farming. Waste sorting throughout the country must be adapted to sort and recycle green milk cartons - as opposed to wasting and burning them. And the agriculture policies must support the farmers climate efforts" (Appendix C5).

Based on this, it is argued that Arla is actively lobbying for political changes that will improve the environmental conditions of the Danish society. Arla is thereby actively seeking to impact the political agenda in order to improve the conditions related to a sustainable improvement in the business world. Hereby Arla is emphasizing its own role in solving the issues related to climate change, as Arla thereby becomes a part of the "quadruple helix" model (see section 2.6.2). In a press release of January 1st 2020, Arla states that:

“Research confirms that Danish companies are occupied with solving the climate challenge. However, it appears to be a both difficult and complex job. Significant CO2 reductions is a necessity that we, as a society, need to be successful with. We need everyone to be involved and the large companies must take the lead and show the way for smaller companies” (Appendix C2).

By this, it is argued that Arla is embracing its role as a large company to affect the political agenda which at the end will lead to political changes that improves the foundation for all companies to contribute a development in favor of the environment. Hence, Arla is displaying an activist behavior in favor of the common good of the Danish society. Through this political brand activism, Arla is emphasizing cooperation as an important tool for solving the climate related issues which Arla has called attention to on three occasions on Twitter (See appendices B3, B4, and B12). All three tweets states that the involvement of politicians is crucial in order for Arla and other Danish companies reach the climate goals which, in this context, are referred to as the UN SDGs (See section 2.5.2 for elaboration).

In Arla’s external communication it appears that Arla is actively seeking to promote the cooperation by participating in different activities. On January 29, 2020, Arla participated in a climate conference held by Compact Denmark, the Danish contribution to the UN Global Compact, together with other of Denmark largest companies (Appendix B5 and B6). In this context Arla has shared several tweets under the hashtag #theroadtozero where Arla is referring to a report conducted by Arla itself in cooperation with Compact Denmark. The report is occupied with investigating the climate commitment among Danish companies. (Appendix B11). In one of these tweets Arla express that *“62 percent of the Danish companies are working to reduce their environmental footprint while 30 percent has yet to establish sustainable initiatives. We need everyone on board!”* (Appendix B10). By that Arla is displaying an activist approach to achieving a sustainable development in the Danish society while expressing Arla’s opinion on how this should take place. Arla is urging all companies to take part in the journey to reaching the climate goals as this is what serves the common good and future of our society.

In alignment with this, Arla is stating, with reference to the report mentioned above, that energy consumption is the primary focus in the climate efforts (Appendix B9), that 24 percent of the Danish companies find that the political reduction goal of 2030 is realistic (Appendix B8), but that only 13 percent of the Danish companies have set concrete climate goals (Appendix B7). Through these statements Arla is lobbying for an increased commitment among the Danish companies who are lacking behind in the context of sustainability. The demand for more cooperation is thereby not only directed at the politicians but also at the business community, however, the responsibility for generating this change is placed at the politicians as it is their responsibility to improve the frames for sustainable efforts in the business community and to increase the demand

for sustainable commitment. By that it is argued that Arla not only is lobbying for political changes for the interest of Arla's own business, but for the benefit of all Danish companies while these changes are serving the interest of the common good in the Danish society. Arla's external communication is therefore interpreted as political brand activism on several levels. The demand for increased cooperation between the different institutions entails that the handling of climate change solutions becomes more effective and it is therefore considered something that serves the common good of the Danish society for which reason Arla's lobbying activity can be interpreted as political brand activism. It can, however, also be characterized as environmental brand activism, as the lobbying activities have the environment as a final goal.

6.2.2 Summary of Political Brand Activism

Arla is taking on an activist role in a political context by publicly demanding more cooperation between the different institutions which should be facilitated by politicians. Thereby Arla is applying its brand in order to impact the political agenda in favor of the environment.

6.3 Social Activism

According to the theoretical framework of the present thesis, social activism is considered as content related to the topics of equality, gender, race, age, education, healthcare, social security, privacy, and consumer protection. The topic of both education, healthcare, and social security have been identified in the collected data (See appendices A4, A10, B21, and C7) and will be analyzed in the following.

6.3.1 Education

One way that Arla actively is pursuing to act in favor of the common good is through education directed at the consumers. In a post on Facebook of September 30 2019, Arla is sharing an article explaining whether milk is sustainable or not (See appendix A4). The post is directed at the private consumers asking the question *"Do you sometimes wonder whether the things you eat and drink are sustainable?"* (Appendix A4). By this Arla is showing an awareness of the confusion and lack of knowledge that the consumers are facing when purchasing groceries for which reason Arla is taking on a role as an educational institution that serves the purpose of educating the consumers in sustainable consumption habits. Additionally, Arla has shared a post on their Facebook account about how the consumers should respond to the printed shelf life date on dairy products as they explain *"Should your food products end up in your mouth or the bin when the shelf life data is expired? Dairies are often good after this date. Read here to learn how to decide whether your food is fresh"* (Appendix A10). Here, Arla's intend is to educate the consumers on how to reduce food waste, which is considered part of a sustainable development I society as reducing food waste is related to a sustainable food consumption (See section XX for elaboration). Changing the expiration date on their product is thereby a way of educating the consumers in sustainable

food consumption and at the same time a way of reducing the environmental footprint of the food industry. Arla elaborates that *"Food waste is a massive challenge and a topic that we at Arla continuously are working to reduce"* (Appendix C9). Thus, Arla is actively working to solve one of the issues that society is facing through consumer education. Appendix A5, A10, and C9 are thereby examples of Arla's educational efforts and how Arla applies its position to promote more knowledge about sustainable consumption habits. This is primarily interpreted as a social brand activism trait, however, as the final goal is to solve an environmental issue, it is also argued that there exists an interrelation with environmental brand activism

Another aspect of social brand activism which is present in Arla's external communication is labelling. As it appears from appendices B26 and A1, Arla has introduced two new labels on their products – a label for indicating reduced CO₂ emission in packaging, also mentioned in section 6.1.1, and an animal welfare label. Arla explain that they have introduced the labels in order to *"make it easier for the consumers to locate packaging that is climate friendly. We do it because we want to support our customers in making greener decisions"* (Appendix C6). It is argued that these labels have an educational function as Arla is enhancing the consumers knowledge of their products which implies that they are given the possibility to select Arla's products based on a knowledge foundation. Furthermore, the adding of labels increases the consumers' awareness of animal welfare as well as sustainable packaging which are topics that both are in the interest of the common good of society and therefore can be considered as social brand activism.

According to the theoretical framework of Sarkar and Kotler (2018), education is associated with social brand activism, however, in this specific context, it can also be interpreted as environmental brand activism, as education here is applied as an instrument for achieving an environmental result. Spreading knowledge about sustainable consumption habits has a positive effect on the environmental footprint related to consumption which makes education, in the present context, associated with the topic of reducing emission control – a topic that, based on Sarkar and Kotler's definition, is related to the concept of environmental brand activism (See table 1).

However, not all of Arla's educational initiatives are related to environmental brand activism. Arla's educational efforts furthermore reaches out to the Danish children where Arla has established a food camp for the purpose of educating the children in healthy food habits and enjoyment of food (Appendices A12 and B2). The goal of this initiative is to allow children to *"touch, taste and experiment with food and be included in cooking"* (Appendix A12) and more than 9000 children have been part of the food camp during the past five years (Appendix C2). Arla's motivation for the food camp is to:

"... Apply the knowledge we have to create value for the young people, families, schools, scientists and additional stakeholders within the field. It will bring inspiration to efforts needed for promoting the general food culture, better

food habits, and a healthy life style among children and young people” (Appendix C2).

By this, Arla is not only displaying a responsibility for educating the population, but furthermore to establish a knowledge sharing that serves the common good of the Danish society. In relation to the food camp, Arla has conducted a research on children and pickiness published in a report that concludes that *“55 percent of the Danish children are described as picky - however - only 25 percent of the children are considering themselves as picky [...] To be called picky is pigeonholing the children and it makes them act like they are picky...”* (Appendix C2). Here Arla is addressing children’s food habits based on their parents impact hereon as Arla is placing the responsibility for the children’s food habits on the parent stating that they have a negative impact on the food habits. Arla’s communication is directed at the parents in appendix C2 with the purpose of educating them in a better way to approach their children, food habits, and pickiness. It is furthermore elaborated that

“85 percent of the children states they want to try new food items and 62 percent of these even liked what they tasted. It is thereby, to a great extent, the adults, or the parents, who need to change their habits and behavior in order to learn their children to be braver when it comes to food” (Appendix C2).

The food camp initiative distinguish itself in relation to the other educational efforts mentioned above, as both educating the consumers in sustainable consumption and labelling can be related to a greater purpose - the environment. The aim of the food camp is not to have a final positive impact on the environment, but on the contrary to promote welfare and health among the Danish children. Whereas the remaining educational efforts are related to environmental brand activism, the food camp is considered an example of Arla applying its brand in a social activist context. Based on the aspects of education derived from Arla’s external communication it is therefore argued that both social - and environmental brand activism are present.

6.3.2 Health and Social Security

Another topic found relevant in relation to social brand activism is Arla’s effort to develop a sustainable dairy industry in Nigeria which Arla has been communicating about on both Twitter and in a press release (See Appendices B21 and C7). In a press release Arla states that:

“With an increasing demand for nutritious dairy products among Nigeria’s fast-growing population there is a need to improve the local dairy industry in order for it to meet the demand [...] We are very excited about this new

partnership because it will make an actual difference for so many farmers life and the farming in general” (Appendix C7).

Based in this, it can be derived that Arla’s Nigeria initiative is occupied with social brand activism on several levels. Firstly, Arla is seeking to have a positive impact on the health of the Nigerian population by offering them correctly produced, low risk dairy products and thereby a higher degree of food security. Secondly, there is a focus on building a foundation for the Nigerian farmers to have better living conditions and a higher degree of social security related to being a farmer as the aim of the Nigeria initiative is to *“increasing the locale farmers’ income and create growth in the Nigerian dairy industry”* (Appendix C7). Arla furthermore elaborates that:

“Instead of constantly moving in the search for grass areas and water sources, the famers will get a piece of land at their disposal where they can settle and expand their farm. It is part of the public commitment to ensure the infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and water which is essential in order to process the milk and get it on the market” (Appendix C7).

In other words, the existing living conditions as a farmer is poor with a high degree of uncertainty about the future. By offering them a piece of land the Nigerian are able to achieve a higher degree of social security, as their income is regular. An additional element of social brand activism found in the quote above is that Arla is stressing the public responsibility to ensure the infrastructure which contribute better conditions, not only for the farmer, but for the Nigerian population as whole. With this initiative, Arla is thereby serving the common good of the Nigerian population while being occupied with one of the critical issues that world is facing – population growth. By that it is argued that social brand activism, in the form of ensuring health, food security, and social security, is evident in the case of Arla. It is, however, only evident in the context of the specific initiative established in Nigeria.

6.3.3 Summary of Social Brand Activism

Arla is displaying social brand activist behavior through the efforts shared in their external communication. Both the topics of health, social security, and education are found in the collected data which are all associated with social brand activism.

6.4 Workplace Activism

In their theoretical framework, Sarkar and Kotler (2018) elaborates that the category of brand activism related to the workplace is related to topics such as Governance of corporate organization, CEO pay, workers compensation, labor and union relations, supply chain management (See table

1). In the collected data, one topic is identified as workplace activism within the topic of supply chain management, which will be elaborated in the following.

6.4.1 Sustainable Supply Chain Management

As described in section 6.1.2, Arla has established a new brand called JÖRD which is argued to be an example of environmental brand activism. However, this initiative can also be seen in the perspective of sustainable supply chain management, which, according to the theoretical framework, is related to workplace brand activism. The plant-based alternative to cow milk is thereby not only an indicator of Arla's desire to reduce CO2 emissions while impacting the consumers' food habits in a more climate friendly direction, as established in the section about environmental brand activism. Arla's shift to plant-based products is an example of sustainable product development including a change of the raw material in their production, hence it can be considered part of sustainable supply chain management. In a press release of Marts 5 2020, Arla explains that:

"... It is a natural step and an exciting business opportunity for us to enter the market of plant-based products, which is closely related to our additional products. We want to use our unique expertise and innovation power to develop natural, Nordic products that are modified to fit into the everyday life of the Danes" (Appendix C1).

Here Arla is employing an activist voice by expressing their interpretation of which initiatives workplaces should embrace in order to meet the demands of the future, more specifically, to solve the issues related to climate change. In this context, Arla is advocating a focus on innovation in order to improve the various processes related to a company's supply chain management. Arla is thereby emphasizing innovation in their product development and is furthermore emphasizing its own important role in relation to innovation. The fact the Arla's is the largest dairy company in Denmark implies that Arla's has the best resources available for developing new products, including knowledge resources and financial resources, within this industry which enhances Arla's responsibility to take the lead in the development of new products. A role that Arla is willing to take on, as the launch of plant-based products is based on *"a clear ambition to play a leading role within this category in the coming years"* (Appendix B1). The sustainable supply chain management is therefore highly associated with innovation in their production development which can be considered an expression of workplace brand activism. Though sustainable business practices and innovation can also be interpreted as environmental brand activism as it appears from section 6.1.2 and 6.1.3

Additionally, Arla states that: *"Milk will always be the core of Arla. However, we are aware that many Danes is using plant-based beverages like they are using milk"* (Appendix C1). Based

on this quote it can be argued that Arla's plant-based beverages furthermore is a result of adapting the product development to meet the demands of the consumers which constitutes an additionally part of Arla's supply chain management. According to Arla's own data, the Danes are increasingly consuming plant-based beverages as this category has increased by more than 50 percent from 2018 to 2019 (Appendix C1). Adapting the supply chain to the changing consumer demand is way of maintaining and ensuring a strong and attractive workplace for the employees for which reason it, according to Sarkar and Kotler (2018) is considered traits of workplace brand activism. Here Arla's focus on the value chain constitutes something that serves the common good, as it creates better conditions for the environment, the consumers, and the employees of Arla. Hence it is argued that workplace brand activism is present in the case of Arla, however, it is only evident in their external communication about supply chain management.

6.5 Sub-Conclusion

Four categories of brand activism can be identified in Arla's external communication. Arla is publicly taking a stand on issues related to the environment, political issues, social issues, and workplace related issues. The environment is the most addressed issue, as Arla's activist approach to all four categories of issues are related to an environmental concern for which reason it is found that Arla's activist application of its brand mainly is promoting an agenda in favor of the environment. However, Arla is also expressing its opinion about non-environmental issues though these issues are less emphasized in Arla's external communication.

7.0 Discussion of Findings

In the following, a discussion of the findings of the analysis above will take place. The discussion looks into the findings seen in the light of the literature review in section 2.0 as well as findings that are raising further investigation questions.

7.1 Progressive or Not?

As it appears from the analytical findings, Arla is presenting itself as an activist brand within the categories of environmental brand activism, political brand activism, social brand activism, and workplace brand activism. The question is then, whether Arla, based on these findings, can be considered a progressive brand. According to the theoretical framework proposed by Sarkar and Kotler (2018), a progressive brand actively pursues policies that promotes the common good whereas a regressive brand actively goes against the common good. The following aims at discussing whether Arla should be perceived as a progressive brand based on the analytical findings of their external communication. Hence, Arla's emphasis of each of the elements identified as brand activism will be discussed.

7.1.1 Environmental Brand Activism

Based on Arla's external communication efforts it appears that the topics of sustainable resources, innovation, and a sustainable supply chain are highly emphasized in Arla's external communication which is further emphasized by launching their sustainability campaign. The question is whether all of these initiatives with roots in environmental improvements can be interpreted as progressive environmental brand activism.

Focusing on the initiatives about sustainable resources, Arla is occupied with reducing the CO₂ emission related to producing cheese wrapping, milk carrying boxes and plastic food containers. As it appears from the data, the sustainable packaging is limited to some specific products and is thereby not implemented throughout the all of the packaging at Arla which indicates that these initiatives should not be interpreted as an indicator of activist environmental branding. However, the initiatives live up to the previously mentioned definition of sustainability as "[...]the changing ability of one or many systems to sustain the changing requirements of one or many systems, over time" (Manderson 2006 p. 96). It is therefore argued that the sustainable resource efforts are meeting the demands for being sustainable, and thereby protecting the environment, however to a less distinct degree. Furthermore, the communicated efforts are limited to a national level which reinforces the argument of neutral environmental brand activism being present.

In appendices C3, B13, and A8 it was found that Arla has initiated a new climate check on all of their farms. The farms, including the cows, are the greatest source for GhG emission in Arla's entire value chain and it is thereby an essential issue for Arla to address. By implementing the climate check Arla display that they are taking a large responsibility for solving the greatest challenge related to their production, and as it appears from the data, they have furthermore been successful with reducing the GhG emission from their farms. Additionally, the climate check has been employed by all of Arla European farmers which means that the initiative goes beyond a national level. For this reason, it is argued that the climate check initiative is the result of a progressive approach to environmental brand activism.

As it appears from section 2.5.3, sustainable food consumption is an important part of a sustainable development. Here Arla is actively seeking to promote a more sustainable food consumption behavior among the Danish consumers by launching their new plant-based beverages, JÖRD, however, the plant-based products accounts for a small amount of Arla's total production with a majority of their products being based on cow-milk. The new plant-based beverages can thereby be seen as a sign of environmental brand activism, as it is emphasized in Arla's external communication, though it is argued to be less emphasized in their overall business strategy, as the cow milk remains their primary resource in the production. Furthermore, it can be discussed whether the motive for launching these new products is found in protecting the environment or as part of a marketing strategy which serves the purpose of meeting the new consumer demands. As previously mentioned in section 2.5.4, it is considered easy for large companies to emphasize

a particular aspect of sustainability, in this case sustainable food consumption, to advance their own agendas and thereby prioritize business outcomes over societal concerns (Manderson 2016, Hahn et al. 2017). It is difficult to determine whether this issue is asserting itself in the case of Arla, however the fact that cow-milk remains an essential part of Arla's supply chain indicates that this might be the case. For this reason, it is argued that the implementation of plant-based products is the result of a more neutral approach to environmental brand activism which is supported by the fact that the new products only will be sold on the Danish market, and the initiative is thereby limited to a national focus.

The most dominant initiative that is present in Arla's external communication is their newly introduced sustainability campaign. Through their campaign, Arla is addressing various aspects of climate change and contributing new solutions and Arla's thereby taking responsibility for the impact of their own business activities while educating the consumers and leading the way for a greener development among Danish companies in general. The sustainability campaign is considered the strongest identification of brand activism as the campaign is constructed based on several of the initiatives mentioned individually in this research. Hence, the campaign is considered an example of a high degree of environmental brand activism compared to many of the smaller scaled initiatives identified as brand activism in the present thesis.

7.1.2 Political Brand Activism

When investigating the political brand activism in Arla's external communication, one main topic was evident - to improve the cooperation between the different institutions in order to improve the environment. According to the theoretical framework proposed by Sarkar and Kotler, political brand activism is measured, among other things, on the degree to which a brand promotes transparent and open government as well as participation of all stakeholders when implementing new policies. This is exactly what Arla is stressing in their external communication with an emphasis on expanding the cooperation between politicians, companies, and scientists. On one hand, the demand for more cooperation can be interpreted as a way for affect the political handling of issues in a manner that benefits Arla's own business terms. On the other hand, Arla has a focus that goes beyond their own interest, as they stress the fact that all companies should be involved - even the smaller companies. It is therefore argued that Arla is displaying a responsibility for solving the challenge of climate change by applying a high degree of political brand activism which indicates a progressive approach to this type of brand activism.

Additionally, the degree of political brand activism is reinforced by clear alignment between Arla's lobbying efforts and the company's own values with advocates for a sincere and transparent motivation for their activist political message. As it appears from the data referred to in section 6.2.1 Arla is also accumulating knowledge within the field of Danish companies and how they work with implementing environmental concerns in their business models which adds to the image of Arla's brand being applied for the purpose of promoting political changes. Based

on the findings deduced from the data analysis, it is therefore apparent that a strong indicator of Arla's being a progressive activist brand is present when it comes to politically rooted issues.

7.1.3 Social Brand Activism

The findings regarding social brand activism revealed that the topic of education, health, and social security were evident in the data collected from Arla's external communication. As argued in section 6.3, the presence of these topics gives an identification of a social brand activist approach to Arla's brand management. The degree of social brand activism can, however, be discussed.

In Arla's communication about education they refer to educating the consumers about good food habits. Through this initiative, Arla is aiming at promoting better eating habits and knowledge about food. Arla's own commitment to the people that they seek to educate is, however, considered minimal. The initiative is not associated with any follow ups, or improving of the access to better and more healthy food for which reason it is argued that Arla has a low degree of commitment to the initiatives related to education. Furthermore, the target group for the education is limited to groups of the Danish consumers and is therefore considered to have a local focus level, indicating a neutral approach to social brand activism, as the company do, however, take some degree of responsibility and commitment within this topic.

The Nigeria initiative, analyzed in section 6.3.2, does, on the other hand, reach out to a broader level as it goes beyond the national level, and thereby is considered global level, which advocates that progressive brand activism is present. In this specific case, Arla is in a high degree improving the standard of living for the Nigerian population while improving the access to food of higher quality and safety. On the other hand, it can be argued that Arla is acting in their own interest as the milk produced by the Nigerian farmers will be employed for the production of Arla's products and the Nigeria initiative is thereby also associated with financial benefits for Arla. However, it is argued that the project is related to a higher degree of risk than success given that it can be difficult to predict the success rate of the initiative. For this reason, Arla's work in Nigeria indicates a more progressive approach to social brand activism but with elements pointing in a more neutral direction.

7.1.4 Workplace Brand Activism

The only topic identified as workplace activism in the collected data of Arla's external communication is sustainable supply chain management for which reason the workplace brand activism identified in the case of Arla is related to an environmental adaptation as elaborated in section 6.4. In relation hereto, it is argued that innovation and sustainable supply chain management to a higher degree is related to environmental brand activism than workplace brand activism as Arla's brand activist approach to solving these issues as they are more associated with the promotion of an environmental concern than the concern for internal issues in the company, e.g. to

ensure democracy among the employees. However, a sustainable supply chain management is highly related to the handling of internal issues for which reason it is identified as workplace brand activism. It is therefore argued, that workplace brand activism is present, though in a less emphasized degree which suggests a more neutral approach to this type of brand activism. Additionally, the implantation of the plant-based products is, as previously mentioned, limited to the Danish market, which supports the perception of a neutral approach to workplace brand activism.

As already established, the degree of workplace brand activism can be determined based on the inclusion of employees' voice, promotion of equal pay and equal work, living wages, the opportunity for form unions, and the encouragement of a democracy (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). In the collected data, none of these themes have been identified, for which reason it is argued that there is a low degree of workplace brand activism present in Arla's external communication. This is, however, not interpreted as an absence of consideration for the mentioned themes, but on the contrary, it is interpreted as an identification of the fact that these are themes that Arla does not have an activist approach to.

7.1.5 Level of Progressive Brand Activism

Based on Arla's external communication it is argued that brand activism is present both on a neutral - and progressive level. The aspects of plant-based products, sustainable resources, and education suggest a neutral approach to brand activism. The progressive aspects are seen in Arla's demand for more political participation and cooperation, the implementation of a climate check, the Nigeria project, and, most importantly, in the launch of their sustainability campaign. Considering the data collected from Arla's external communication it thereby appears that Arla can be considered a progressive brand in some contexts and neutral in others for which reason it cannot be finally concluded whether Arla should be considered an overall progressive or neutral brand when it comes to brand activism. However, the sustainability campaign indicates a new approach to applying the brand in a progressive way for which reason it is suggested that Arla increasingly is becoming more progressive in relation to brand activism. A future research is therefore suggested in order to determine the direction in which Arla is developing.

7.2 Brand Activism Awareness in Denmark

The present thesis takes its starting point in a Danish company and its Danish social media accounts for which reason Denmark is a central part of the study. This might, however, have affected the findings of the analysis given that Denmark is one of the geographical areas where brand activism has yet to impact the agenda of a business management. Here, businesses' acquaintance to brand activism is more spread in the United States, as mentioned in section 2.3.1, for which reason it can be argued that the findings of the present thesis might have been significantly different if an American company had composed the case for conducting the research. However, the fact that Arla is a Danish company does not necessarily imply that brand activism is infeasible to

encounter in their external communication efforts. As it appears from the previous sections, progressive brand activism is evident in several aspects of Arla's external communication efforts which confirms the hypothesis that brand activism is present outside the geographical area of the United States. The present study has, in other words, contributed additional knowledge to the geographical limits of brand activism which widens the perspective for researching the concept in geographical areas where it is given little attention and prioritization in the business world.

Given that Arla is part of a European business context, as opposed to American, it is considered less likely that the employees managing Arla's social media have made acquaintance with the concept of brand activism, hence it is likewise considered unlikely that Arla as an organization is actively applying brand activism in their communication. In this context it is argued that the lack of knowledge about brand activism implies that the concept is less present in Arla's external communication whereas a more intensive knowledge level would imply that brand activism would have been more emphasized on Arla's communication channels. Had Arla actively been pursuing to become an activist brand, it is therefore considered likely that brand activism had been more evident and emphasized on their social media accounts and that Arla should actively be pursuing this is more likely, if it had been located in the United States. For this reason, it is argued that the geographical focus chosen for the present thesis has had an impact on the final findings, though it will demand further research to confirm this argument. It is suggested to shed light on this aspect in a further research where members of the Arla organization are involved in the research process, e.g. contributing to the data collection through interviews, in order to determine the level of knowledge about brand activism present within the organization.

Despite the fact that brand activism is identified in the case of Arla there is a lack of evidence present to point out whether this is the result of an active choice from Arla's perspective or whether the identified brand activism elements are the side effect of Arla's efforts to achieve another goal. Given that brand activism is fairly new concept and that is less spread outside the United States, it is considered less likely that Arla is actively working the concept. However, it can be argued that as the concept of brand activism becomes more well-known outside of the United States, including in the Danish society, more companies will actively work with it and embrace the concept. This is what has been the case with concepts such as CSR, which has been increasingly implemented in companies all over the world. The global spreading and application of brand activism is a topic that demands further research in order to establish a deeper understanding of brand activism within a national context, e.g. Denmark.

7.3 The Question of Greenwashing

As elaborated in section 2.5.3 about sustainability in the context of business, sustainability can be related an increased risk of greenwashing, i.e. that a company is promoting a greener brand image than what is the actual reality. In this context it is argued that there exists a risk of greenwashing in Arla's activist approach to employ its brand for promoting a sustainable development.

Based on Arla's external communication an image of the company as a sustainable and responsible company is evident which emphasizes an overall green image of Arla as an organization. On the contrary, Arla is built on producing milk-based and which is considered one of the beverages related to the highest environmental footprint as established in section 2.5.4. Hence, a paradox is present in the conflicting image that Arla display in their external communication and environmental impact of their production which raises the suspicion of greenwashing.

Arla is taking a lot of initiatives to reduce the CO₂ emission related to their production, as it appears from the collected data, however, it is difficult to determine how great the impact of these initiatives is on Arla's total CO₂ emission. As elaborated in section 2.5.3, there is a tendency for companies to increasingly employ the green success stories to promote an image of greater achievements than what is the reality and it can be discussed whether this is what that is taking place with Arla's sustainability campaign. The analysis revealed that Arla's sustainability campaign can be interpreted as environmental brand activism, however, the campaign is based on several minor initiatives which together are stated to have a significant impact on Arla's total environmental impact.

One example of an isolated initiative, is an animal welfare label that Arla has added on their products in order to inform the consumers about the degree of animal welfare of behind their products. In a tweet, the Dane, Simon Nyborg Jensen, explains that the highest animal welfare score achieved through the label only correlates to the minimum demand of organic farming (Jensen 2020). Based in this argument it is therefore considered greenwashing when Arla is basing its responsible image on initiatives like this, as it improves the animal welfare, though, better and more responsible alternative are available. Another example is the new milk carrying boxes which Arla states is related to a 30 percent reduction of CO₂ emission. Here, it should be pointed out that the 30-percentage reduction not is on Arla's total CO₂ emission, but limited to 30 percent out of the total of the CO₂ emission related to the production of the milk carrying boxes. Furthermore, the production of these milk boxes accounts for a minor part of Arla's total emission stressing the fact, that the effect of the new milk carrying boxes is minimal seen in a greater perspective. These isolated initiatives are present in Arla's external communication and thereby contribute to creating a green image of Arla, however, they are considered small, isolated initiatives with insignificant impacts, thus they can be interpreted as greenwashing. A final determination of the greenwashing suspicion cannot be deduced based on the findings of the present thesis, as it would demand a deeper research on how the effect of each of these isolated initiatives are affecting the climate.

Though there is an identification of greenwashing present in Arla's external communication about the sustainability campaign, the company has, a previously mentioned, an ambition to produce CO₂ neutral milk by 2050. If this goal is achieved, it suggests that Arla's sustainability campaign is not the result of greenwashing, including an imbalance in the resources spend on communication and an actual transition, but on the contrary that these isolated initiatives are the result of a furrow full-assessment of all parts of the company's value chain. With that being the

case, the suspicion of greenwashing would be significantly reduced emphasizing brand activism as the motivation for communicating about the company's green initiatives. A further research in the future would help to establish whether Arla is successful with reaching their goal of CO2 neutral milk by 2050 which would specify whether their sustainability campaign should be interpreted mainly as a marketing campaign, indicating greenwashing, or as part of greening business strategy. As described in section 3.1.1, Sarkar and Kotler's theoretical framework is critiqued for being too vague in distinguishing between brand activism and marketing and advertising (Shetty et al. 2019), hence it would add some high value to the existing literature within the field of brand activism to exploit the boundary between marketing and brand activism. This will additionally contribute a better understanding of greenwashing in relation to brand activism.

7.4 Differentiation Between Communication Channels

Looking at the data collected from Arla's accounts on Twitter and Facebook and their press releases, it appears that brand activism can be identified on all three platforms. Based on the coding of the collected data it can be discussed whether the three different communication channels are applied for different communication purposes in the context of brand activism. As it appears from the analytical findings, press releases and Twitter are employed for communication about both environmental, - social, - political, - and workplace brand activism. Facebook, on the other hand, is mainly employed for environmental brand activist behavior. Arla is thereby displaying a different activist behavior depending on communication channel applied. This explanation hereof is suggested to be the different target groups associated with each communication channel, where Facebook differentiates itself from the remaining two channels, given that the private consumers compose the main target group of this communication channel.

Environmental brand activism is the most represented type of brand activism as it appears in all three data sources and it can therefore be argued that this type of brand activism is the one highest emphasized by Arla in their external communication based on both the number of communication channels and the amount of data identified as brand activism. This would indicate that Arla mainly should be perceived as a brand acting in an environmental activist manner. Though it is suggested that the emphasis of each type of brand activism cannot be determined based on their representation on the three selected communication channels. It does however give an identification of which topics Arla is perceiving as relevant for each of their communicational target groups. Here the environment is the topic considered most relevant across communication channels thereby target groups.

As mentioned, the consumers want brands to take public stand on topics such as climate change on social media and this demand might have an influential impact on the data found on the social media communication channel, Facebook. The environmental brand activist behavior identified on Facebook can thereby be argued to be the result of Arla's attempt to meet the consumer's demand for taking a public stand on environmental issues which would explain why this

topic is strongly emphasized in data derived from Facebook. With this being the case, the environmental concern can be interpreted as a marketing adaption rather than genuine brand activism efforts. However, the motive for a focusing on an environmental activist behavior cannot be finally concluded based on the findings of the present thesis, as it would demand additional research with a higher degree of inclusion of members from the investigated case.

7.5 Practical Implications

As previously mentioned, the concept of brand activism is new phenomenon which implies that there is a lack of in-depth literature within the topic. This constitutes a practical implication in the application of the framework as the lack of an in-depth description of the concept implies that the line between brand activism and CSR, and brand activism and CPA, has the potential to become unclear. In other words, how can it be established whether an action should be interpreted as brand activism, CSR, or CPA? In the present research, brand activism is understood as the result of the development of the concepts of CSR and CPA, as elaborated in section 2.4, for which reason the concepts are interrelated. When identifying elements of brand activism in Arla's external communication, it is therefore unavoidable that they likewise will contain elements of CSR and CPA. For this reason, the present data analysis has been based on the definition of brand activism as a concept that contains both CSR and CPA considerations, hence the practical implication of lacking in-depth knowledge has led the researcher to contribute a new definition of brand activism to the existing academic literature within the field.

Furthermore, the framework of Sarkar and Kotler has been composed with business leader as the target group and the framework thereby constitutes a guide for business leaders to adapt their businesses to the concept of brand activism. Hence, the main purpose of their framework is to provide business leader with a tool for improving the brand related activities and not as a theoretical tool for academic research as it has been the case in the present thesis. (Sarkar & Kotler 2018). The application of the framework in a different context than what it was intended for is, however, considered a practical implication with a low impact on the final findings as the purpose of the framework is to contribute concepts that facilitates an analysis of Arla's brand activist behavior. In this aspect, the framework has thereby successfully contributed the knowledge and concepts demanded despite the fact that it has been employed in different manner than what it was indented to. Hence it is argued, that the present thesis is adding to existing understanding of the brand activism framework's application possibilities.

8.0 Conclusion

The analytical findings of the present thesis conclude that the concept of brand activism is present in the investigated external communication of the Danish dairy company, Arla. Arla is displaying an activist behavior within four of Sarkar and Kotler's proposed categories of brand activism. Environmental brand activism is present in Arla's external communication through the topics of

sustainable resources, sustainable business practices, innovation in favor of the environment, and through their sustainability campaign launched in 2019. Political brand activism is identified through Arla's lobbying efforts that promotes an increased cooperation between business actors, politicians, and scientists. The topics of consumer education and improving health and living conditions for the Nigerian population are considered traits of social brand activism. Finally, workplace brand activism is evident in Arla's external communication as Arla is publicly taking a stand on sustainable supply chain management. Arla is thereby seeking to impact both the environmental, political, social, and workplace agenda through its brand activist communication. The findings do, however, establish that the handling of climate related issues, and thereby environmental brand activism, is given the highest prioritization based on Arla's external communication as a majority of the topics identified as brand activism can be directly associated with solving environmentally rooted issues.

Arla is displaying both progressive and neutral brand activism efforts within the topics identified as brand activism derived from the data set collected on social media and press releases. Based on the present research it can thereby not be finally determined whether Arla should be considered a progressive activist brand or not. Arla's recent sustainability campaign is, however, interpreted as a new and more progressive approach to the application of the Arla brand in the future with a focus on impacting the agenda of handling environmentally rooted global issues. It is thereby suggested that the international concept of brand activism increasingly will be spread on a local level creating an increased number of progressive Danish brands.

The final findings of the present case study are not applicable for generalization and the findings cannot be transferred directly to any other case. On the other hand, the findings of the present thesis serve the function of contributing new knowledge within the limited knowledge field of brand activism. Based on the findings it is concluded that brand activism can be identified outside an American context and furthermore, that a brand can act as an activist without being a self-proclaimed activist. New knowledge can thereby be added to existing literature within the application possibilities of brand activism. There is, however, a demand for further research within the conceptual framework of brand activism, e.g. research on the how brand activism affects brand reputation and the risk of greenwashing.

9.0 Literature

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