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CORPORATE ACTIVISM – NEW KID ON THE CSR BLOCK

Perceptions of Social Justice in Starbucks' Corporate Activism Discourses

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ABSTRACT

Salla Kettunen: Corporate Activism – New Kid on the CSR Block: Perceptions of Social Justice in Starbucks' Corporate Activism Discourses
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Over the past decade, large-scale American companies have taken a new kind of social stand and publicly spoken out on issues unrelated to their core business activities. The rights of LGBTQI+ people, racism, and gender equity, among others, have become hot topics on the corporate agenda – and companies are not afraid to show this through campaigns, partnerships, statements, and public comments. The phenomenon has been titled as corporate activism.

The activist efforts of companies are evidently connected to corporate social responsibility (CSR), i.e. the idea that companies have responsibilities that go beyond profit-making. In recent decades, CSR practices and theories have been criticized for being too instrumental: the realm of CSR is argued to be dominated by business interests which ultimately lead to unequal stakeholder participation and shallow CSR practices. At first glance, it seems that corporate activism might be something different. The private sector is becoming more vocal, engaging in new discourses, and moving to uncharted terrains in scales that the U.S. society has not witnessed during its modern history.

The upsurge of corporate activism has gathered attention within non-academic literature, but academic research on the topic remains scarce. The overall objective of this thesis is to address the research gap and establish initial connections between Peace Research and corporate activism. The more targeted objective is to critically examine how issues of social justice manifest in corporate activism discourses. To reach these goals, this research provides a thorough introduction to CSR and corporate activism and conducts a case study analysis on the U.S. coffee company Starbucks. A theoretical framework founded in CSR-theorizing and the methodological tool of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) guide the analysis of the data.

The findings reveal that Starbucks's activism discourses respond to mounting external pressure for corporate societal engagement and leadership. Activism is justified by emphasizing the relatable character of the company and its current Chairman emeritus Howard Schultz and romanticizing the U.S. as a promised land that needs protection. In addition, the discourses highlight the difficulties the country is facing in the current political landscape and the meaningful role of Starbucks in answering the problems. The findings ultimately show that Starbucks' activism efforts are derived from the narrow and instrumental perspective of an advantaged group and fail to bring out the voices of those who are marginalized against and disadvantaged. As a result, dominance and unequal power relations are likely reproduced and the aspiration to spark positive social changes stays hollow.

Overall, the research builds a normative theoretical structure around the concept of corporate activism instead of analyzing the phenomenon solely from instrumental and descriptive perspectives. The study contributes to an understanding of how corporate activism, despite its efforts to enact positive change, can uphold dominance and be justified with semantically strong arguments. Although the study managed to achieve its objectives, more research is needed to increase the generalizability of the findings and further understand the connections between corporate activism and social justice.

The study fundamentally shows that corporate activism is the new kid on the CSR block, and it is here to stay. If corporations are to make a genuine impact, they need to critically self-examine their position and advantages in society. The corporate activist who engages in an equal dialogue with those stakeholders who are disadvantaged and marginalized against, asks how to best support them, and (most importantly) listens is the one who changes the game.

Keywords: corporate activism, social justice, corporate social responsibility, Starbucks, CSR, America.

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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Hopefully, I managed to give back at least a tiny bit of the fortunes you gave me.

1. Introduction

"- - we will neither stand by, nor stand silent, as the uncertainty around the new Administration's actions grows with each passing day" (Starbucks 2017b).

Over the past decade, large-scale American companies have taken a new kind of social stand and publicly spoken on issues unrelated to their core business activities. The rights of LGBTQI+ people, racism, and gender equity, among others, have become hot topics on the corporate agenda – and companies are not quiet about it.[1] An increasing amount of corporate statements, campaigns, public comments by the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), and participation in demonstrations and marches reveal that speaking out on timely social issues is becoming more common than unusual. This corporate activity is not intended to happen behind closed doors with lobbyists or regulators, but instead among and for the general public (see Chatterji and Toffel 2019.) The phenomenon has been titled as corporate activism.

As a subject of research, corporate activism is located in the domain of corporate social responsibility (CSR), i.e. an umbrella concept concerned with the relationship between business and society.[2] Essentially, CSR draws together several theoretical standpoints which are all grounded in the same idea: companies have obligations to society that go beyond profit maximization. (see Snider, Hill & Martin 2003, 175; Carroll & Shabana 2010, 85.) In a world where multinational corporations have a significant influence in societies and are capable of changing political, economic, and social orders, CSR seems to be needed more than ever. However, several theorists have criticized the capabilities of CSR to make a genuine impact in society – for some, the whole concept is essentially trapped in the fundamental and structural profit-making-logic of the firm (see Banerjee 2014). Is corporate activism any different from this?

At first glance, it appears that corporate activism expands the theoretical ground and practices of corporate involvement in society, taking it to new fascinating areas. American companies are becoming more vocal, engaging in new discourses, and moving to uncharted terrains in scales that the society has not witnessed during its modern history. The focus has shifted from being a reactive

[1] LGBTQI+ is an acronym for the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex with the + representing other identities that can be also included under the umbrella term.

[2] Some theorists use the word corporate responsibility (CR) instead of "corporate social responsibility" to emphasize the environmental responsibilities of companies. In this thesis, I use the acronym CSR as an umbrella concept that captures the responsibilities of corporations through various dimensions, e.g. social, ethical, economic, and environmental.

corporate citizen into being a proactive game-changer.[3] Speaking out on pressing social issues without an immediate connection to the company's financial bottom line is evidently something new. (see Parkinson 2018.)

One might swiftly notice that the activist efforts of companies are connected to the notion of social justice, i.e. the equal realization of the same basic rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits (Zastrow 2009, 52). Achieving the ideal condition assigns responsibility to the basic institutions of society that influence or define the distribution of rights, benefits, duties, and burdens of cooperation (see Rawls 1971, 4). Corporate activism seems to bring companies closer to the realization and maintenance of social justice: corporations are not anymore participating in the distribution of rights, benefits, and protection through taxation or by being subjects of regulation. Instead, they become vocal influencers and activists that differ from traditional civil society actors, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and political groups pursuing justice for all. The corporate activists are oftentimes wealthy, well-known, and significant members of communities around the United States of America (hereon after, U.S.).

The upsurge of corporate activism has gathered much attention within non-academic literature but theoretical research on the topic remains scarce. The few existing studies on the topic have examined the instrumentality of the concept, i.e. why and how it occurs and does activism yield any corporate profits. In addition, some quantitative surveys have studied the extent of activism and how employees react to the activist efforts of their companies (see e.g. Chatterji & Toffel 2019, 2017, 2015; Deloitte 2015). In other words, qualitative and theoretically grounded research is absent. More importantly and interestingly, the field of Peace Research has barely addressed the topic. The literature on the private sector's influence on questions of positive peace, such as social justice, dominantly focuses on war-torn countries and corporate influence on peace processes. Examples include Peace Through Commerce (Williams 2008) and corporate diplomacy (Westermann-Behaylo et al. 2015).[4]

The overall objective of this thesis is to address the existing research gap. My aim is to establish initial links between Peace Research, corporate activism, and the overall framework of CSR. A more targeted objective is to shed critical light on how social justice is perceived and justified in corporate

[3] Hereon after, the term discourse refers to the social use of spoken or written language in social contexts. More specifically, the word 'discourse' is used in two ways: 1) as an abstract noun, i.e. language and broader semiosis as elements of social life; 2) as a count noun, i.e. ways of representing the world. (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, 81; Fairclough 1995, 54; Fairclough 2003, 26.)

[4] Positive peace refers to the divisions made between negative peace, i.e. absence of organized collective violence, and positive peace, i.e. the overcoming of indirect and structural violence (see Galtung 1967). Positive peace is understood to consist of equitable distribution of resources, acceptance of the rights of others, free flow of information, good relations with neighbors, and well-functioning government, among others (see Institute for Economics and Peace 2019).

activism discourses. I intend to examine corporate activism as the new kid on the CSR block and analyze whether it has the potential to bring about meaningful and just change or whether it eventually is trapped in the same difficulties as the modern instrumentalization of CSR. To reach these objectives, the research is conducted as a case study that focuses on the U.S. coffee company Starbucks. The analyzed data consists of texts published on Starbucks' webpage. Here, the specific subjects of interests are power relations detectable in the discourses and the ways through which activism is justified.[5] The framework of this thesis is built by combining the theoretical concepts of social justice, corporate activism, and corporate citizenship. The joint approach for the theoretical framework is justified by highlighting the similarities and parallelism between the three concepts while acknowledging the unique input each has to offer. The theoretical framework is supported by the methodological tool of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Ultimately, the case-study analysis answers the following research question:

How social justice is perceived and justified in Starbucks' corporate activism discourses?

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Firstly, chapter 2 will thoroughly introduce the concept of CSR. It demonstrates the effects of globalization on the societal role and responsibilities of companies and highlights the power and influence of multinational corporations. The chapter also introduces CSR's historical evolution in the U.S. and ends in a critical discussion on the problems found within contemporary CSR theories and practices. By providing a well-grounded introduction to CSR and the U.S.' country context, chapter 2 simultaneously maps out the main reasons for the rise of corporate activism. Thus, it serves as a fundamental and explanatory foundation for the theoretical framework of this thesis.

Following this, chapter 3 describes the concepts of corporate citizenship, corporate activism, and social justice. The chapter defines key terms and concepts and further leads the discussion to the goals of this study. It is followed by a chapter presenting the methodological tool, i.e. Critical Discourse Analysis. This chapter introduces the basic premises of CDA, and a three-dimensional analysis model developed by Norman Fairclough. Chapter 4 also clarifies the reasons behind choosing Starbucks as the designated research subject and discusses the primary research data.

Chapters 5 and 6 form the core of this thesis. Chapter 5 will describe and analyze the data while dating back to the findings back to the literature review. The chapter will introduce the discourses found in the text and interpret them in the light of the previous studies and theoretical concepts presented.

[5] As corporate activism is intended toward a broad audience and manifests largely through language, paying attention to the discursive practices of activist companies is appropriate.

Chapter 6 draws together what has been established, evaluates the findings and arguments made, and explains how this thesis contributes to new knowledge. Finally, further research questions on the topic are brought forward.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility – Behind the Ambiguous Term

The responsibility of business corporations to solely maximize shareholder returns and produce goods and services to society has been fundamentally questioned. The increasing power of large companies, business scandals and malpractices, the centrality of the private sector in social and economic development, and complex social and environmental challenges are just some of the issues that have challenged the traditional purpose of the firm (see Blowfield & Murray 2014, 4–6; Rayman-Bacchus & Crowther 2004, 23).

Concerned with the relationship between business and society, CSR considers the obligations of companies through a wide range of variables, e.g. social, economic, environmental, and ethical dimensions. At its core, CSR maintains that companies have responsibilities to society that go beyond profit maximization. Companies should not be hold accountable only for their capability to answer shareholder demands but also for the social and environmental consequences of their business activities. (Snider, Hill & Martin 2003, 175; Carroll & Shabana 2010, 85; Matten & Moon 2008, 405.) Instead, CSR pays attention to a variety of stakeholders, i.e. groups or individuals who have a stake, a claim, or an interest in the operations and decisions of the firm. These people effect or are affected by the actions of corporations and the achievement of their objectives. (see Freeman 1984.) The categorization of stakeholders varies but customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, local authorities, and NGOs are regularly considered as the most relevant stakeholders (Snider, Hill & Martin 2003, 176; Maignan & Ralston 2002, 498; Carroll 1991, 43; Girard & Sobczak 2012, 216).

Providing any further and commonly accepted definition of CSR is a difficult task: there is no consensus on what CSR precisely means in theory and practice.[6] In this thesis, I follow Garrida and Mélé (2004) and understand CSR as an umbrella concept consisting of several theoretical approaches. The approaches further classify CSR into four main dimensions related to profits (instrumental theories concerning wealth creation); political performance (political theories concerning the societal power of companies and the responsible use of power), social demands (integrative theories concerning the satisfaction of social demands); and ethical values (ethical theories concerning ethical responsibilities of corporations to society). (Garriga & Mélé 2004, 51.)

[6] It is to be acknowledged that the absence of a widely agreed operational framework on CSR opens loopholes. To illustrate, the lack of sufficient minimum standards for social performance enables companies that work against public welfare, e.g. tobacco corporations, to present their business activities as socially responsible in their CSR reporting and marketing. In this way, corporations can neutralize the negative effects to some stakeholders, portray themselves as responsible, and prevent possible regulations. (*see* Fooks et al 2013.)

One explanation for the ambiguous nature of CSR is the variances found between nation states: corporate responsibilities look different in countries such as Sweden and Germany that have an explicit legal framework defining the social contract between business and society than in countries where governmental rules can be regarded as an intrusion with private liberty, for instance as in the U.S. or United Kingdom (Blowfield & Murray 2014, 130). The structure of society, cultural traditions, national institutions, socio-economic priorities, and the geopolitical context, among others, play a role in determining how corporate responsibilities are understood and practiced in countries around the globe (Carroll 2016, 7; Matten & Moon 2008, 406; see Visser 2011). In this study, I introduce the U.S. landscape for the emergence and practice of CSR as well as observe corporate activism and social justice in the country.

Despite national differences in the interpretation and implementation of CSR, the concept seems to be ingrained into the terrain of business over the past three decades. An increasing number of corporations, citizens, governments, and non-governmental and international organizations around the world appear to have accepted CSR as a guiding framework for understanding modern societies' relationship with the private sector (Moura-Leite & Padgett 2011, 533; Vogel 2006, 6; Carroll 2008, 41).[7] The universal proliferation of CSR can connected to globalization. Today, countries individually and as a collective face complex, interconnected changes and challenges that originate from the processes globalization and modern industrialization. The ethics of technology, the globalized economy, climate change, and demographic fluctuations have all ascribed companies new weighty responsibilities. Indeed, it seems that the modern expectations for corporations indeed go beyond paying taxes and obeying the law. (Blowfield & Murray 2014, 17.)

2.1. Globalization – Re-contextualizing CSR

Globalization is one of the strongest forces shaping and redefining the relationship between business and society. Transnational economic, political, social, and environmental interconnections and movements are continuously transforming societal conditions within different regions (Steger 2003, 7–8.) The consequences of globalization are complex and many. The most relevant of them for this thesis are listed as follows.

[7] The UN's Global Compact is a suitable example of the global proliferation of CSR. The Global Compact is the largest international CSR initiative and sets out ten principles on human rights, labor, environment, and corruption (UN Global Compact 2018). Other relevant CSR instruments are the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises – both of which are soft law instruments (Cirlig 2016, 242-243).

Firstly, the emergence of multiple networks and activities that transcend traditional boundaries has made our globe more hybrid than previously. Economics, culture, politics, and technology increasingly blend into and shape each other. Secondly, economic relations and activities expand and stretch in unprecedented ways. Global production and trade reach every corner of the world. Thirdly, social exchanges increasingly intensify and accelerate. Distances are shortening and information spreads rapidly – things are getting faster, and local events are shaped by issues occurring across the world and vice versa. Finally, people are increasingly conscious of deepening social connections and interdependencies between the global and the local. Identities, attitudes, and cultures are more heterogeneous and values more plural. (Steger 2003, 9–13.) To illustrate the four trends on a practical level, I will next elaborate their direct and indirect implications for business. Introducing the trends more thoroughly allows to distinguish why corporate activism and CSR will likely gain more relevance in the future.

Today's hybrid national and global phenomena belong to decentralized processes that concern societal actors such as corporations. The internet and climate change, for example, transcend traditional political and judicial boundaries and cannot be solely controlled by any national governments. In other words, some societal issues are increasingly influenced and governed by multiple non-state actors. This further connects the economic and political domains and makes the division between them blurry. (Crane & Matten 2016, 68; Scherer & Palazzo 2011, 918–922.) The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer's results echo the trend: the report reveals that the global trust in the ability of governments to solve global problems is lower compared to the trust of citizens in the ability of corporations and civil society to tackle the same issues (Edelman Trust Barometer 2018a, 44; Edelman Trust Barometer 2018b, 3). In sum, hybridity means that companies are not perceived only as economic actors – more is expected of and demanded from them.

The globalization of trade, production, and markets have made corporations bigger, both in size and power. Many multinational corporations (MNCs) have yielded significant profits by transferring their supply chains to developing countries, where there is cheap labor and economically favorable production conditions (Blowfield & Murray 2014, 106–107).[8] The amplified wealth and influence of companies have turned them into significant global and national actors, capable of affecting the economic, political, and social landscape of societies (Blowfield & Murray 2014, 99; Steger 2003, 51; see Rayman-Bacchus & Crowther 2004, 23–24). The development has intensified the call for

[8] This 'race to the bottom' has come at a high cost: numerous human rights and environmental violations have been detected along the supply chains of MNCs (see e.g. Human Rights Watch 2016; Greenpeace 2018).

CSR and the need to hold especially MNCs accountable for their activities, while assigning them appropriate responsibilities (see Djelic & Etchanchu 2017, 643). Simply put, companies possess power and wealth often comparable to nation states – and society is eager to hold them accountable.

Modern digital communication tools and internet technologies enable citizens, NGOs, and the media to observe and distribute content in real time. The world has entered a phase where the monopoly of information has crumbled and almost everyone has the power to produce, influence, and sustain public discourses. (Hermida 2012, 309–311; Clausen 2004, 25; Kou et al. 2017, 807.) [9] Previously, information provided by companies, e.g. public company reports, was the primary source of material available on corporations. Nowadays, citizens and pressure groups can discover and bring corporate malpractices to public awareness and mobilize to affect change. Simultaneously, mediators, such as ranking and accreditation bodies are able to pressure companies on a global scale. Operating on this platform of global visibility, companies are inclined to protect their brand image and adjust to the demands for information and transparency. (Tapscott & Ticoll 2003 in Marshall 2004, 15; Carroll 2015, 88-89; Burchell & Cook 2006, 131; Djelic & Etchanchu 2017, 656.) In sum, companies face the pressure to conduct responsible business and communicate loudly and openly.

Modern companies are affected by growing social interdependencies between nation states, businesses, organizations, and citizens. Identities, activities, and outlooks exceed local and national boundaries and foster ideas of world citizenship. Companies operate in contexts that are characterized by pluralistic values and growing social expectations which, in turn, challenge the traditional norms and rules regarding legitimate corporate conduct (Steger 2003, 12; Hooft 2009, 1–2; Lawson 2011, 47; Scherer & Palazzo 2011; see Woodward et al. 2008) The pluralism of values concerns businesses especially through the notion of ethical consumerism. The possibility to express one's ethical self through purchase decisions or the deliberate avoidance of certain brands has gained prevalence among consumers (Gillani & Kutaula, 2018, 512; Papaoikonomou et al 2016, 209). This has turned businesses into channels for expressing moral choices and allowed citizens to play a more direct role in shaping and regulating business ethics (Crane & Matten 2016, 367–368). Briefly explained, businesses are expected to operate according to the multiple values to uphold legitimacy – and these values indeed are many.

Based on the above, we can distinguish that MNCs have become important players in the global and national arenas. They are not only subjects that shape the surrounding world but also channels through

[9] The power of modern communication technologies was evident in the usage of social media during the Arab spring. Presently, this power can be seen in several protests against MNCs due to the exposure of unethical treatment of workers in supply factories (see Hamdy & Gomaa 2012, 196; Segran 2017).

which the surrounding world aspires to express their needs, desires, interests, and values. It is clear that the role and responsibilities of companies have dramatically changed with the emergence of globalization and various processes included in it. As corporate activism is taking the societal involvement of companies into new levels, turning them into more proactive actors, it is truly important to research how activism manifests and how it is justified. This sub-chapter has elaborated the contemporary operating context for the private sector and pinned out global trends that might explain the rise of corporate activism. Noting the significance and large proliferation these global trends, it is highly likely that CSR and corporate activism are here to stay – and it is vital to obtain more descriptive and critical understandings into the phenomenon.

2.2. Corporate Social Responsibility in the U.S.

Perceptions of CSR has varied and progressed for over half a century within the U.S. (Matten & Moon 2008, 405). In this sub-chapter, I will introduce CSR's historical developments within the country and discuss its current status by paying attention to the political, economic, and cultural context it is embedded in. I will thereby explain the rising significance of CSR, distinguish the U.S. context for the rise of corporate activism, and demonstrate how CSR changes to reflect society at given times. Contemporary U.S. theorizing on CSR will not be touched upon in much depth for two reasons. Firstly, the U.S. academia has largely turned its focus from producing theoretical considerations on CSR to conducting empirical research on the matter. Secondly, the concept has experienced a disintegration of interests into related themes, such as corporate citizenship, making core CSR theorizing scarce. (see Carroll 2008, 39.)

2.2.1. The Historical Evolution of CSR in the U.S.

Questions regarding CSR have circled around the practices of American businesses for decades. The concept was first introduced by Howard Bowen (1953), who described that "businessmen" have obligations to "follow lines of actions that are desirable in terms of the objectives and values accepted in society and to work toward their improvement" (Bowen 1953, 6).[10] His work was based on the idea that American companies are significant centers of power that can shape the lives of citizens. Bowen called for a thorough examination of the social responsibilities of businesses and highlighted the importance of management and organizational changes. However, his reflections did not resonate much within the U.S. business community. At the time, companies engaged in corporate

[10] As recognized by Carroll (2008), the 1950s did not include formal writings on other genders than men working in the sphere of business (Carroll 2008, 25).

philanthropy, such as charity contributions, but did not consider incorporating corporate responsibility into the practice of business itself. Nevertheless, as the power and wealth of companies increased, the idea of corporate responsibilities assumed firmer ground. (Carroll 2008, 25–26; Carroll 2015, 87.)

After the 1950s, the theoretical discussion on CSR grew. Researchers were eager to examine what CSR meant in practice and study its importance and benefits to businesses and society. (Carroll 2016, 1–2; Moura-Leite & Padgett 2011, 530.) A prominent CSR theorist Keith Davis (1960) pioneeringly argued that socially responsible corporations could increase their economic profits in the long-term. He was one of the first theorists to discuss the business case for CSR, i.e. the rational justifications for the influence of CSR to corporate financial performance. (Carroll & Shabana 2010, 101.) It is important to acknowledge that Davis did not view CSR exclusively as means to increase profit and referred to corporate responsibilities as "businessmen's decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm's direct economic or technical interest" (Davis 1960, 70). Despite the accelerating academic interest, philanthropy continued as the main form of corporate involvement in society (Carroll 2008, 28).

After the social movements of the 1960s, e.g. the civil rights and environmental movements, the debate on CSR expanded from theoretical considerations to the domains of government and business. Consumers, workers, and citizens had rising social and political expectations for companies. Many demanded more corporate transparency. (Carroll 2015, 88; Clark 2000, 366.) The establishment of governmental bodies, e.g. the Environmental Protection Agency and the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the development of strategies of civil regulation, e.g. social audits and rankings of CSR performance, formalized these requests. The incentive to operationalize CSR into business activities became apparent. (Carroll 1991, 39; Vogel 2006, 6; Clark 2000, 366.) The Committee for Economic Development published a policy statement that explicitly recognized the significance of CSR by stating that "[i]nasmuch, as business exists to serve society, its future will depend on the quality of management's response to the changing expectations of the public" (Committee for Economic Development 1971, 16).

It was at that time when A.B. Carroll (1979) presented his definitional framework for CSR. Carroll's framework brought together the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations for companies. (Carroll, 1979, 500.) The basic premise of the conceptualization was the following: 1) companies have the responsibility to produce goods and services that society wants – all other responsibilities are predicated to firms' capability to sustain its activities; 2) firms have a social contract with society and are expected to pursue their economic activities within legal requirements;

3) responsible businesses engage in practices that are expected by members of society, even though these expectations are not codified in the law; 4) businesses have to give back to society, even if there are no straightforward societal or legislative requirements to do so (ibid).[11] In practical terms, Carroll created a foundation for framing businesses' responsibilities toward society and discussed issues such as sustaining a high level of operational productivity, recognizing and respecting evolving ethical norms adopted by society, providing assistance to private and public education, and supporting community projects. (Carroll 2016, 2; Carroll 1991 40–41.)

During the 1980s, the focus of researchers shifted from theoretical considerations of CSR to the operationalization of the concept. More attention was paid to the development of new theories that supported the core concerns of CSR, such as stakeholder theory. (Carroll 2008, 34; Carroll 1999, 284–286.)[12] On a practical level, business and social interests came closer, but for alarming reasons. Corporate malpractices and scandals were widely documented throughout the 1980s, which led to the appearance and growth of theorizing on business ethics. (Carroll 2008, 36.) Researchers and theorists studied how matters of wright and wrong were addressed as well as attempted to distinguish how companies can manage ethical issues through a variety of policies, practices, and programmes (see Crane & Matten, 2016). Issues such as employment discrimination, questionable practices of MNCs, and environmental pollution rose the agenda. Companies begun approaching their responsibilities more seriously, taking the concerns of their stakeholders into account. (Moura-Leite & Padgett 2011, 532; Carroll 2015, 88.)

Starting from the 1990s, CSR has progressed from the interplay of thought and practice. A diverse range of related literature has been accumulated over the decades and the term has continued to serve as a building block for complementary theoretical approaches. (Carroll 1999, 288.) Simultaneously, the emphasis on CSR has further shifted from developing theoretical definitions to conducting empirical research on the topic (Carroll 2008, 39). As described by Basu & Palazzo (2008), questions of what and why has given way to the question of how – examining and describing the implementation of strategies and processes that enable corporations to conduct responsible business have moved to center stage. (Basu & Palazzo 2008, 130.)

[11] Carroll has visited his four-part conceptualization throughout the years. In 1991, he recast his definitional framework into a four-part pyramid with the intention of showing that all the four components are dependent on each other: they constitute a whole and are not mutually exclusive. (see Carroll 1991). The four-part CSR pyramid has been one of the most cited frameworks within CSR literature and oftentimes serves as the basis for CSR theorizing.

[12] Much like CSR, stakeholder theory draws attention to the significance of integrating societal concerns into business operations. However, it does not pay as much attention to responsibility toward society but posits the building of relationship and creation of stakeholder value as the essence of business. (Freeman & Dmytriyev 2017, 9–10.)

Clearly, corporate responsibilities change as society changes: the practice and theories of CSR reflect the changes happening within the landscape of business and the broader environment. This makes the concept constantly assume new roles. (Lahtinen et al. 2018, 12.) To situate corporate activism as the latest manifestation or "the new role" of CSR and analyze the phenomenon from the point-of-view of social justice, it is next appropriate to elaborate the contemporary American political, economic, and cultural landscape for CSR.

2.2.2. Where CSR is Now… and Why?

As discussed previously, socio-economic priorities, the institutional framework, and culture, among others determine how CSR is defined and acted upon in society. It can be said that corporate responsibilities in the U.S. are shaped by traditions of liberal individualism, communal welfare, democratic pluralism, and utilitarianism – determinants that also bring to the fore the psychology upon which the country's legal and economic basis are founded (Freeman & Hasnaoui 2011, 427; see Pasquero 2004 in Matten & Moon 2008, 409).

In the U.S., CSR is largely influenced by the level of power and involvement by the state. The U.S. government has traditionally had a limited role in addressing the country's social and economic affairs which is visible in the low levels of extensive welfare state provision and regulations for labor and capital markets. The lack of governmental participation has designated social issues and discretionary engagement as the main core of U.S. CSR practices (Camilleri 2017, 77–78.) CSR has been mainly understood as voluntary and matters such as education and employee rights have been long-lasting items on the CSR agendas of companies. (Danko et al. 2008, 45–46; Matten & Moon 2008, 408–412; Fifka 2013, 352).[13]

The U.S. stock market is the primary source of capital for publicly owned firms, meaning that the ownership of company shares is spread among a broad range of shareholders. Listed corporations are expected to provide a high degree of transparency and accountability to individuals stockholders as guarantees for their investment (Fifka 2013, 342, 344; Matten & Moon 2008, 408.) Meeting the demands of such a widespread cohort and demonstrating liability leads to a situation where listed U.S. companies tend to conduct more CSR (Fifka 2013, 349). On a similar note, the disperse of

[13] It is to be acknowledged that some policy frameworks and programmes which support and guide sustainable corporate conduct in the U.S. do exist. For example, the US Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs hosts a Responsible Business Conduct team that "provides guidance, promotion and support for responsible business practices, engaging the private sector, labor groups, non-governmental organizations, and other governments" (the US Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs 2018). Nonetheless, despite appearing well-intentioned on paper, the reputation of such frameworks and programmes does not come uncontested: significant gaps between governmental CSR policies and practices have been detected to exist (Camilleri 2017, 87–88).

company capital and the plurality of shareholders has paved way for an interesting trend within the responsible business domain: some stock owners aspire to influence the responsibility efforts of companies from within. The increased power of shareholders is illustrated by phenomena such as socially responsible investments and shareholder activism. (Maignan & Ralston 2002, 511.)[14]

Perhaps the most interesting determinant shaping CSR is the country's culture which features a synthesis between individualistic capitalism and communal welfare (Fifka 2013, 343). Due to the long-standing tradition of liberal individualism, U.S. society tends to put emphasis on the efforts of individuals rather than institutionalized collective actions. There is an abundance of corporate codes and checklists that guide company managers in their ethical decision-making as well as mechanisms that involve individual choices. (Vogel 1992, 44–45; Brammer & Pavelin 2005, 21.) The U.S. culture also features a strong preference for civic engagement. The ethos of 'giving back' to communities is expected from individuals and corporations alike. (Fifka 2013, 341–343, 351.)

The preference for communal welfare is further shaped by the role of religion in the country – with traces of Puritan and Calvinist character – and its influence on institutional structures and the political and economic culture (Doh & Guay 2006, 49–50; Fifka 2013, 343).[15] Firms are not only expected to behave according to social norms but also set standards for appropriate behavior (Maignan & Ralston 2002, 510–511; Vogel 1992, 42). However, it is important to acknowledge that concerns over unchecked corporate power accompanied by major business scandals have existed for decades. The public perception of the moral worth of American companies remains mixed. (Waterhouse 2013, 2).

When considering the overall economic and sociopolitical environment of the country, it is no surprise that the U.S. business community largely acknowledges the idea of undertaking economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities (Forte 2013, 816).[16] American companies engage in community activities, philanthropy, and volunteering programs – all of which represent important ideologies for US business executives (Danko et. al 2008, 46; Fifka 2013). Companies may deal with

[14] Socially responsible investments are the deployment of capital by investors to address social challenges. It involves the consideration of the social, environmental, and ethical consequences of the investments. (Blowfield & Murray 2014, 230.) Shareholder activism is a form of investor engagement where shareholders aspire to influence corporate managers and company policies and practices (Goranova & Ryan 2014, 1232–1233).

[15] Undoubtedly, religion has diverse manifestations in the U.S. and practitioners of several distinct religions can be found. The literature on the influences of world religions such as Islam or Hinduism on American CSR remains scarce, explaining why these and other religions were not used as an example in the text.

[16] Certainly, factors such as NGOs that monitor corporate conduct, industry norms, and media coverage on corporate (mis)behavior also explain the high level of CSR acceptance. (Tang et al. 2015, 218; Campbell 2007, 946). These determinants were not considered here as the aim is to draw a more general understanding of the American context for CSR.

pressure from stakeholders, e.g. with consumer and activist demands to address labor conditions in supply chains; have partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations; and sign up for alliances with other companies, such as the Global Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS or the Business for Social Responsibility (Matten & Moon 2008, 409; Carroll & Shabana 2010, 85).

In recent decades, the focus of corporations has shifted from the ethos of "giving back" to the consideration of strategic and holistic functions of CSR (Becker-Olsen et al. 2011, 31; Blowfield & Murray 2014, 144). Companies are keen to distinguish how they can benefit from implementing CSR in their core strategy. At best, this can provide a positive impact on people, planet, and wealth. At worst, it prevents the meaningful, just, and equal realization of CSR.

2.2.3. The Flaws of Contemporary CSR – Can You Smell the Money?

The business case for CSR was a built-in premise almost since the beginning. Early theorists and researchers believed that the efforts of companies to enhance their operative environment would benefit their business in the long-term. As CSR gained momentum throughout the decades, the consideration for its benefits grew larger as well. (Carroll & Shabana 2010, 101). Simultaneously, opponents of CSR began to obtain stronger voices in the debate. Economist Milton Friedman (1962) famously objected CSR and maintained that the single social responsibility of managers was to increase shareholders' profit, while acting in accordance with the law (see Friedman & Friedman 1962). If managers used the firms' resources to do social goods that did not maximize shareholder return, they imposed taxes on shareholders' money and became civil servants who ought to be elected through a political process (Friedman 1970). Thus, the reasoning for CSR proponents was that a link between CSR and the financial performance of companies could convince economists such as Friedman to view CSR positively or neutrally (Carroll 2015, 89; Schreck 2011, 183). Since then, Friedman's theory has been met with numerous counterarguments and criticized as outdated (Carroll 2008, 27).

The business case for CSR has grown in importance over the few decades in the U.S. Scholars and practitioners have been eager to examine the relationship between CSR and corporate financial performance (CFP) with the aim of answering whether doing good does well for business (Lee, Graves & Waddock 2018, 764). Showcasing a positive correlation between CSR and corporate financial performance is believed to give social and environmental matters more legitimacy and more ground in mainstream business decisions (see Blowfield & Murray 2014, 144; Schreck 2011, 167).

The instrumental and strategic rationalization of CSR has been subjected to criticism by researchers who argue that it enables the realm of responsibility to be dominated by business interests. For

example, Burchell and Cook (2006) recognize that the business case approach has produced narrowly focused CSR strategies which understand corporate responsibilities dominantly through negative and positive business impacts (Burchell & Cook 2006, 121). This had led to situations where some companies solely pay attention to responsibility issues where the link between good business and CSR is strong, while ignoring urgent societal issues where the business case is weak (Blowfield & Murray 2014, 307, 330). Kolstad (2007) further acknowledges that CSR can be used as a disguise to enhance brand image and increase profits, not as a meaningful strategy to affect positive changes in society and meet corporate responsibilities (Kolstad 2007, 138, 144).

Using CSR as part of public relations rather than a core strategy seems to be common (see Crouch 2010, 16). For example, several studies have revealed that companies likely disclose activities that they can favorable report in their CSR reports on, while paying less attention or completely ignoring activities that they can be criticized about. Reports seldomly provide specific details of CSR practices but instead cover general topics and use the latest "buzzwords". (Blowfield & Murray 2016, 183; Carroll 2015, 93; see Wang et al. 2018) Overall, the validity, accurateness, and independence of CSR reports can be often questioned (Burchell & Cook 2006, 131).

The business case approach has been criticized for creating an unequal and unjust condition between stakeholders. Stakeholder-oriented CSR theorizing sees that corporations should not only pay attention to stakeholders but also actively engage and involve them in continuous dialogue and in company decisions (Girard & Sobczak 2012, 216). This rarely seems to happen and stakeholders who are vulnerable, weak, and marginalized are often left outside of corporate agendas. Even though these individuals and groups have a legitimate claim to participate in corporate governance, lack of power leaves them excluded. For example, some stakeholders might be dispersed in a way that makes coordination and representation difficult while others might lack the resource to organize meaningfully. (Hussain & Moriarty 2018, 532.) Companies also tend to focus on stakeholders and issues that are important for business activities, leaving those who suffer most from society's ills to stay on the margins (Djelic & Etchanchu 2017, 643; Barnett 2019, 168–169).

By distinguishing stakeholders based on who has the most power, urgency, and legitimacy in corporate conduct, stakeholder theorizing contributes to instrumentalist thinking. Even research searching for the variables of a win-win situation between stakeholders and the company still tend to give primacy to the most powerful stakeholders and neglect a business case where the actions of companies could tackle broader societal problems. (Barnett 2019, 168–169; see Scherer & Palazzo 2011.) Accordingly, this thesis follows Carrol and Buckholtz (2000) and recognizes that CSR theories and practices must include a broad range of companies. Stakeholders cannot be only those groups

that management or particular researchers deems as important, but also those groups who themselves think they have a stake in the firm (Carrol & Buckholtz, 2000 in Burchell & Cook 2006, 133).

Banerjee (2008) argues that the dominant discourses of corporate social responsibility and sustainability are inherently driven by business interests and used to legitimize and enhance the power of MNCs (Banerjee 2008, 51). He further highlights the structural and functional limits of CSR and maintains that the current structure and purpose of companies aimed at delivering shareholder value is incompatible with broader social goals, such as delivering social justice and enhancing environmental integrity. Ultimately, narrow corporate goals of self-interest can prevent normative CSR practices from gaining significant ground. (Banerjee 2014, 94.) Consequently, for many critiques, CSR has ultimately failed to achieve its goals and thus the concept needs to be modified to be more demanding and innovative (see Blowfield & Murray 2016, 330).

While fully recognizing that the mainstreaming of CSR is largely depended on its capacity to add value for corporations, this thesis is not concerned with the quest for the business case or the win-win situation. I very much agree with the research arguing that the instrumental implementation of CSR eventually draws responsibility-thinking away from the non-business environment. (see Burchell & Cook 2006, 121‒122.) I align with the critical perspectives and recognize my responsibility to examine corporate activism with a sense of cautiousness, especially when reflecting the latter to questions of social justice. As stated earlier, even the promising stakeholder-oriented thinking can be non-inclusive and not pay attention to weaker groups and the securement of their meaningful participation. (Djelic & Etchanchu 2017, 643; Ehrnström-Fuentes 2016, 434).[17] In sum, there clearly is a need to assure the recognition of the plurality of stakeholder voices in the governance of corporations and their CSR activities – whether this happens in corporate activism is yet to be seen (see Djelic & Etchanchu 2017, 657; Banerjee 2014, 84–85).

[17] Interestingly, stakeholder theory was originally developed to serve as a critical alternative to the instrumental view on CSR and provide an effective method to analyze and deal with changes within the roles of business, government, and civil society. (see Scherer et al. 2016, 274; Crane & Matten 2016, 78). Recognizing the shortcomings of the current stakeholder primacy is, thus, critical to the further development of CSR.

3. Getting Political: Corporate Citizenship, Corporate Activism, and Social Justice

In the following sub-chapters, I will introduce the concepts of corporate citizenship, corporate activism, and social justice – the three concepts that form the theoretical framework of this thesis. Theorizing on corporate activism and corporate citizenship draw attention to the role and responsibilities of companies that go beyond profit-making but have different areas of focus. The literature on corporate citizenship pays attention to a regulatory vacuum that drives companies to be more-or-less active political actors which shape and co-create their institutional environment. Literature published on corporate activism strongly focuses on describing the concept, i.e. why and how it occurs. After discussing these theoretical orientations, I will introduce the main topics identifiable in social justice research while drawing connections between the three concepts.

The reason for reviewing the literature in question is straightforward. It gives justification for: 1) attaching an explicit political dimension to the nature of modern companies and viewing them as proactive political and social actors; 2) examining how questions of social justice are understood and addressed in the discourses of a company that has profiled itself as an activist in the American society.

3.1. Corporate Citizenship – The Firm as a Political Actor

The theory of corporate citizenship draws attention to the increasing role of companies as social and political actors, especially in the area of citizenship rights (Fifka 2013, 345; Crane & Matten 2005).[18] Due to globalization and gaps in national governance, companies are increasingly acting in the domains of politics and have taken on roles that were previously associated with that of governments and public institutions.

Before observing corporate citizenship in more depth, it is to be acknowledged that the relationship between economy and polity has been blurry for a long time: U.S. companies have been involved in American politics for decades. (Djelic & Etchanchu 2017, 642).[19] Following Djelic and Etchanchu (2017), I do not argue that the political role of American corporations is a new phenomenon driven by contemporary globalization. A suitable historical example of this managerial trusteeship that rose

[18] Corporate citizenship is closely related to the concept of "political CSR", coined by Scherer and Palazzo. Political CSR discusses "those responsible business activities that turn corporations into political actors" (Scherer & Palazzo 2016, 276) and "suggests an extended model of governance with business firms contributing to global regulation and providing public goods" (Scherer & Palazzo 2011, 901).

[19] Managerial trusteeship suffered from de-legitimation during the 1920s, which contributed to the description of the distinction between the responsibilities of business and political/social sphere (Djelic & Etchanchu 2017.)

to prominence together with corporate and managerial capitalism during the first half of the 20th century. At the time, corporate managers were expected to act as "trustees" for different constituencies and serve the public interest through political responsibilities, e.g. by maintaining the well-being of American liberalism and way of life. (Djelic & Etchanchu 2017.)

The main notion of this thesis is that globalization and the complex processes embedded in has significantly contributed to shifts in the business-society relationship, assigned companies highly notable power and influence, and eventually paved for the emergence of phenomena such as corporate activism. Thus, the concept of corporate citizenship is here used as a method to draw attention to the growing importance of corporations in the citizenship arena and, eventually, their role in the administration of social justice (see Crane & Matten 2005, 171–174; see Crane & Matten 2016, 68). [20]

The regulatory vacuum caused by the globalized economy assigns corporations new political responsibilities and given them more strategic power in society. As described previously, many Western companies have shifted their activities to developing countries that have low taxes, low levels of environmental regulations, and poor workers' rights. The internationalization of corporate supply chains has led to ecological and human rights violations and presented new risks for the activities of companies. Heterogenous legal and social demands, public pressure from civil society actors, and complex operative environments have given corporations the incentive to address governance gaps in developing countries and contribute to self-regulation by protecting, enabling, and implementing citizenship rights. (Scherer & Palazzo 2011, 904.)

Companies are not only involved in performing government functions in countries with weak or failed political systems – they conduct such activities in developed and stable economies as well. (Hussain & Moriarty 2018, 522; Matten & Crane 2005, 170.)[21] Insufficient local institutions, government failure to enforce important regulations or the deliberate decision by public authorities to delegate key state functions to private actors are often the primary explanation for companies becoming providers of public goods in developed countries. (Wood & Wright 2015, 272; Bell & Hindmoor 2009 in Scherer et al 2016). Within the U.S., the latter reason is especially visible as the government has retreated from the provision of some basic public services, such as health care. Instead, many

[20] This thesis follows Crane & Matten (2005) and defines citizenship as "an arena where two parties are involved: (1) the state (originally) as the party administering rights of citizenship and (2) the private citizen as the receiver of those rights". (Crane & Matten 2005, 175).

[21] As recognized by Scherer and Palazzo (2016), governance gaps are not exclusive of fragile states but manifest within different country contexts (Scherer & Palazzo 2016, 285).

services have been privatized and corporations have assumed a role for their provision (Crane & Matten 2016, 68; Mäkinen & Räsänen 2011, 6.)[22] Corporations enter the citizenship arena by having the opportunity to step in into the new areas of governance or receiving a more pertinent position in territories that were previously mostly administrated by the government (Crane & Matten 2005, 172). To summarize, "corporations rather than governments – – have increasingly assumed, shared or even taken over the function of protecting, facilitating, and enabling of citizen's rights" (Crane, Matten & Moon 2004, 109).

3.1.1. *What does the Citizenship Mean in Corporate Citizenship?*

The dominant and modern understanding of liberal citizenship defines citizenship as a set of individual rights (Faulks 2000 in Crane & Matten 2005, 170). The conversation on liberal citizenship essentially features T. H. Marshall's widely accept categorization on citizenship which consists of three elements: civil, social, and political rights which are traditionally granted to individuals by governments (see Marshall 1965). According to Crane and Matten (2005), social rights give citizens the freedom to participate in society, e.g. through education and health care ("positive rights"); civil rights provide citizens freedom from abuses caused by third parties, e.g. through access to freedom of speech ("negative rights"); and political rights enable citizens to actively participate in society, e.g. through voting or by taking part in collective will formation. (Crane & Matten 2005, 170). When examined through corporate involvement, the rights could be viewed as follows. [23]

In the area of social rights, corporations participate in the administration of rights through privatization or welfare reform. For example, companies might take part in educational and community development programs or the provision of health services. They assume a providing role by either supplying or not supplying individuals with social services. (Crane & Matten 2005 172, 174; Crane, Matten & Moon 2004, 109.) In the area of civil rights, companies can discourage or encourage governments to respect rights or – especially in the context of weak or failed governments – companies may protect or violate civil rights themselves. In this case, businesses assume more of an enabling role by either capacitating or constraining civil rights. In the area political rights, corporations can either participate in political processes through lobbying and party funding or act as channels through which citizens can express their political will. (see Crane, Matten & Moon 2008;

[22] According to Moon (2002), one of the reasons why governments share administrative responsibilities is the lack of monopoly of solutions for society (Moon 2002 in Crane, Matten & Moon 2004, 339).

[23] It is vital to note that corporate citizenship is intended to serve as a political metaphor: it does not consider companies as citizens themselves (as individuals are considered) but as entities that have complex relations to the citizenship rights of individuals (Crane & Matten 2005, 174; Mäkinen & Räsänen 2011, 6; Crane, Matten & Moon 2005, 431, 432).

Mäkinen & Räsänen 2011, 6). For example, the U.S. has seen a rise in consumer activism, which has been partially explained by apathy toward conventional politics. (Crane & Matten 2016, 368.)

By connecting companies to the administration of citizenship rights, corporate citizenship approaches corporations from a political point of view. It understands companies not only as lobbyists aspiring to influence politics but as active actors which shape and co-create their institutional environment (see Barley 2010; Scherer & Palazzo 2011). This has been especially the case within the U.S., where the business community has built an institutional field to shape U.S. public policy. Consisting of different populations of organizations, e.g. political action committees, government affairs offices, and public affairs and law firms, the institutional field has amplified corporate political influence and simultaneously shielded companies from appearing to influence the federal government directly. (Barley 2010, 777.) U.S. companies engage in collective decisions, public deliberations, and the provision of public goods in diverse areas of governance which attaches a clear political dimension to the nature of companies (Scherer et al. 2016, 276; Wood & Wright 2015, 280–283, see Djelic & Etchanchu 2017). This approach can benefit companies by preventing potential clashes between private actors and their societal environment (Scherer & Palazzo 2007, 1109).

The motivation behind the political activities of companies is varied. They can be the result of voluntary, self-interest-driven initiatives or compulsory, public pressure-driven reactions. Regardless of the incentive, the essential feature is that the corporation assumes a political role rather than only an economic one (Crane & Matten 2016, 73.) Accordingly, corporate citizenship is a descriptive conceptualization, not a normative one. It frames the relationship between an individual and a corporation descriptively instead of presenting normative assumptions of what this relationship should be. (Crane & Matten 2005, 174–175.)

The main notions of corporate citizenship raise a lot of critical questions regarding democratic accountability. Many writers agree that if companies perform public functions, such as the administration of citizenship rights, they should be subjected to a greater degree of democratic accountability. The problem here is that citizens do not have democratic control over companies and cannot put pressure on them the same way they can assert pressure on governments. (see Hussain & Moriarty 2018, 352; Crouch 2010.) For the realization of social justice, this of course is problematic.

I share these concerns and argue that an appropriate form of accountability must be imposed on corporations through mechanisms which can assure the adequate protection of citizenship rights and the equal distribution of rights, benefits, and protection (see Crane & Matten 2005, 175–176). Using corporate citizenship as a part of the theoretical framework of this thesis does not mean that I view

the powerful role of companies in the political domain as an inherently positive phenomenon. Instead, corporate citizenship here is used as a description to shed additional light on how and why companies engage in political domains in the U.S. With these conclusions in mind, I will next present the phenomenon of corporate activism which is both a theoretical concept and the subject of analysis of this thesis. Compared to corporate citizenship, corporate activism takes corporate involvement in society to uncharted territories.

3.2. Corporate Activism – The Firm as a Societal Leader

During the past decade, American society has seen something new: the rapid rise of corporate activism. An increasing number of CEOs, employees, and corporate marketing teams are taking a stand on social and environmental issues unrelated to their core business (see Chatterji and Toffel 2019). The very recent manifestation of corporate activism means that theorizing on the matter remains scarce which makes it an especially fertile area of research.

The concept of corporate activism is intertwined with the terms of "CEO activism" and "brand activism". The three terms basically discuss the same issues and themes, but the focus of each one is slightly different. CEO activism emphasizes the role of the company leadership as societal activists and brand activism relates to carefully designed campaigns that advance a social good and build a positive corporate image (Böhm, Skoglund & Eatherley 2018). In this thesis, I use the term corporate activism to discuss the three terms together and pay attention to the company as a whole, including its leadership, brand, employees, etc. Thereby, corporate activism is understood to include CEO comments, company policies, employee activism, campaign and marketing efforts, and public company statements. This allows to maintain the focus on corporations as entities fostering or diminishing the state of social justice.

While engaging in corporate activism, companies deal with timely environmental and social challenges. As brands and constituents of people, they are speaking up on issues related to, for example, the rights of sexual and gender minorities, race relations, climate change, and gender equity. To illustrate, a study published by Cone Communications suggests that American citizens expect companies to address domestic job growth, racial equality, women's rights, cost of higher education, immigration, climate change, gun control, and LGBTQI+ rights in their business activities (Cone Communication 2017, 19).

As mentioned, the activist efforts of companies are not directly related to the core business and bottom line of the company – the latest studies on corporate activism indicate that it is hard to directly link to successes in companies' operating performance. (Chatterji & Toffel 2018; Chatterji & Toffel

2019.) Activist companies are not aspiring to influence a regulatory landscape in their favor, fund political committees, nor administer the health care of their employees. Instead, they are engaging with heated political and social discussions which are in-line with their values, mission, brand image, and company purpose. Accordingly, activism does not happen behind closed doors but instead on public forums, such as social media, interviews, advertisements, and public events. (Chatterji & Toffel 2019, 162.) As a practice, it is clearly very discursive.

Corporate activism can be argued to feed into the understanding of companies as citizens and political actors. It echoes the ideas presented by Scherer and Palazzo (2011): corporations are engaging in political discourses more due to the changes brought by globalization. They are answering to the changing order of political institutions and destabilized relations between the government, corporations, and civil society, and stepping into the public arena more proactively than before. (see Scherer & Palazzo 2011, 906.)

3.2.1. Why Corporations Engage in Activism?

The reasons behind the rise of corporate activism are most likely multiple. One could be dwindling general trust among the public. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2018a; 2018b), the global trust of citizens in governments and public institutions decreased in the year 2018. In the U.S. the Trust Index crashed by 23 points compared to 2017. Simultaneously, more people are placing mounting expectations on businesses and many feel that CEOs should take the lead on societal change. (Edelman Trust Barometer 2018a, 2018b.) A study conducted by Cone Communications (2017) demonstrated that 70% of Americans believe that companies should improve issues which may not be relevant to their business operations, while 63% hope businesses drive social and environmental change forward. Moreover, 79% expect companies to improve their efforts in corporate responsibility. (Cone Communications 2017, 6, 9.) Given that the study was conducted already three years ago, these numbers might now be slightly or very different.

Another potential reason behind the rise of corporate activism is the growing presence of millennials in work life. Studies suggest that millennial employees expect companies to focus less on profit and more on impact and contributions to society. They are more willing to express their concerns about the social influence of their workplaces and vocally advocate for change. Such employees identify and use corporations as venues for societal engagement. Eventually, employee activism can lead to cultural changes within companies. (Deloitte 2015; Böhm, Skoglund & Eatherley 2018; Davis & White 2015.) Millennials' consumer practices might also increase the incentive for corporate activism. Compared to the U.S. average, millennials are likelier to select responsible products and

believe that companies should take lead if government regulations are absent. Their perception of a company's activism efforts can influence whether they purchase the firm's products and services (KRC Research & Weber Shandwick 2016, 10; Cone Communications 2017, 31).

Based on their research, Chatterji and Toffel (2018, 2019) suggest that the personal convictions of CEOs drive corporate activism forward. They describe examples of U.S. corporate leaders who have openly expressed their moral beliefs and responsibility to do good in society. CEOs communicate their values to the general public instead of solely engaging in discussions with regulators, politicians, and business partners. The findings of Chatterji and Toffel's research also suggest that CEO activism can frame the public discussion as effectively as statements by politicians and thus shape public opinion. The examined CEO statements were about issues unrelated to the companies' bottom line and could not be regarded as nonmarket strategies intended to shape the rules of the marketplace. If these findings are accurate, the rationale for activism seems to be more rooted in ethical assertions than in immediate business imperatives. (Chatterji & Toffel 2018; Chatterji & Toffel 2019, 161–163.)

Finally, corporate activism appears to be closely linked to the current changes in the landscape of business. As suggested several times in this thesis, the operational landscape and expectations toward companies are becoming vaster and blurrier. Simultaneously, corporations have grown in power and size. MNCs have expanded their activities, assumed more wealth and influence in society, and even taken on administrative responsibilities. Surrounding societies have taken notice and companies are subjected to rising pressure and expectations. As a result, there is a strong incentive for companies to integrate CSR efforts into business activities and be seen as progressive global social actors (Burchell & Cook 2006, 131). The incentive can be traced back to the four categories of CSR profits, political performance, social demands, and ethical values (see Garriga and Mélé 2004).

3.2.2. How Corporations Engage in Activism?

Corporate activists act as advocates on timely issues with the goal of influencing the debate (Chatterji & Toffel 2016, 2). Companies publicly engage in discussions around social and environmental themes, expressing their stance on the matter.

As brands, companies can create or participate in campaigns based on and sustained by political values. These type of activism efforts often involve the use of messages, slogans, visual media. Alternatively, corporations can issue open statements, participate in demonstrations and marches, design brand logo alterations, make monetary donations, and engage in cause-related marketing and communications. (Manfredi-Sánchez 2019, 343; Shetty, Venkataramaiah & Anand 2019, 163.) A suited example is the U.S. apparel company Nike with its advertisements promoting gender equality

and diversity as well as the company's "Just Do It" campaign featuring American football player Colin Kaepernick, who openly protested against structural racism in the U.S. (see Avery & Pauwels 2018).

As entities of individuals, corporations can harness and eventually express the collective views of their employees. It has been suggested that employees are able to drive their companies to take on activist efforts by using tech platforms, social media, and internal corporate communications. Studies indicate that employee activists start conversations on controversial issues with their colleagues, express their views on social media and tech platforms, deliberate their opinion at company-wide meetings, contact human resources or the leadership, and organize public campaigns that push the company to become an activist on a given matter. They expect their companies to make meaningful contributions to society. (Coulman 2019; United Minds, KRC Research & Weber Shandwick 2019.) The message of the employees if often targeted toward the company leadership with the aim of growing activism first internally. An example of this is the case when 20 000 workers of Google walked out and protested the way sexual harassment was mishandled in the workplace (see Bhuiyan 2019).

As organizations lead by a leadership team, companies can provide a legitimating platform for CEOs to publicly speak out. CEOs vocalize their beliefs and stance on questions of justice and indicate that their companies are be driven by the same values that the CEOs have. This type of activism can take many forms, such as public statements, interviews, comments, and open letters. For example, CEOs can give out comments on controversial laws, join coalitions, or issue support statements for climate change legislation. (see Toffel, Chatterji & Kelley 2017.) Interestingly, Chatterji and Toffel suggest that CEO activism can ultimately influence how political and social issues are framed. (Chatterji & Toffel 2019, 177–178.) It has been further suggested that the political ideologies and activist efforts of CEOs also shape firms' CSR practices and increase the likelihood of employee activism (Chin, Hambrick, & Trevino, 2013; Briscoe, Chin, & Hambrick 2014, 1802). An example of CEO activism is Apple CEO Tim Cook's public criticizing toward his home state of Alabama for insufficient LGBTQI+ rights (Chatterji & Toffel 2016). Despite the perceived power of well-known CEOs, a study conducted by KRC Research and Weber Shandwick (2016) demonstrated that the American public critically questions the motivations behind CEO activism. Many believe that CEOs aspire to get media attention (31%), build their reputation (21%), and sell more products or services (21%) through activism. (KRC & Weber Shandwick 2016, 8.)

3.3. Making the Connection to Social Justice

Social justice is difficult to conceptualize but often described as "an ideal condition in which all members of a society have the same basic rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits" (Zastrow 2009, 52). By focusing on the equal realization of such features, social justice discusses the same topics as corporate citizenship and corporate activism theorizing. It also shares the same determinants as CSR i.e. institutional and ideological frameworks, culture, economic systems, and historical legacies – systems that are constantly evolving and can ultimately result in oppression (Bell 2016; Hardiman & Jackson 2016).

Social justice research is dominantly based on identifying, evaluating, and challenging the status quo of social injustice within societies. It addresses questions such as poverty, racism, diversity, gender, sex, and lack of basic social services for all citizens that reflect unjust political and social systems. The practice of social justice aspires to result in positive changes, while promoting human development and creating inclusive, participatory, and just relationships and societal structures. (Burkemper & Strech 2003 3; Birkenmaier 2003, 41–42; Adams & Bell 2016, ix.) Thus, social justice practitioners are not only concerned with examining what is just for the individuals but instead what is just for the social whole (Capeheart & Milovanovic 2007, 2).

Analyzing power is at the heart of social justice research: inequalities in the distribution of power leads to inequalities in social conditions. (Dodgson 2018, 411). According to Bell (2016), power relations can be detected from the social hierarchies that exist in societies: some groups are advantaged or dominant, while others are disadvantaged, marginalized, or subordinated. Through socialization, the former group is seen as "the normal", i.e. capable, credible, and superior – a position that is oftentimes understood as deserved rather than a product of systems of inequality. (Bell 2016, 9.) Hegemony thus is an essential part of power. As recognized by Agnew (2005), hegemony refers to exercise of power through which the dominant group convinces and eventually coerces the disadvantaged groups to accept the production and reproduction of disadvantage as normal. Cultural norms and standards enacted by the dominant groups form a social fabric which makes oppressive practices as "reasonable". Hegemony is not the overt use of economic, political, or military power but rather socially constructed structures that delicately maintain oppression. (Agnew 2005, 2.) These types of power relations are likely to manifest also in corporate activism through which well-known CEOs and large-scale private U.S. companies express views and push for societal changes.

Bell (2016) further specifies that language, ideology, cultural and material practices normalize oppression. This means that individuals or institutional agents can even unconsciously maintain

inequalities and social hierarchies. (Bell 2016, 9–11.) As a result, the knowledge, understandings, and discourses of disadvantaged groups are silenced (see Freire 2004). However, there is no reason to believe that competing discourses do not exist or are not able to affect change – as long as there is power, there is also resistance. (Gorlewski 2011, 196). It is thereby appropriate to examine whose voice, understandings, and knowledge are visible in discursive practices – and this will be done in the analysis of this thesis as well.

Some social justice researchers have paid attention to the integration of economic justice and social justice. Rights such as freedom from violence, right to vote, and freedom of speech are not adequate if citizens do not have access to jobs, income supports, health care or other in-kind resources (Briar-Lawson et al. 2011, 21.) On this topic, Roth (2011) has discussed the rising differences between rich and the poor within and between nations, whereas Briar-Lawson and Bonpane (2011) have paid attention to the power of companies to shape interpretations regarding economic policies and the rights of individuals (Roth 2011b, 107–108; Briar-Lawson & Bonpane III 2011, 249).

In social justice research, the key to achieving social justice is democratic collaboration. This includes working and exchanging ideas and practices especially with those affected by oppressive socio-economic conditions and enabling individuals from disadvantaged and marginalized groups to have a central position in framing and developing answers to social problems. If an advantaged group determines what are the needs of groups suffering from inequalities, then injustice is produced repeatedly (Adams & Bell 2016, ix; Bell 2016, 1, 21.) Fundamentally, there should be enough institutional, political, social, and conceptual space for the emergence of new inter-relations that exist beyond separation and isolation (Powell & Roediger 2012, xviii). The notions clearly resonate with critique presented on CSR and the lack of inclusive company practices and unequal stakeholder participation.

Modern notions of social justice are essentially tied to globalization. As recognized by Adams and Bell (2016), social conditions are embedded in multinational, multiethical, and diasporic elements that cannot be excluded to the soil of one country (Adams & Bell 2016, xi). The interaction within and between these multiple dimensions constantly creates new challenges and opportunities for social justice practitioners (see Capeheart & Milovanovic 2007, 2, 77). It is clear that social justice is not compatible with global problems such as environmental degradation, governance gaps in the global economy, and lack of democratic control over global corporations (Roth 2011c, 238; Briar-Lawson & Bonpane III 2011, 250).

Within the U.S., institutional racism and poverty are often cited as prevalent social problems, and especially the intersection between the two. Authors such as Powell and Roediger (2012) and Roberts (2018) have examined the relationship between institutionalized racism, concentrated poverty, and health. Here, Powell importantly highlights that associating poverty to people of color is reinforcing racialization. (see Powell & Roediger 2012, 60; see Roberts 2018.) Other notable issues regarding social justice include income and wealth gaps, the segregation and discrimination of racialized groups, lack of representation of minorities and vulnerable groups in the highest level of government and the private sector, insufficient health care, lack of equal educational opportunities, and racial polarization (Hartman 2003, 55; Wernet et al. 2003, 63–64). In terms of economic justice, the increase in corporate power has been described to lead to the fall of corporate tax burden, undemocratic and unjust employment practices, and a focus on profitability at the expense of social issues (Briar-Lawson et al. 2011, 22–25; see Roth 2011a, 72–76).

3.4. Some Concluding Remarks

The previous sub-chapters and the main concepts presented form the theoretical framework of this thesis. The notion of corporate citizenship reinforces the political context for corporate activism and discusses citizenship rights but, due to its descriptive nature, does not assume a normative stance. Corporate activism, however, adopts its goals and elements from social justice as it essentially involves companies speaking out on current social issues while trying to affect change.

It is vital to recognize that I do not use the theoretical framework to examine whether corporate activism is “genuine” or whether it is used as a cloak to attract customers, enhance brand image, and gain profits (see Karnani 2010). Instead, I use the theoretical framework to approach corporate activism from a perspective that allows both instrumental (what, why, how) and normative examination (whose voice is heard, who has the power). More importantly, I examine whether corporate activism includes the key to achieving social justice: the company is working with and enabling disadvantaged and marginalized groups to have a central say in framing social problems and developing answers to them… Or is eventually inequality and systems of oppression just reproduced?

4. Examining Discourses, Power, and Starbucks as a Corporate Activist

Considering the normative nature of social justice and Peace Research in general, this study is located in the field of critical social sciences. Critical social sciences aspire to provide a descriptive analysis of the surrounding society as well as evaluate what "good societies"' should be like when it comes to cultivating the well-being of their members (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, 78-79.) Following this notion, the chosen methodology for gathering and analyzing the data is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In this chapter, I will first introduce the basic premises of CDA and the three-dimensional analysis model developed by Norman Fairclough. After this I will clarify why Starbucks is the designated subject of research and discuss the primary research data and research questions.

4.1. Basic Premises of CDA

CDA is about the critical study of language and its role in social environments. It does not detach language from the wider social context, but instead sees it as an essential part of it – this recognition also guides the analysis of the data. Like other socio-linguistic theories, CDA understands language as a form of social practice that is socially shaping, i.e. socially constitutive, and in a relationship with other aspects of the social. Discourses are constructed by and socially construct our social environments. (Fairclough 1995, 54–55; Fairclough 1992, 63-64; Wodak & Meyer 2011, 2, 11; Cherrier 2008, 182.) As explained by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010), language is in a dialectical relationship with other social elements, i.e. they internalize elements from each other. The analytical focus thus needs to be on the discourse as well as on the relations between the discourse and other social elements. (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 2010, 1215.) It is essential to acknowledge that the wider social complex and economic and political relations are complex and discourses essentially simplify them. Discursive simplification results in selectivity in terms of what elements are excluded and included. (Fairclough 2005, 55.)

The epistemic interest of CDA is on the questions of power, social injustice and inequality, and social movements striving toward positive changes (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 2010, 1215). As an analytical tool, CDA is distinguished by its goal to examine how discourses establish, sustain, and challenge power relations. CDA is used to discover those properties of discourses that produce and reproduce dominance, inequality, and social power abuse.[24] According to van Dijk (1993), power and dominance are based on access to discourse and communication. Groups who can access and control

[24] Dominance is defined here as "the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality" (van Dijk 1993, 249– 250).

the discourse and its variables, conditions and consequences ultimately hold power. Lack of power, in turn, is measured by the lack of controlled access to discourse. (van Dijk 1993, 256.) CDA takes a normative sociopolitical stance and aspires to resist and change social injustice. The perspective of the analysis should be on the side of the ones who suffer the most and the critical targets should be the power elites who are responsible for ignoring, sustaining, reproducing or condoning to social inequality and injustice. (Fairclough 1992, 65; van Dijk 1993, 249–253.)

CDA does have descriptive capabilities as well: it can be used to describe and examine stereotyped categorizations, elite talk, and the use of attributes that express attitudes. However, the analysis needs to eventually take an explanatory stance and delve deeper into the question of why these categories exist. (Chilton 2005, 24.) In this research, I follow van Dijk (1993) and pay attention to top–down relations of power and dominance instead of bottom–up forms of resistance, compliance, and acceptance. In other words, the focus is on examining the dominant elite groups and their discursive practices while paying attention to the potential absence of discourses from disadvantaged and groups. (see van Dijk 1993, 250.)

CDA can be described to have three central doctrines: 1) discourse is a social action (or social practice); 2) social action constructs reality; 3) discourse is the use of language and CDA examines the causal relationship between language and social action (Fairclough & Wodak 1997 in Chilton 2005, 22–23). Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak (2011) conveniently summarize CDA into seven assertions:

1. **CDA addresses social problems.** It is the linguistic and semiotic analysis of social processes and problems.
2. **Power relations are discursive.** CDA underlines the discursive nature of power relations and pays attention to how power is exercised and negotiated.
3. **Discourse constitute society and culture.** Language contrbutes to transforming and/or reproducing society and culture.
4. **Discourse does ideological work.** Ideologies represent social reality and articulate together representations of reality and constructions of identity.
5. **Discourse is historical.** Discourses are always situated and produced within contexts as well as connected to other discourses produced earlier or presently.
6. **Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory.** Discourses can be interpreted in various ways depending on feelings, beliefs, values, and knowledge.
7. **Discourse is a form of social action.** The researcher is expected to express their explicit interests. (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak 2011, 104–108.)

Based on the above, we can determine that CDA is essentially interested in examining pressing social issues instead of contributing to a specific school, discipline, or paradigm. However, the focus on social problems does require an interdisciplinary and highly theoretically guided analysis. (van Dijk 1993, 252.) This notion also guides the structure and content of this thesis, which connects theorizing on Peace Research and CSR. Due to the epistemic approach of CDA on questions of dominance and power, theory and methodology are fundamentally linked to each other within the research. Accordingly, theories and disciplines that contribute to the normative goal of CDA are deemed as relevant (Fairclough & Chouliriaki 2010, 1215; van Dijk 1993, 279). By focusing on identifying, evaluating, and challenging the status quo of social injustice within societies, social justice theory accompanies CDA particularly well. Moreover, theorizing on CSR, corporate activism, and corporate citizenship also support the objectives of CDA as it draws attention to social structures, societal responsibilities, and just relations between actors. Hence, the appropriateness of CDA as a methodological tool can be easily justified within the context of this research.[25]

4.2. Fairclough's Model: Social Structures, Events, and Practices

The methodological emphasis of this thesis is based on Fairclough's categorization of social structures, social practices, and social events. Together in interplay they constitute the three levels of social reality (Fairclough 2012 & Fairclough, 82). Fairclough's basic premise is that "texts are parts of social events which are shaped by the causal powers of social structures (including languages) and social practices (including orders of discourse) – –" (Fairclough 2003, 38).

4.2.1. The Possible, The Actual, and The Mediator

Fairclough describes social structures as "very abstract entities" that define a set of potential, but in complex ways. These could be economic structures, e.g. capitalism, social class or kinship systems, e.g. feudalism, and other systems and mechanisms. The semiotic aspect in social structures is languages. According to Fairclough a language "defines a certain potential, certain possibilities, and

[25] The nature of CSR as a discourse has received attention within academia. Burchell and Cook (2006) have examined how CSR is used as a hybrid discourse by companies that aspire to internalize the language of social responsibility. They have stressed the need to understand the central role of interaction, dialogue, and the struggle between different actors within the CSR discourse as well as the risks relating to the use of CSR discourses only as public relations rhetoric. (Burchell & Cook 2006, 124–131.) Banerjee (2014), argues that current CSR theorizing does not pay enough attention to power, discourses, and subjectives and believes that "a critical perspective will enhance our understanding of both the limits of CSR and the institutional and political arrangements required to overcome these limits". (Banerjee 2014, 93.) Fooks et al. (2013), in turn, underline the importance of situating public comments on CSR by corporate managers in the surrounding economic, political, and historical contexts (Fooks et al 2013, 283.)

excludes others – certain ways of combining linguistic elements are possible, others are not – –“ (Fairclough 2003, 23–24; Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, 82). In sum, social structures determine what is possible and languages are a type of social structure (Fairclough 2003, 223).

By social events, Fairclough means concrete actions and instances of things happening, i.e. what actually occurs. These could be the behavior of people and people acting by the means of language. The semiotic aspect of social events consists of spoken and written texts, e.g. electronic texts, and texts that combine various modes such as music and images. According to Fairclough, texts have social effects and can bring about changes in people, actions, social relations, and the material world. However, as explained later in this chapter, this causality is not a simple one. (Fairclough 2003, 23, 8; Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, 82). Fairclough distinguishes three major types of text meaning that are simultaneously expressed:

1. Action and Social Relation: the relationship of the text to the event.
2. Representation: the relationship of the text to the wider social and physical world.
3. Identification: the relationship of the texts to the persons involved in the event.

In sum, social events establish what is happening and texts are elements of social events (Fairclough 2003, 27, 223).

According to Fairclough, social practices are ways of representing and being associated with identities. Compared to the social events, social practices are relatively stable and durable forms of social activities but still open to changes. They are networked together in shifting ways that change over duration of time. Examples include classroom teaching, medical consultations, and family meals. The semiotic dimension of the networks is order of discourses. According to Fairclough, orders of discourses consist of discourses, genres, and styles. Social practices exist as intermediate entities between events and social structures. They are ways of controlling the selection and exclusion of structural possibilities, i.e. they can be seen as the social organization and control of linguistic variation (Fairclough 2003, 23–24; 205, Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, 82). The categories of social practices correspond to the three main aspects of meaning in texts:

1. Genres: ways of acting and interacting that are related to a specific practice (e.g. news, interviews, reports).
2. Discourses: ways of representing aspects of the world from particular perspectives and positions (e.g. different political parties).

3. Styles: ways of being, particular social or personal identities (e.g. how a person uses language as a resource for self-identification).

In sum, social practices mediate the relationship between what is structurally possible and what is happening. Orders of discourse are elements of social practice. (Fairclough 2003, 25, 223.)

Fairclough's further describes the relationship between the three levels. He emphasis that social structures can directly shape social practices and social practices, in turn, can directly shape (but not determine) social events. However, the relationship between structures and events is more complex: what actually happens and what structurally is possible are not in a direct relationship with each other, i.e. social structures do not directly shape events. Instead, events are mediated by social practices. As a result, changes in the nature of events can eventually lead to changes in practices, which eventually can lead to changes in structures. (Fairclough 2003, 23; Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, 82) Hence, the characterization of social practices as mediators.

In the analysis, special focus will be on the relationships between discourse (abstract noun) and other social elements. The analysis asks how the discourse manifests and what is its relationship with social elements within networks of practices. It pays attention to how "genres are realized in actional meanings and forms of a text, discourses in representational meanings and forms, and styles in identificational meanings and forms" (Fairclough 2003, 67). This will be done while keeping in mind the following three tenets. First, discourse is a part of social activity within a practice that constitutes genres. Second, discourse (abstract noun) figure in representation and constitute discourses (count noun). Third, discourse appear in ways of being and constitute style. (ibid, 206.)

4.3. Starbucks as a Subject of Research

Established in 1971, Starbucks hopes to "share great coffee with our friends and help make the world a little better". (Starbucks 2019a). Accordingly, Starbucks could be seen as one of the most vocal corporate activists with its numerous public statements by the former CEO Howard Schultz (current Chairman emeritus), corporate campaigns, and employee activist efforts. Schultz has been often referred as one of the leading CEO activists and the company campaigns, e.g. the pledge to hire 10 000 refugees in 75 countries after U.S. President Donald Trump's order to suspend America's refugee program and ban citizens from several Muslim countries to U.S, have put Starbucks' activist efforts to the limelight. (Chatterji & Toffel 2015; Chapman 2017.)

Starbucks' corporate activism most likely stems from its strong public engagement to CSR. Throughout the years, Starbucks has branded itself as a company that acknowledges its capability to

enact positive social and environmental impact. (see Starbucks 2020.) Its CSR efforts have focused on serving disadvantaged communities and creating opportunities for groups facing inequality. For example, the company has committed into helping 100 000 young people to find education, hiring 10 000 veterans and military spouses, and supporting the education of its workers. Moreover, the company claims to engage as much as possible in sustainable sourcing and supply chain management. (Starbucks 2019b.) Expressing such big pledges seem to be in line with the huge net worth of this stock listed company.

Starbucks' activist efforts have stirred a lot of public conversation and gathered plenty of criticism. For example, in 2015 Starbucks initiated a campaign titled "Race Together" that urged baristas to write "race together" on coffee cups and engage in a conversation with customers about racism in the U.S. (Chatterji & Toffel 2015, 2). The campaign was almost immediately criticized for approaching such a volatile and delicate issue so misguidedly and lightly, especially when considering that company itself has faced diversity issues (Shah 2018). Starbucks' other activist actions have also been subjected to negative attention, resulting in social media backlashes or even consumers boycotts. For example, the campaign to hire refugees attracted criticism and some consumers urged others to boycott Starbucks with the social media hashtag #BoycottStarbucks. (Chapman 2017.)

Starbucks' explicit activist efforts, its large company size as a stock market listed company, and the massive spotlight the company has been under during the past decade make it a particularly interesting research target. Its strong social stances and notable public attention serve as the main reasons why the company was selected to be a subject of analysis.

4.4. Presenting the Research Data

The primary research data consists of public statements published by Starbucks on its website "Starbucks Stories & News" during 2015-2019.[26] The website operates under a different domain than the main company website, i.e. Starbucks.com, and is clearly dedicated to function as a platform where the reader can learn more about Starbucks' societal activities. Starbucks Stories and News consists of articles related to coffee, community, social impact, and community work. The articles are written by different authors under their name or as anonymous writers. The material includes various text types, i.e. columns, news, announcements, personal letters and small articles published on the website of Starbucks.

[26] https://stories.starbucks.com/

The chosen method for analysis, the normative nature of critical social sciences, and the aim of this research guided the initial collection of the research material. The section "News" with its sub-sections "News" and "Views" was selected as the primary research material for this thesis. More specifically, ten different articles or statements serve as the analyzed data. The length of the text varied from one page to seven pages, making the data vast. The selected material filled the following criteria:

1. The selected material included words or pictures that implicated Starbucks' involvement in the administration and/or maintenance of citizenship rights and social justice. The words/pictures included the following tags: ethnicity, race/racism, sexual orientation, inclusion, discrimination, equality, justice, LGBT, human rights, citizenship.
2. The selected material dealt with political and social discussion that were unrelated to the core business of the company – though the material might mention the company values, mission, and purpose.

The selected research data will be analyzed while aspiring to answer the main research question of this thesis – how social justice is perceived and justified in Starbucks' corporate activism discourse? To answer the question, the analysis will be guided by the structure provided by Norman Fairclough's CDA model on social events, social practices, and social structures – the three elements that constitute social reality.

The analysis will thus be multi-functional and pay attention to how the three corresponding categories (Action and genres, Representation and discourses, and Identification and styles) are built in the texts. Genres hold actional meanings and forms of texts, discourses representational meanings and forms, and styles identificational meanings and forms (Fairclough 2003, 67). In other words, I will identify discourses and connect them to a network of practices and examine their relationship to other elements within the practices concerned. The textual analysis will look at the data from the perspectives of Action, Representation, And Identification as well as make a connection between concrete social events and abstract social practices by distinguishing the genres, discourses, and styles articulated. This is possible due to the corresponding nature between Action and genres, Representation and discourses, and Identification and styles. (see Fairclough 2003, 28.) In sum, the analysis will focus on the meaning and form of the texts.

5. Findings: The Road to Hell is Paved with Good Intentions

This chapter utilizes the introduced theoretical framework of corporate citizenship, corporate activism and social justice as well as Norman Fairclough's model of CDA for the analysis of the data. My objective is to identify and analyze implicit and latent discourses and examine their relationship to wider social practices. An important reminder is that as a research method CDA aspires to detect power relations and take the perspective of those who are marginalized or disadvantaged.

Before the analysis, I examined the material to discover any possible correlations between the texts. I found similar words, phrases, and themes within different publications and grouped them. These groups were roughly named "patriotism and leadership", "justification and legitimation", and "social justice and human rights issues". After grouping the material, I examined the ways corporate activism can be identifiable in the data – is the company speaking as an abstract entity, are employees voicing their views, or does the CEO or other leader express their stance on timely issues? In the following sub-chapters, I will examine the research material from the theoretical and methodological perspectives introduced in this thesis. The findings will be described and analyzed within the sub-chapters, guided by evaluation against theoretical literature.

5.1. Protect the Perfect U.S. -discourse

The first identified discourse underlines patriotic sentiments towards the U.S. Some of the articles mention several times national symbols and the deep meaning found in them. The "Protect the Perfect U.S." -discourse mainly features quotes from the former Starbucks CEO and current chairman emeritus Howard Schultz. In an article published on July 6th, 2017, Schultz describes a photo he found during the independence day of the country:

– – as the fabric of our nation hangs from the extended ladders of two gleaming red-and-white fire trucks, the flag's stars and stripes assert themselves in the summer breeze. In this photo of iconic American symbols, I see and feel so much. (Starbucks 2017a.)

By emphasizing his sentiments toward the familiar American symbols, Schultz portrays his deep affection for the country. He does not only see the concrete symbols but much more than that – he sees beyond the symbols. In this way, Schultz is representing himself as a fellow U.S. citizen and decreasing the distance between a corporate executive and the general public. He is revealing himself as a man, who like many other Americans, has strong feelings for his country. This emphasis could be interpreted as a legitimation of his activist efforts as a corporate leader who is working toward the greater good of his country. The connection between Schultz, his company Starbucks, and the U.S.

citizens is further deepened by the phrase "Like America, Starbucks is a place where differences flourish, and the human spirit unites" (Starbucks 2017a).

Making such a connection relies heavily on semantics filled with romanticism and the discourse intends to uplift the reader into believing in two almost mythical, great, and abstract entities: the U.S. as a country and Starbucks as a company. Hence, the discourse is linked to the ideal condition of social justice, where differences between individuals do not negatively affect their basic rights, protections, opportunities, and social benefits (see Zastrow 2009, 52). Schultz emphases the unique importance of the U.S. in another text:

To me, the flag also represents our country's core values. It's an enduring cloth of common threads that unites a nation founded on the right of all people to live freely, which by design encourages and invites the pronounced differences that exist among us today. No other country in the world houses so many people of such diversity, and those of us at Starbucks see, hear and experience that diversity every day, in our stores. (Starbucks 2017a.)

The discourse is clearly filled with optimism and selectivity. It does not pay attention to social problems within then U.S., e.g. racial divides, discrimination, biases found within the country's work life, or the racist and sexist public comments by President Donald Trump. (see Akhtar 2019a; Ledford 2019; Graham, Green, Murphy & Richards 2019.) Thus, the discourse does not acknowledge power relations and instances of injustice within the U.S. that leave some groups more disadvantaged, marginalized, or subordinated than others (see Powell & Roediger 2012, 60; see Roberts 2018). The knowledge, understandings, and experience of these groups are not heard or recognized. Instead, the discourse is more from the perspective of someone who belongs to an advantaged group. This is problematic since power and dominance are characterized by unequal access to discourse and communication (see van Dijk 1993). Correspondingly, the discourse can be interpreted to convince the reader that the current social fabric of the U.S. is commonsensical and even desired. This relates to the use of hegemony as a socially constructed structure that does not question current power relations or subtle oppression (see Agnew 2005, 2.)

The discourse paints a picture of a country that has been successful in the past and will be successful in the future if Starbucks and its employees work hard for the maintenance of societal wellbeing. It places importance on the actions of Starbucks' employees as a collective of individuals striving toward the common good.

– – as Starbucks partners, you are in a position to bridge such differences [political persuasions, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and stations in life] and highlight our similarities. The

servant leadership traits you assert every day—the compassion, the empathy, the respect for all who work in and enter our stores—are connective threads that bring people together in a sense of community. Never underestimate the power of your role, which is about so much more than the business of coffee. (Starbucks 2017a.)[27]

The "Protect the Perfect U.S." discourse draws from the synthesis between individualistic capitalism and communal welfare. It emphasizes the individual and civic engagement rather than institutionalized collective actions, reflecting the country's 'ethos of giving back'. With phrases such as "we are all servant leaders with the potential to live our values and positively influence people's lives", it represents Starbucks' important role in the conservation of the desired America and upholds an image of Starbucks as an essential societal actor: "I just want each of us to remember what we stand for, and what we are capable of achieving as a company, as partners, and as Americans". (Starbucks 2017a.) Hence, the discourse emphasizes the significance of Starbucks in the fostering of social justice, but it is eventually represented from a very narrow perspective i.e. from the perspective of a wealthy corporate leader.[28]

The discourse is located within a body of text that is drafted in the shape of a letter with a clear structure: greeting "To Our Partners", use of the predicate "I", and a closing "Onwards, Howard" (Starbucks 2017a). As letters are understood to have a personal touch and the writer and reader share a more intimate relationship, the genre of the text contributes to a social activity that could be regarded as a public conversation between Schultz and the employees. Unquestionably, this conversation is meant to be seen by others as well – corporate activism does not happen behind closed doors. Thus, the discourse is located in a more global network of social practices.[29] Due to the powerful semantics used in the text (e.g. "respect", "civility", "dignity", "courage and sacrifice"), the meaning of the text is strongly placed on Schultz' identification as a defender of American values, i.e. someone who will take the country back to the promise of the American dream.[30] The discourse promises big things but very little evidence to support those promises.

5.2. Leading in Uncertain Times -discourse

The analyzed material does not articulate only romantic and patriotic world views but also sustains a discourse in which Starbucks is leading the country in uncertain times. It prioritizes Starbucks' efforts

[27] Starbucks' corporate communication refers employees as partners.
[28] Discourses and Representation
[29] Genres and Action
[30] Styles and Identification

to strengthen the U.S. as "the conscience of our country, and the promise of the American Dream, [are] being called into question" (Starbucks 2017b). This discourse principally consists of public letters from Howard Schultz to Starbucks employees. As within the "Protect the Perfect USA" -discourse, the contributions to a social action have apparent informality. However, this can be interpreted as strategically motivated activity: informality might yield positive results for the company brand image and Schultz.[31] A vast majority of the material in the identified discourse deals with the election and the political decisions of Donald Trump.

In a public letter addressed to Starbucks' employees, Schultz takes the position of a civic leader. This act can be connected to political performance, social demands, and ethical values embedded in CSR, as discussed in chapter 2 (see Garriga & Mélé 2004, 51). He assumes an assertive stance by saying that "We have a president-elect in Donald Trump, and it is our responsibility as citizens to give him the opportunity to govern well and bring our country together". He highlights his personal feelings as a way to provide assurance and comfort to his fellow citizens and employees "I am hopeful that we will overcome the vitriol and division of this unprecedented election season" (Starbucks 2016). Eventually, Schultz even comforts the employees:

> *Today, I trust you, and I trust all that is good in our country. Let's take care of each other and the people in our lives. I believe we will each find the best version of ourselves to help our country move on in the direction we all deserve. Together is where our collective power lies, as partners, and as Americans.* (Starbucks 2016.)[32]

In the discourse, Starbucks is navigating in the uncertainty, political instability, and unpredictable nature of the Trump presidency. In another personal letter intended toward Starbucks employees, Schultz shares his personal sentiments after the Executive Order President Trump issued on January 2017, banning people from several predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States: "We are living in an unprecedented time, one in which we are witness to the conscience of our country, and the promise of the American Dream, being called into question" Starbucks (2017b). The discourse has clear connections to the "Protect the Perfect USA" -discourse that underlines patriotic sentiments and the uniqueness and importance of the country.

The uncertain condition of the social sphere is claimed to eventually threaten the very foundation of social justice in the U.S. The responsibility to act is placed on the two corporate leaders, Schultz and current Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson, as well as the Starbucks employees. The message, however,

[31] Genres and Actions

[32] Styles and Identification

ultimately is more unidirectional in which instructions are given from above – though the promise of more efficient dialogue is given.

These uncertain times call for different measures and communication tools than we have used in the past. Kevin [Johnson] and I are going to accelerate our commitment to communicating with you more frequently, including leveraging new technology platforms moving forward. (Starbucks 2017b.)

We are all obligated to ensure our elected officials hear from us individually and collectively. Starbucks is doing its part; we need you to use the collective power of your voices to do the same while respecting the diverse viewpoints of the 90 million customers who visit our stores in more than 25,000 locations around the world. (Starbucks 2017b.)

The discourse represents the relationship of the text to the wider social world from the perspective and position of a big and powerful corporation that is aspiring to stand in solidarity with Muslim immigrants and refugees.[33] Simultaneously, Schultz places special importance to Starbucks and the continuum of the company's mission – as if this matters in the grand political scheme.

We are in business to inspire and nurture the human spirit, one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time – whether that neighborhood is in a Red State or a Blue State; a Christian country or a Muslim country; a divided nation or a united nation. That will not change. You have my word on that. (Starbucks 2017b.)

Starbucks, and its leadership and employees are portrayed as active political actors that have the power to influence people to act and shape the institutional environment of the country as well as "build bridges" and give "resolute promise[s]" (Starbucks 2017b). The "leader" aspect of the discourse is put into more concrete practice as Starbucks makes a global commitment to hiring 10 000 refugees (Starbucks 2017c). As mentioned previously, the importance of integrating economic and social justice is an important topic is social justice research (see Briar-Lawson et al. 2011, 21). However, the positionality of Starbucks and its corporate leadership to make such pledges should be examined critically given that the company has been throughout the years accused of racism and discrimination (The Outline 2018).

The discourse does not inform whether there has there been any institutional, political, social, and conceptual space for dialogue between Starbucks, its employees, and other stakeholders that are affected by the company's activities (see Powell & Roediger 2012, xviii). It is not clear who has given

[33] Discourses and Representation

the mandate for Schultz to speak out and the discourse does not disclose whether the company leadership has worked and exchanged ideas with those affected by oppressive structures and political decisions. As mentioned in chapter 4, if an advantaged group determines what are the needs of groups suffering from inequalities, then injustice is produced repeatedly (Adams & Bell 2016, ix; Bell 2016, 1, Hardiman & Jackson 2016, 21). Here, it seems that the discourse reflects and represents the concerns of a privileged and powerful group.

5.3. Justifying Activism -discourse

The "Justifying Activism" -discourse justifies Starbucks' activist efforts by arguing that the current political landscape calls businesses to act. It also describes Starbucks' values and concrete actions that enhance social justice in the U.S.

The discourse highlights the need for companies to act during times where "the rules of engagement for a public company are very, very different than they've ever been – –" (Starbucks 2018a). It is located in the context of globalization that significantly contributes to modern shifts in the business-society relationship – a theme discussed in a reoccurring manner in this thesis. The discourse further justifies the political and societal involvement of Starbucks and the private sector by claiming that current U.S. politics have failed. In an award ceremony, Schultz reportedly says "we must pick up the slack and, unfortunately, the lack of responsibility of the political class" (Starbucks 2018a). Thereby, the discourse can be interpreted to include elements discussed in chapter 3: a connection is made to insufficient local institutions and political failure to enforce important regulations (see Wood & Wright 2015, 272; Bell & Hindmoor 2009 in Scherer et al 2016).

The "Justifying Activism" -discourse situates corporate activism into a new sphere of corporate responsibility. As discussed previously, in the US, the government has traditionally had a limited role in addressing the country's social and economic affairs, which has designated social issues and discretionary engagement as the main core of CSR practices and CSR has been mainly seen to be voluntary in nature (see Camilleri 2017, 77–78.) According to the "Justifying Activism" -discourse, corporate activism and political engagement are now something companies "must" do (see Starbucks 2018a).

Besides references to the current social context, the discourse emphasizes Starbucks' company values as drivers for activism. For Starbucks, all decisions are not economic ones: "The lens in which we are making that decision is through the lens of our people" (Starbucks 2019c). Emphasis is placed on the process of identification and styling in which Starbucks is a corporation aspiring to do good while

respecting its stakeholders and their rights. The company is not aiming to profit at the expense of others.[34]

A company that would achieve the balance between profit and conscience, a company that would demonstrate that not every decision is an economic one, a company that would demonstrate success is best when it's shared (Starbucks 2018a).

This justification can be interpreted to be a demonstration that Starbucks' responsibilities go beyond profit-making. Moreover, it reflects the external expectations companies face. As mentioned previously, a study showcased 70% of Americans believe that companies should improve issues that may not be relevant to their business operations (see Cone Communications 2017).

The style of the discourse is underlined by portraying Starbucks' activism as collective actions. Mutuality and symmetry are highlighted:

We can choose to live by the values that reside in each of us, and honor our commitment to nurture the human spirit with love, and offer everyone in our stores and communities a place of inclusion and optimism (Starbucks 2016).

Emphasizing values in the discourse can be understood to respond to criticism toward U.S. companies and increasing stakeholder expectations. The crumbling of the monopoly of information has brought corporate malpractices to public awareness and NGOs, citizens, and ranking bodies assert pressure on companies. Simultaneously, companies are turning into channels for expressing moral choices, both for consumers and workers (see Crane & Matten 2016, 367–368; Böhm, Skoglund & Eatherley 2018). The discourse aspires to demonstrate that Starbucks is societal actor one can trust and rely on.

Starbucks is described as a "perfect store", and its corporate leader Schultz as a social agent who challenges those "in positions of power and influence, to take action to provide opportunities for others" (Starbucks 2019c; Starbucks 2018a).[35]

Starbucks earns 100 out of 100 for the first time on the 2015 Corporate Equality Index (CEI), an initiative administered by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation on corporate policies and practices as a top employer for LGBTQ workplace equality (Starbucks 2019c).

[34] Styles and Identification
[35] Discourses and Representation

Starbucks chairman and chief executive officer Howard Schultz makes a vocal statement on diversity and equality during a spontaneous exchange at the 2013 Starbucks Annual Meeting of Shareholders (Starbucks 2019c).

A statement published in 2018 accentuates Schultz as an embodiment of Starbucks values: "in the last year, Schultz said he's traveled across the United States and abroad to better understand the human condition" (Starbucks 2018a).

He's [Schultz] visited the border of Mexico and Texas to better understand immigration issues. He's visited the battlefields at Gettysburg. And recently he visited Normandy, France, and walked among the 9,000 headstones; there, he met a Frenchman kneeling at the grave of an American serviceman and cleaning it. (Starbucks 2018a.)

The text includes two genres: personal letters and company statements. The primary purpose of the two is to convince the reader that the company and its leadership are on a justified and good mission. The generic structure of the texts is once again quite predictable. Letters include a greeting, the body of the letter, and the signature greeting. The company statements indicate a problem and show how Starbucks is addressing it. The social relation between the text and the reader is intended to be symmetrical, portraying solidarity.[36]

Nevertheless, the discourse can be subjected to criticism. Firstly, the discourse's justification for activism fails to address the problem of the lack of democratic accountability and control over companies. As described previously, if companies engage more in activities that are usually associated with that of governments and politicians, they should be subjected to a greater degree of democratic accountability by citizens (see Hussain & Moriarty 2018, 352; Crouch 2010). It seems that the discourse lacks critical self-reflection regarding the consequences of the private sector stepping into the arena of social justice. Secondly, the discourse does not address nor question the larger structural context where the company's activist efforts are located. This is problematic because the realization of social justice is ultimately linked to institutional and ideological frameworks, culture, economic systems, and historical legacies. It cannot be examined in isolation (see Bell 2016, 4, 22.) Thirdly, the discourse appears to fundamentally advocate for a status quo where the powerful assume more power. In the U.S., corporate leaders and boardrooms are dominantly white men and the discourse does not raise concerns about who can participate in corporate governance nor discuss who are on the corporate agenda (see Newkirk 2019; Akhtar 2019b). This eventually maintains a status quo where the already powerful corporate leaders assume more societal influence, enabling

[36] Genres and Actions

advantaged groups to set political agendas, constitute knowledge (see Gorlewski 2011, 9–10). Inequalities and social hierarchies are likely consciously or unconsciously maintained and the discourses of disadvantaged groups silenced (see Bell 2016; Freire 2004).

5.4. Activist and a Social Justice Defender -discourse

The final discourse discusses Starbucks as an activist and a defender of social justice. It is categorized thematically into three sub-discourses that deal with the rights of sexual and gender minorities, racism and inclusion, and democracy.

5.4.1. Sexual and Gender Minorities

The discourse addresses the rights of sexual and gender minorities and represents Starbucks as an ally and partner for the LGBTQI+ community. It characterizes the social world as a place where gender and sexual minorities face discriminatory legislation and practices.

Across the U.S., we are witnessing the introduction of local and state legislation condoning discriminatory treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons (Starbucks 2016b).

The position of Starbucks in the discourse is one of a defender of LGBTQI+ rights and the company uses its power to enact change.[37] As within the "Justifying Activism" -discourse, examples of Starbucks' concrete successes and actions are demonstrated to convince the reader that Starbucks' activism is not just all talk.

Starbucks and Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation come together to help make the world a more compassionate and welcoming place for the LGBTQ community (Starbucks 2019c).

Starbucks joined over 200 companies to file a joint amicus brief to the Supreme Court in support of LGBTQ rights. The landmark briefing argues that existing federal civil rights law should protect LGTBQ people from discrimination in contexts ranging from employment to housing, healthcare and education. (Starbucks 2019c.)

Starbucks also joined the Human Rights Campaign's Business Coalition in support of the Equality Act, a bill that would protect LGBTQ people from discrimination in housing, the workplace, public accommodations, and other settings under federal law. (Starbucks 2019c).

[37] Discourses and Representation

The discourse is an example of how corporate activism manifests as the operational landscape and expectations toward companies that are becoming vaster and blurrier. Starbucks as a company is cooperating with a famous singer, files a joint amicus brief to the Supreme Court, and supports legislation protecting LGBTQI+ people. In addition, the discourse features examples of employee activism and elaborates on how Starbucks employees established a Starbucks Pride Alliance Network years before. One of the network founders reportedly says: "We help connect partners with something bigger – – And we hope to use our influence to make the company more inclusive." (Starbucks 2019c.)

Based on the quotes above, it can be argued that the discourse follows the trend discussed by Burchell and Cook (2006): Starbucks has the incentive to use CSR and internal and external activism to represent itself as a progressive social actor and affect change.[38] Nevertheless, the discourse includes elements of a public relations driven logic as Lady Gaga had already previously partnered with Starbucks to promote Starbucks drinks as a part of campaign (Gajanan 2017). Moreover, the use of words "world", "compassionate", and "welcoming" seem to simplify a tremendously serious issue of worldwide structural discrimination into a question of obtaining positive feelings, such as compassion toward sexual and gender minorities.

The text consists of long company statements and personal letters from various Starbucks leaders. The purpose seems to be to create discourses that are both informal, engaging, and symmetrical as well as professional, efficient, and qualified.[39] Strong vocabulary, the use of adverbials, and the identification "I" and "our" in the personal letters underline the conversational and symmetrical relationship with Starbucks and the LGBTQI+ community.[40]

We heard a lot from our transgender partners that this is important to them – and so it should be important to us too," Brock [Starbucks Benefit Director] said. "It's true to our mission and values of nurturing the human spirit. (Starbucks 2018b.)

LGBTQI+ voices are also included as the text features the personal story of a transgender man working at Starbucks. He has reportedly benefitted from Starbucks' transgender medical benefits.

Starbucks is taking a stand and standing up for trans people and saying that our procedures aren't just cosmetic – they are lifesaving. They're affirming," he said. "They're vitally important to trans

[38] Discourses and Representation
[39] Genres and Action
[40] Styles and Identification

people and it's not something just to be seen as a cosmetic procedure that's optional, because for a lot of people, it's not optional for them. (Starbucks, 2018b.)

Another quote by a senior coordinator on the Starbucks Food Innovation team brings a LGBTQI+ voice into the discourse:

"It was such an inspirational moment to me to realize that this company supported me", said Smith (Starbucks 2018d).

As power and dominance are based on access to discourse and communication, it is crucial that the discourse includes LGBTQI+ voices. In addition, the discourse addresses the problem of lack of representation of minorities which has been a clear social issue within the U.S. It can be however questioned whether the access of LGBTQI+ people to the discourse is still controlled by the discriminated group or whether their voices are included when appropriate. It is quite evident that discourse does not include any criticism from a member of a sexual or gender minority toward Starbucks. As said previously, discourses enable the advantaged groups to eventually legitimize oppressive practices and uphold power relations. Thus, self-criticism and the acknowledgment of one's position and privileges in society are essential and these seem to be lacking in Starbucks' activism discourse.

5.4.2. Racism and Discrimination

The discourse also addresses racism and discrimination. As mentioned, institutional racism, segregation and discrimination of racialized groups, and racial polarization are prevalent social problems within the U.S. (Hartman 2003, 55; Wernet et al. 2003, 63–64). As a response to this, Starbucks is represented as a company that creates safe spaces for everyone and adheres to diversity.

We treat each other with respect and dignity, and we embrace diversity and inclusion in order to create a place where each of us can be ourselves. Discrimination of any kind has no place in our company. (Starbucks 2016b.)

The theme of racism and discrimination is particularly pertinent in the discourse as Starbucks was subjected to extreme criticism and outrage in 2018. Two young African Americans waiting for a business partner at a Starbucks store in Philadelphia were arrested for not ordering anything. (Orso 2019). The discourse portrays Starbucks as a company that acknowledges how deeply structural racism is in the U.S. but works hard to not uphold any biases or racist practices. Moreover, it shuns away from identifying as a company that adheres to racist biases: "In the aftermath of the arrests,

Kevin Johnson, Starbucks chief executive officer, released a video publicly apologizing. "This is not who we are," he said." (Starbucks 2018c.)[41]

The discourse uses semantics that describe Starbucks' identification as a brave company, capable of critical self-examination: "it was time, Johnson and then-executive chairman Howard Schultz decided, for Starbucks to look deeply at its own relationship with racial bias" (Starbucks 2018c).[42] Moreover, the company is said to be "a microcosm of what's happening in the United States", indicating that everyone has biases (2018c). This way, the discourse does succeed to pay attention to socialization through which systems of inequality are normalized and the position of advantaged and/or dominant group seen almost as natural. However, there seems to be controversiality in the discourse as the phrases "this is not who we are" and "its own relationship with racial bias" manifest in the same text. The acknowledgement that racism also exists within Starbucks is thus left short and the blame for the racist incident is placed on the surrounding society.

The discourse is located within a genre of a company statement that describes Starbucks' efforts in overcoming racial biases with nation-wide employee training. The purpose is to show to the reader that official and serious efforts are taken to address the problem of racism and bias within Starbucks.[43] Nonetheless, the company is simultaneously represented as a frontrunner in advancing inclusivity and diversity and tackling racism and discrimination. Starbucks' actions are commended and the discourse maintains a perception of the company as an activist leader that is shaping the social fabric in the U.S.

> *Starbucks is hoping to effect change not only inside itself, but also to motivate other companies to think about the role of bias. To that end, it's working with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights to bring together other groups and businesses later this year for a working session on creating a more inclusive work culture.* (Starbucks 2018c.)

As good as these intentions are, phrases such as "It's not only the right thing to do, and a step in trying to help bridge the racial divide in the U.S, but it's also good for business, she [executive vice president of public affairs for Starbucks] added" emphasize the logic of profit-making in the corporate world. Hence, the argument by Banerjee (2014) about the structural and functional limits of CSR looks to hold in this case: the current structure and purpose of companies aimed at delivering shareholder value can result in very selective CSR practices. From a public relations perspective, Starbucks had

[41] Discourses and representation

[42] Styles and Identification

[43] Genres and Actions

no other chance to take drastic public measures to answer the outrage that took place after the Philadelphia incident – a video of the moment went viral. It is thereby worth questioning whether Starbucks would have addressed the issue in such a public and pertinent manner if the incident had not occurred nor it had not been made public with modern communications tools. Ultimately, narrow corporate goals of self-interest can effortlessly prevent normative CSR practices from gaining significant ground and impact in practice. (see Banerjee 2014, 94.)

5.4.3. Protecting Democracy

The final theme addressed in the "Activist and Social Justice Defender" -discourse relates to human rights as a more general and abstract concept. It addresses especially the right to vote and the rights of refugees.[44]

The text discusses the need for American voters to practice their right to vote and take part in the building of U.S. democracy. In the discourse, Starbucks is represented as a catalyst that educates and encourages Americans questions related to representative democracy and voting. The relationship between Starbucks and citizens is one of where the company has the authority and the position to advice. In addition, the company is once again portrayed as a frontrunner and activist leader among other companies.[45]

> *So with TurboVote, Democracy Works, Starbucks and people like Common [and Grammy- and Academy Award-winning performer], we have been going around the country trying to make sure that everyone understands that the country has been built not only on our democracy, but on participation.* (Starbucks 2016c.)

> *In addition, Starbucks has signed on to the TurboVote Challenge, a nonpartisan, multiyear initiative bringing together influential companies to get out the vote in record numbers* (Starbucks 2016c).

With the discourse, Starbucks is engaging in the arena of political rights and aspiring to capacitate U.S. citizens to use their voice. The company is not participating in political processes through lobbying nor trying to shape the institutional environment to its favor. Instead, it is engaging in

[44] The analyzed material also included mentions about Starbucks' global human rights statement, but this aspect is not included in the discourse as businesses responsibility to respect human rights in their production chains is increasingly understood as mandatory, e.g. countries such as Finland and France have enacted or are enacting legislation regarding companies' human rights due diligence.

[45] Discourses and Representation

awareness-raising activism and almost setting standards for appropriate citizenship behavior. This reflects the decrease of trust of citizens in governments and public institutions and the rise of expectations toward business and CEOs. Accordingly, Starbucks' discourse is placing the company as an actor that is trying to redeem U.S. citizens belief in politics.

The text is located in the genre of a company statement that adheres to more formality and has the social purpose to enhance voter engagement in the U.S. as well as the strategic purpose of putting Starbucks' brand on the frontline of timely issues, i.e. elections in this case.[46] The style of the text includes elements of authority and asymmetry, where Starbucks and its partner Common place accountability on U.S. citizens to engage in voting, reflecting the representation of Starbucks as a societal leader.

"I put the responsibility and accountability on you right now to know who is running in office locally, state-wide and federally who's going to make the change that you want to happen." [said Common] (Starbucks 2016c).

The discourse also underlines Schultz' capability to answer to human rights problems as a CEO. In a personal letter, Schultz discusses the threats the Trump administration and its Executive Order Protecting The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States" poses to human rights.

I am hearing the alarm you all are sounding that the civility and human rights we have all taken for granted for so long are under attack, and want to use a faster, more immediate form of communication to engage with you on matters that concern us all as partners (Starbucks 2017b).

I also want to take this opportunity … to ensure you are clear that we will neither stand by, nor stand silent, as the uncertainty around the new Administration's actions grows with each passing day (Starbucks 2017b.)

In the quotes, Schultz identifies as a complete, coherent and competent leader who is using his power to correct injustice. He assumes and personifies a social role in which he and his company are capable of shaping social change and even assuming a bigger influence than the country's Administration. Schultz formulates and articulates his ultimate concerns and this way becomes a personality that reflects an activist leader.[47] Accordingly, the discourse once again reflects the current social context

[46] Genres and Action
[47] Styles and Identification

where people are placing mounting expectations for businesses. Many feel that CEOs should take the lead on change. (see Edelman Trust Barometer 2018b, 10.)

Practicing social justice aspires to result in positive changes while promoting human development and creating inclusive, participatory, and just relationships and societal structures. However, the discourse does not acknowledge the criticism targeted toward the U.S' voting system: voter suppression as a tactic has been argued to significantly decrease the capability of minority communities in the U.S. to exercise their democratic right to vote (see Rao, Dillon, Kelly & Bennet 2019). In other words, it seems that the company is targeting a symptom of injustice, not the actual disease of injustice. The company could use a discourse as a foundation for resistance, which brings up voices that challenge the dominant discourses and highlight practices of injustice. Otherwise, it seems that an advantaged group once again determines what are the needs and difficulties of groups suffering from inequalities.

6. Conclusions

The objective of this research was to connect the field of Peace Research to a whole new area of inquiry, i.e. the potential consequences of heightened company societal engagement on social justice in non-fragile states. More specifically, the aim was to shed critical light on how social justice is perceived and justified in corporate activism discourses as well as examine whether corporate activism, as the new kid on the CSR block, can escape the traps embedded in the logic of the firm.

The thesis located corporate activism into the broader context of globalization as well as demonstrated how processes originating from globalization are recontextualizing CSR and the role and responsibilities of companies. It was suggested that modern businesses are expected to operate according to the multiple values and answer to rising external pressure. Simultaneously, the surrounding world has become more hybrid and less controllable by traditional nation-state actors. Analytical importance was placed on the growing power, wealth, and influence of MNCs: large-scale companies are capable of affecting social, economic, and political arenas.

The study continued by providing a thorough account of CSR in the U.S. It was recognized that traditions of liberal individualism, communal welfare, democratic pluralism and power and involvement by the state shape corporate societal engagement in the U.S (Freeman & Hasnaoui 201; Pasquero 2004 in Matten & Moon 2008; Camilleri 2017). The quest for the business case was identified as one of the major determinants of American CSR. While fully acknowledging that the mainstreaming of CSR depends on its abilities to support companies' activities and add value, it was

argued that the instrumental rationalization of CSR can lead to risky situations (see Burchell & Cook 2006). At worst, CSR becomes dominated by business interests and is used to enhance corporate images and yield profits. Simultaneously, those stakeholders who have the least power and suffer most from society's ills might be left to the margins. (Djelic & Etchanchu 2017; Barnett 2019).

By paying attention to the theoretical concepts of corporate citizenship, corporate activism, and social justice, the study identified corporate activism as a new interesting phenomenon within the world of CSR. American companies were assuming proactive roles, even those of societal leaders, and were addressing questions relating to social justice – which really did not have much to do with the company bottom line. The interest was thus on examining whether corporate activism can bring about something new, fresh, and perhaps reviving into the theories and practices on CSR.

Relying on the methodological tool of CDA and the theoretical framework, the research findings were descriptively dated back to the main notions of the literature review, i.e. the fundamental idea that companies are increasingly perceived as societal activists and actors that are expected set standards for appropriate behavior (Maignan & Ralston 2002; Vogel 1992). It was detected that Starbucks's corporate activism discourses largely answered to external pressure for intense corporate societal engagement and leadership. This reflected the theoretical framework introduced in the study.

The thesis built a normative structure around the concept of corporate activism, instead of analyzing the concept purely from instrumental and descriptive perspectives. The intention was not only to examine questions of *what* and *how*, but also *why* and with *what consequences.* The acknowledgement from the beginning of the analysis was that the dominant discourses of CSR have the risk of being inherently driven by business interests. Thus, special attention was paid to inadequate corporate engagement with stakeholders, inadequate observations of society, and selective framing of discourses. This perception, together with the main notions of social justice, served as a guide for the analysis of the data.

The analysis revealed that Starbucks' activism discourses were derived from the narrow perspective of an advantaged group and failed to bring forth the voices of those who are marginalized against and disadvantaged. In many of the discourses, Starbucks or the company leadership decided what the societal problem was and who suffers from it, while highlighting the capabilities of the company to solve such issues. Any self-criticism and self-reflection were notable absent, even in cases where Starbucks had been the target of accusations of past discriminatory practices. Dominance and unequal power relations were at times reproduced and the aspiration to result in just social changes stayed alarmingly hollow. It largely appeared that the incentive to speak out was to uphold a positive and

credible corporate image, instead of raising awareness and supporting unheard voices to be included in the public discussion.

Clearly, with its power and reach, Starbucks has the platform to support disadvantaged and marginalized groups to be heard. However, this includes a moral dilemma. Why these groups should operate through a channel which ultimately consciously or unconsciously upholds discriminatory practices or uses the symbols of the groups to valorize their corporate image (e.g. the Pride flag)? Indeed, the world is alarmingly far from perfect, and (despite active, brave and commendable human rights groups, activists, and NGOs etc.) the voices of those who are disadvantaged and marginalized are still suppressed in many cases. If corporations aspire to become allies for disadvantaged and marginalized groups, they should at minimum run their operations with constant self-criticism, cautiousness, and humility.

The findings of this case study show that Starbucks' corporate activism discourses entail unjust and hegemonic elements that unfortunately hinder social justice. The efforts to enact positive change fall short and strong semantics cover the conscious or even unconscious maintenance of inequalities. A questionable amount of power is placed on the ability of Starbucks and its leadership to guide the U.S. through turbulent and uncertain times as well as bring comfort and assurance that everything will turn out OK. The U.S. as a country is glorified as a perfect place, a melting pot of all cultures, that has room for all – and Starbucks will protect this country and always continue to serve every single individual, despite religion, race, political convictions... This promise and the perfect perception of the U.S., unfortunately, lacks any acknowledgement of deep structural problems and discriminatory practices embedded in the country.

Ultimately, corporate activism does not seem to walk the talk and redeem the flaws found in the modern, instrumentalized version CSR. With such narrow and glorified activist discourses, Starbucks fails to bring about any true change and move away from the PR -aspect found within many modern CSR practices. As mentioned earlier, this thesis acknowledges that CSR cannot survive if it does not bring added value for companies and support their condition for survival. It is not argued here that doing good precludes doing well. However, the criticism is targeted toward the way "doing good" is acted upon; too simplistically, too narrowly, too PR-oriented.

For Peace Research, corporate activism and broader corporate societal engagement in non-conflict countries seem to be an interesting and suitable study subject. Companies are influencing questions of peace, justice, and stability in non-war-torn countries as well. Additional research is needed to increase the generalizability of the findings of this study and provide more solid arguments on how

discourses of corporate activism can be detrimental to social justice. The findings also revealed the need to examine whether corporate activism discourses influence public and political perceptions of social justice and whether activism has actual influence on practices of social justice.

For companies practicing CSR and corporate activism, I say the following: look at your position and advantages in society, critically examine your practices and policies, engage in equal dialogue with a those stakeholders who are disadvantaged or marginalized against, ask how your company can support them, and most importantly, listen. That is how you make an impact.

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