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Creating Collaboration: How Social Movement Organizations Shape Digital Activism to Promote Broader Social Change

Shahla Ghobadi
Leeds University Business School, The University of Leeds
s.ghobadi@leeds.ac.uk

Scott Sonenshein
Jones Graduate School of Business, Rice University
Scotts@rice.edu

ABSTRACT

Social movement organizations (SMOs) have increasingly embraced *digital activism*, using social media and networking tools to advocate for a cause, to mobilize globally distributed consumers and pressure businesses to change their practices. Past research has primarily focused on how SMOs have used viral social media posts to prompt businesses to take immediate action on an issue. This article proposes a shift in the discourse to explore how SMOs' digital activism can promote broader social change through collaborative agreements rather than merely demanding narrow concessions or compliance. We examine the online campaigns of a large international SMO and how the campaigns influenced three global businesses to alter their environmental practices and industry standards. We find that the SMO used contrasting combinations of content positioning and social networking strategies to mobilize consumers, ultimately achieving collaboration agreements through influencing the businesses' risk perceptions and the potential strategic gains from collaboration with the SMO. The comparative analysis yields insights into how SMOs may vary their digital activism strategies depending on consumers' loyalty to a business and its offerings, including its products and services. We develop a theoretical perspective that explains why and how consumer loyalty can shape SMOs' selection of digital activism strategies and the process of achieving collaboration agreements. The findings also advance the literature on digital activism strategies by introducing the notion of ambivalent content positioning and emphasizing the significance of social networking for risk management and sustaining SMOs' digital activism.

Keywords: Collaboration agreement, social change, social causes, digital activism, consumers, qualitative study, case study research.

INTRODUCTION

Social movement organizations (SMOs) leverage advocacy and mobilization to target businesses and promote social change aligned with their values and beliefs (Briscoe and Gupta 2016; Durand and Georgallis 2018). While SMOs have traditionally relied on in-person pressure campaigns to achieve results from target businesses (Hensby et al. 2012; Lee et al. 2018), more recent research emphasizes the role of digital activism—defined as utilizing social media and networking tools to advocate for a cause (Briscoe and Gupta 2016; Schmitz et al. 2020; Selander and Jarvenpaa 2016; Vink 2018). Through digital activism, SMOs can mobilize globally distributed consumers and hold businesses accountable for changing problematic practices to avoid negative publicity (Herman and Kim 2014; Luo et al. 2016; Treré 2015). Global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of digital activism. With in-person gatherings being restricted or banned, SMOs had to rely on digital platforms to continue their campaigns (Pleyers 2020). This accelerated the shift towards online organizing, and this effect has remained even after the pandemic wound down (Calzada 2022).

As vital as it is for securing compliance with SMOs' campaigns, a deeper form of social change might arise if target businesses establish enduring relationships with SMOs (Gray et al. 2022; Odziemkowska 2022). Collaborative relationships, in particular, indicate a deeper commitment to addressing social causes by redefining industry standards and expectations (Cloutier and Langley 2017; Gray et al. 2022). A relationship between a SMO and a business can be cultivated through a collaboration agreement—a formal arrangement that outlines joint efforts to achieve mutually relevant social change outcomes (Gray 1989; Gray 2000; Tello-Rozas et al. 2015). For instance, Greenpeace and Unilever agreed to collaborate to ensure that palm oil suppliers were protecting Borneo's ecologically sensitive forests and peat lands; Asia Pulp & Paper

Group (APP) collaborated with Greenpeace to revise their Forest Conservation Policy; and Astro, a leading content and entertainment company in Malaysia, collaborated with Greenpeace to reduce plastic use and raise businesses' awareness of climate change. While the outcome of any long-term relationship is uncertain, collaborative agreements lay the foundation for potential spillover effects that influence other businesses and industries to become more socially responsible (Durand and Georgallis 2018; Gray et al. 2022; van Wijk et al. 2013). Although SMOs have historically aimed to collaborate with businesses to bring about social change, businesses prioritize their autonomy and control over their practices, which could be scrutinized and overseen during a long-lasting relationship with SMOs (Cloutier and Langley 2017; Gray et al. 2022). Collaboration agreements that involve committees, intermediaries, and third-party bodies can also be seen as inflexible and challenging to exit, which may result in business resistance (Arenas et al. 2013; Sonday and Wilson-Prangley 2018). For instance, when the Fair Labor Association (FLA) pressured Nike to improve working conditions in its overseas factories, Nike initially resisted collaboration. It was only after facing significant public criticism and boycotts that the company agreed to work with the FLA and make necessary changes.

SMOs, therefore, need to devise effective strategies to overcome businesses' reluctance to engage in collaboration. The tension between SMOs and businesses over collaboration agreements raises the question, however, of whether SMOs can leverage digital technologies' global reach and the publicity they can generate, to achieve an enduring dialogue with target businesses to address fundamental social issues. So far, research has extensively examined the effectiveness of digital activism to persuade target businesses to adopt specific changes (Breindl and Briatte 2013; Leong et al. 2019), but there has been less exploration of how SMOs can apply these technologies to encourage businesses to enter into collaboration agreements, which require a greater level of

commitment. The gap is germane as SMOs' digital activism has the potential to achieve more extensive social change by pursuing collaborative agreements rather than solely seeking narrow concessions or compliance about a specific practice.

We contribute to current understanding of how SMOs can leverage digital activism to establish lasting relationships with businesses, promote a shared sense of purpose, and advance social change aspirations at the field level. More formally, the study explores: *How do SMOs use digital activism to motivate target businesses to collaborate on advancing social change?*

We address the research question by conducting an in-depth longitudinal, embedded case study of three online campaigns implemented by a large SMO that led to collaboration agreements. The analysis draws upon the tenets of strategic framing, given their importance in how SMOs design and implement campaigns to mobilize potential activists and challenge businesses to change (Benford and Snow 2000; Vicari 2010).

The findings demonstrate that the SMO's activism content leveraged diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing to mobilize consumers and pressure the businesses to change. Additionally, the SMO employed varied content positioning and social networking strategies, which enabled them to strengthen activism and manage associated risks, ensuring engagement throughout the campaigns. Consumers adopted and built on SMOs' digital activism content and strategies, which led to sustained mobilization and influenced the businesses' perceptions of risks and potential strategic gains from collaboration with the SMO. This ultimately motivated the businesses to collaborate with the SMO. Furthermore, the comparative analysis indicates that the type of digital activism campaigns appears to differ depending on the type of product or service, and that this may be related to the SMO's perception of consumers' loyalty to the target business and its offerings. We build on the insight and elaborate a theoretical perspective on how consumer

loyalty can shape optimal campaigns' content positioning and social networking strategies. We discuss contributions to research on digital activism, SMO strategies, and loyalty-based relationships in achieving social change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SMOs and Digital Activism

SMOs aim to mobilize large numbers of people around shared social values and rights to pursue social change goals (Chen 2020; Durand and Georgallis 2018; Xiong et al. 2019). Although historically, SMOs have focused on in-person pressure campaigns (Hensby et al. 2012; Lee et al. 2018), recent research indicates that SMOs are increasingly using digital technologies to achieve their objectives (Selander and Jarvenpaa 2016). Social media and networking tools enable SMOs to rapidly disseminate information to large audiences (Leong et al. 2019; Luo et al. 2016; Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2014). If SMOs' online content goes viral, it can accelerate collective action (Brunsting and Postmes 2002; Carty 2010; Postmes and Brunsting 2002; Ruiu and Ragnedda 2017; Schneider 2015). If public pressure builds, targets are more likely to respond positively to protect themselves against negative publicity and to enhance their brand image (Zhang and Luo 2013).

While digital activism has been hailed as a powerful tool for promoting social change, some scholars have highlighted its risks, inherent complexity, and unpredictability (Ghobadi and Clegg 2015; Soriano 2016; Upchurch and Grassman 2016). Although technology provides greater flexibility and increased participation, it also creates false perceptions about the low cost of activism and the high impact of advancing a social cause, while organizations may use the same technology to discourage activists (Chughtai et al. 2020; Ghobadi and Clegg 2015). Studies have also raised concerns about the internet's ability to incorporate diverse viewpoints into online

conversations (Jacobson et al. 2016) and allow individuals to express unpopular opinions (Miranda et al. 2016). Moreover, while SMOs may use adversarial interactions to pressure businesses into announcing changes, SMOs' focus on reaching concessions to effect change can result in symbolic responses that ultimately hinder real social change (Den Hond and De Bakker 2007; Doh and Guay 2006; Greening and Gray 1994; van Huijstee and Glasbergen 2010a). Specifically, businesses may make symbolic concessions in response to activists' demands to avoid negative publicity, without a genuine commitment to advancing social change. Non-target businesses may also engage in impression management activities as a preventive measure against future activism (McDonnell and Werner 2016; Scherer et al. 2013). To overcome these challenges, SMOs need to effectively plan for digital activism, including mobilizing individuals whose activism can influence target businesses (e.g., consumers) and using strategic framing to communicate messages that resonate with activists.

SMOs and Consumer Mobilization

Scholars conceptualize activists on a continuum from insider to outsider (Briscoe and Gupta 2016; Meyerson and Scully 1995). While insider activists, such as employees, have access to valuable information (e.g., victim testimonials), they rely on target businesses for resources and may be hesitant to engage in more radical forms of activism that could harm their career prospects (DeCelles et al. 2020). Conversely, outsider activists, such as members of SMOs, have a wider range of tactics at their disposal, including disruptive forms of activism, but lack the valuable knowledge of internal organizational structures and culture, which could limit their momentum and influence (McDonnell and King 2013).

Consumers occupy a middle ground on the insider-outsider continuum, possessing some knowledge of a business's values but lacking insight into informal practices (Cundill et al. 2018).

While consumers may depend on a business's offerings, they are not entirely reliant on the target business for critical resources, making their relationships with businesses more fleeting and therefore more conducive to activism. If consumers have an emotional attachment to a business and its offerings, they are more likely to care about raising their concerns and demanding changes. When businesses fail to address these concerns, consumers may change their purchasing behaviors, albeit with some regret (Oliver 1999). Consumer activism can be effective, as businesses understand the consequences of undermining consumers' voices and the importance of responding appropriately (Kuyper et al. 2017; Levit 2019; Michaelsen 2018). Understandably, SMOs are increasingly targeting consumers and convincing them that voicing their concerns is in their best interest (Bennett 2012; Chen 2020; Colli 2020; Reese 2020). This involves creating campaigns that bring attention to social problems and mobilize consumers to pressure businesses to take action. Traditional SMO tactics have involved boycotts (Ettenson and Klein 2005; Friedman 1999; King 2008; Klein et al. 2004) and confrontational protests (Soule 2009; Walker et al. 2008) that threaten a target business's reputation and profits by garnering media attention.

In the 2000s, the advent of new social networking technologies transformed the internet, bringing individuals closer together and giving SMOs a novel opportunity to reach and mobilize globally distributed consumers (Mueller 2004; Xiong et al. 2019). Online campaigns allow SMOs to engage consumers in activities such as signing petitions and sharing critical comments within the online space (Albinsson and Perera 2012; Heldman 2017; Minocher 2019). Twitter is a prime example, where a hashtag organizes tweets and creates an accumulation of private effects and waves of imitations (Freelon et al. 2016). While online activities, such as posting critical comments and signing petitions, may lack the community markers that contribute to concerted effort and impact (Arvidsson and Caliandro 2016), these activities can serve as visible acts of symbolic

support (Minocher 2019). When aggregated and shared widely, these critiques create a doppelganger brand image that challenges businesses' authenticity and public image, potentially pushing them towards more desirable practices. When individuals use hashtags, for example, they may not interact with each other, but their collective sentiments and affects can create a structured set of meanings that attract media and target businesses' attention.

In summary, SMOs' digital activism that targets mobilizing consumers can be effective if a business perceives it as a significant threat to their market competitiveness. The success of such activism depends on how SMOs frame their communication, which has historically played a strategic role in mobilizing activists.

SMOs and Strategic Framing

Strategic framing refers to selecting critical aspects of a social cause and making them salient in communication in order to amplify shared meanings and elicit audience actions (Benford and Snow 2000). SMOs rely on strategic framing to effectively communicate social issues and mobilize the public to support their cause, which ultimately puts pressure on businesses responsible for harm (Pu and Scanlan 2012; Wang and Soule 2012). SMOs typically use three framing concepts to achieve this: **diagnostic** framing to identify and define a problem, **prognostic** framing to propose solutions, and **motivational** framing to encourage action (Duong et al. 2019; Piercy 2007; Vicari 2010).

Diagnostic framing involves identifying one or more problems and attributing blame and causality to responsible entities such as governments or businesses. For example, activists may elaborate on how carbon pollution enabled by energy companies affects severe weather conditions and everyday quality of life. Prognostic framing involves incorporating solutions into activism content to envision change, engage the audience, and increase the materialization of their support.

This framing communicates a plan and offers solutions for change, such as global justice or process changes. Finally, motivational framing provides a change rationale to motivate people, such as consumers, to participate in collective action by influencing their cognitive perception that they will benefit if they take action to solve the problem.

SMOs have long applied framing concepts in their activism, but advancements in social media and networking tools have enabled them to implement these concepts in more effective and innovative ways (Choi and Park 2014; Nunkoo et al. 2020; Pu and Scanlan 2012; Treré 2015). Social media platforms allow activists to quickly publish confrontational posts that blame a target business for social issues and post persuasive comments on their public articles (Pu and Scanlan 2012; won Kim et al. 2014). The intensive communication also accelerates the rate of consensus-building around problems and solutions and motivates collective action. More people are encouraged to endorse a cause by liking, re-posting, and commenting on digital activism content (Kane et al. 2014; Kavada 2015). In addition, social media platforms offer virtual spaces to reduce the intensity of protests and facilitate unique outcomes (Leong et al. 2019; Xiong et al. 2019). For instance, Twitter and Facebook groups can reduce activism fatigue and reinforce solidarity among activists (Treré 2015). During the #YoSoy132 movement in Mexico, activists created intimate environments to share memes and interact less seriously, which reinforced their belonging to the movement and highlighted their shared vision and understanding.

To summarize, existing research has established that strategic framing plays a crucial role in supporting SMOs' activism campaigns and that digital technologies amplify these framings. We expand on this research by investigating how SMOs can utilize digital activism to strategically frame their cause and encourage businesses to commit to collaborating on social issues.

RESEARCH METHOD

We adopt an interpretivist case study approach to develop novel insights, given the limited research on how SMOs leverage digital activism to foster collaboration agreements (Eisenhardt et al. 2016). To provide a granular understanding of digital activism strategies, our approach is also longitudinal (Langley 1999; Yin 2009). We focus on Greenpeace as the primary context and employ its campaigns as the unit of analysis. By focusing on multiple campaigns from a single SMO, we can investigate why and how an organization can employ different digital activism strategies to facilitate collaboration agreements.

We selected Greenpeace as the organizational case, as it is one of the leading SMOs campaigning against businesses and challenging them to foster social change (Doyle 2007). The SMO has also been at the forefront of using online platforms and social media to mobilize individuals and challenge even the most reputable businesses (Katz-Kimchi and Manosevitch 2015). By discussing *offline* activities *online*, they deliberately seek to raise public awareness and increase engagement (won Kim et al. 2014). Moreover, Greenpeace pursues collaborative approaches with businesses, as evidenced by successful partnerships with McDonald's, Unilever, Timberland, Kleenex, and Best Buy. These factors make Greenpeace a compelling case for examining how SMOs can use digital activism to build collaborations with businesses.

We followed a three-step process to identify Greenpeace campaigns whose reliance on digital activism led to collaboration agreements [1] (Appendix 1). Out of the 105 campaigns identified, we selected 13 that suggested some form of collaboration agreement. From the remaining 13, we chose 10 campaigns that had a history of social activism. Finally, we selected 3 cases from the 10 that demonstrated a significant reliance on digital activism. This outcome confirms the earlier tension over collaboration agreements, with the rarity of SMOs relying on

[1] We used 2017 as the cut-off date for data collection because the campaigns had already wound down by that time.

digital activism to reach these agreements being extreme cases that push the boundaries of current theory (Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Eisenhardt et al. 2016; Eisenhardt 1989). **Green My Apple** (2006-2007) and **Kit Kat** (2010-2011) challenged troublesome ingredients in the production lines of Apple, Inc (hereafter called Apple) and Nestlé Group (hereafter called Nestlé) as product development companies. **Unfriend Coal** (2011-2012) tackled the underlying infrastructure that enables the operation of Facebook, Inc[2] (hereafter called Facebook). Greenpeace relied on social media platforms to mobilize consumers globally and challenge target businesses during these campaigns. The intensive efforts incentivized the targets to engage in online discussions, resulting in three collaboration agreements.

Data Collection

The data collection process was designed to be comprehensive, utilizing multiple steps and sources. We followed three steps to collect data on each campaign, as detailed in Table 1, with a summary of the data presented in Table 2. The first step involved identifying an extensive list of sources from which to collect data. The second step was dedicated to gathering data from these sources. We concluded with a Google API search to uncover any additional information, particularly related to the aftermath of the campaigns, which could offer further insights into the processes and outcomes of the campaigns. This approach allowed us to gain a thorough understanding of the campaigns and the factors that contributed to their success.

[2] Facebook, Inc changed to Meta Platforms, Inc. in 2021.

Table 1. Data Collection Steps	
Extract initial data and identify data sources	1. Extracted data from Greenpeace's central hub to identify each campaign's main channels of practicing digital activism[3]. 2. Collected data for Green My Apple (378 blogposts), Kit Kat (129 blogposts), and Unfriend Coal (379 posts). 3. Conducted a thematic analysis of the data using NVivo to identify all other platforms through which digital activism was practiced, i.e., discovered that Greenpeace used Vimeo to reupload Kit Kat's suspended YouTube video, leading to the inclusion of Vimeo as an additional platform for studying Kit Kat. 4. Found that Green My Apple (2006-2007) relied on Greenpeace site, YouTube, and Flickr; Kit Kat (2010) and Unfriend Coal (2011-2012) relied mostly on Facebook pages but also used YouTube and Vimeo.
Collect additional data from the identified sources	1. Extracted additional data about digital activism processes and collaboration agreements by examining the data on new platforms for each case. For instance, a blog post provided a link to Steve Jobs' concession letter on the Apple website, while Nestlé's media announcement reflected their conditions for accepting Greenpeace's demands. 2. Collected 1 video, 61 photos, and 1476 comments on the material for Green My Apple; 5 videos, 13 photos, 5,925 Facebook posts, and 1,566 comments on the material for Kit Kat; and 6 videos, 30 photos, 5,930 Facebook posts, and 81,630 comments on the material for Unfriend Coal.
Collecting additional data through the Google API	1. Identified and extracted media stories and posts about the campaigns using the Google API Explorer tool. One notable example was an online article on Macworld posted on May 10, 2007, which revealed early signs of collaboration and how the Apple CEO engaged with Greenpeace representatives immediately after Apple's concession to change. 2. Collected 130 online posts from various platforms, including Inhabitant, TreeHugger, and HuffPost, to gain further insights into the campaigns.

Table 2. Overview of Data					
Step	**Content**	**Green My Apple**	**Kit Kat**	**Unfriend Coal**	**Total**
1	**Blog posts**	378	129	379	886
2	**Videos**	1	5	6	12
	Photos	61	13	30	104
	Facebook Posts	0	5,925	5,930	11, 855
	Comments	1,476	1,566	81,630	84, 672
3	**News stories/Press releases**	70	35	33	138

Data Analysis

We followed recommended analytic practices to examine digital activism processes in the cases (Eisenhardt et al. 2016). We conducted the analysis process in four steps: (1) construct a longitudinal understanding, (2) within-case analysis, (3) cross-case analysis, and (4) theory development. Table 3 elaborates on each analysis step using a coding table and examples (Appendix 2).

[3] A central website related to the topic of interest can be a valuable starting point, providing access to important posts and information that may not be easily searchable through search engines. This approach is useful for accessing dispersed information across multiple platforms, such as blog posts or other content that may not be easily discoverable through search engines. Starting with the Greenpeace Central Hub in this study allowed researchers to access valuable information and identify additional sources of data.

Table 3. Data Analysis Process	
Construct a longitudinal understanding for each case	• Used memos to organize emerging thoughts about the data and develop a critical events' timeline for each case. • Inspired by the findings, conducted intensive reading about social activism and collaboration agreements (e.g., co-optations, impression management, loyalty) (Miles and Huberman 1994). • Multiple iterations between the data and literature produced an increasingly refined story forming the coding basis.
Within-case analysis	• Sought evidence for the emergence of collaboration agreements and the use of strategic framing components (diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational). • Sought evidence for the campaigns' strategic framings to understand how the SMO's digital activism supported the campaigns' framings and ultimately encouraged the businesses to collaborate. • Imbued empirical inferences with conceptual meanings provided by extant research to determine possible explanations for the emerging findings, if any (Moschieri et al. 2022).
	Found Greenpeace applied diverse positionings to create digital activism content and implement the campaigns. The literature offers evidence of NGOs' contrasting tactics to influence corporations (van Huijstee and Glasbergen 2010b). Similarly, Greenpeace also created contrasting activism content (*tolerant, antagonistic*), with the addition of *ambivalent* positioning (defined in Appendix 2 and discussed in the findings section).
	Found Greenpeace applied diverse strategies for ensuring that social networking platforms strengthened and sustained its activism throughout the campaigns. One of the campaigns used social networking to promote the campaign. A *promotive strategy* for social networking is frequently discussed in the digital activism literature (Leong et al. 2019; Selander and Jarvenpaa 2016; Xiong et al. 2019). Additionally, the findings shed light on the use of a *preventive strategy* to avoid the dampening consequences of Nestle's response to antagonistic positioning, even though Greenpeace's quick response might not have been planned, and a *protective strategy* to ensure consumers remained empowered to maintain the campaign momentum amidst the lengthy activism processes.
Cross-case analysis	• Cycled through multiple data reflections for each campaign to identify different patterns and to understand better why and how Greenpeace applied different digital activism strategies to support the campaigns' strategic framings and arrive at collaboration agreements (Lempert 2007). • Consulted the literature on consumers and brand experience, services and product experience, and consumer behaviors to make sense of the differences. • Identified the possible impact of different relationships between consumers and the target businesses.
Theory development	• Went back and forth between the data and insights from the extant literature (e.g., consumer behavior, framing) to understand the findings and to weave inferences about each case's narratives into a holistic theory of how SMOs shape digital activism to progress toward establishing collaboration agreements (Strauss and Corbin 1990). • Leveraged insights from recent digital activism trends to enrich the emerging understanding of why the SMO adapted digital activism strategies based on consumer-business relationships (Table 4). • Created a theoretical perspective to be further tested and expanded by future studies.

Our comparative process highlighted the possible impact of different relationships between consumers and the businesses in Greenpeace's distinct strategies and campaigns' processes. This drew our attention to varying levels of consumers' loyalty to a business as a potential influence on the type of digital activism that was pursued. We drew upon research on consumers and brand experience, services and product experience, and consumer behaviors (Akehurst 2008; Bell et al. 2005; Brakus et al. 2009; Desai et al. 2008; Helgesen 2006; Katz and Shapiro 1994; Napoli et al. 2014) to characterise consumer loyalty in terms of three factors (switching costs, consumption speed, and business longevity). Table 4 rates the businesses on a high/medium/low scale for each factor to produce an overall loyalty score.

Table 4. Consumer Loyalty (at the time of the campaigns)			
	Apple	**Nestlé**	**Facebook**
Switching costs: expense involved in changing to a different business provider (Bell et al. 2005; Katz and Shapiro 1994). While Apple, Nestlé, and Facebook all seek to offer emotionally engaging consumer experiences with their products (Mac, Kit Kat, Facebook account), a chocolate bar, is more easily replaceable by similar products.	H	L	H
Consumption speed: a product/service's lifespan from provision to consumption. A computer or social media account is generally used for several years, but a chocolate bar is consumed in a few minutes, hence there is less time for loyalty to get invested.	H	L	H
Business longevity: a business's establishment over an extended period (Desai et al. 2008). The longer a business has been operating, the more likely consumers are to trust its ability to navigate difficulties and succeed in a competitive market (Wiedmann et al. 2011). At the time of the campaigns, Apple (founded in 1976) and Nestlé (founded in 1866) were relatively established companies compared to Facebook (public release in 2006).	H	H	L
Consumer Loyalty	**High**	**Low**	**Medium**

FINDINGS

Table 5 offers an overview of the key features of the three cases.

Table 5. Overview of Digital Activism Cases Resulting in Collaboration Agreements						
				Digital Activism Strategies		
Campaign	**Target Business**	**Consumer Loyalty**	**Campaign Duration**	**Content Framing**	**Content Positioning**	**Social Networking**
Green My Apple	Apple	High	Sep 2006-May 2007 (7 months)	Diagnostic Prognostic Motivational	Tolerant	Promotive
Kit Kat	Nestlé	Low	March-April 2010 (2 months)		Antagonistic	Promotive/Preventive
Unfriend Coal	Facebook	Medium	Feb 2010-Dec 2011 (22 months)		Ambivalent	Promotive/Protective

Mobilizing Consumers through Digital Activism in the case of "Green My Apple"

On September 18, 2006, Greenpeace published an online report titled "Toxic Chemicals in Computers Exposed," which highlighted hazardous substances in new laptops from leading manufacturers including Acer, Apple, Dell, HP, and Sony. Apple's MacBook was found to have one of the highest levels of contamination. To encourage more environmentally friendly changes in electronic products' design, production, and recycling, Greenpeace launched the 'Green my Apple' online campaign on September 26, 2006, requesting that Apple remove toxic substances from its products (Figure 1). With Apple's massive fan base and high customer loyalty (Kane and Sherr 2011), Greenpeace relied on these groups worldwide to voluntarily produce activism content and draw the company's attention. Greenpeace created digital content, framing the importance of removing toxic substances from Apple products and its impact on people and the planet

(*diagnostic*). Greenpeace then set a clear goal for the campaign: changing Apple's production policies (*prognostic*). To mobilize Apple fans and encourage them to challenge Apple, Greenpeace used symbols emphasizing Apple's symbolic language of leadership and caring about consumers (*motivational*). The online campaign, for example, followed Apple's website design, starting with the words: "*We love our Macs, but we hate they're full of toxic chemicals. And we know someone who can do something about it: you."*

Figure 1. Green My Apple

Greenpeace used a *tolerant* content positioning in its digital activism by using friendly comments and calls to articulate the current social problem as an opportunity to avoid problems in the future. For example, Greenpeace created a spoof video featuring the Apple CEO announcing the phase-out of certain chemicals, a worldwide take-back policy, and a green iPod, which was discussed over 100,000 times. Figure 1 also illustrates this positioning.

Greenpeace's tolerant approach received a mostly silent response from Apple. However, Greenpeace continued to use their campaign website as a platform for digital activism. The website emphasized social networking applications and even provided assets released under creative commons licenses for Apple fans to use in their own activism efforts (*promotive*). The website, for instance, encouraged fans to creatively expand on those assets to further pressure Apple. This approach was effective, as Apple fans edited and exchanged the campaign's pictures, such as the

Hug your Apple image, to express their desire for a green Mac. They also created and sold fashion items, such as t-shirts, featuring the campaign's iconic images.

Using these strategies, Green My Apple was able to gradually mobilize more consumers and create a growing ecosystem of Apple fans supporting the campaign. This seven-month campaign from September 2006 to May 2007 resulted in Apple seeing an opportunity to change its manufacturing practices. On May 2, 2007, a green apple appeared on the Apple website, linking to an open letter from the CEO announcing a change in Apple's policy:

"Apple has been criticized by some environmental organizations for not being a leader in removing toxic chemicals from its new products. Our stakeholders deserve and expect more from us, and they're right to do so. We're changing our policy. Apple is already a leader in innovation and engineering, and we are applying these same talents to become an environmental leader."

After Apple changed its business practices to be more environmentally friendly, Greenpeace representatives holding Apple shares attended the annual shareholder meeting to discuss the implementation of the changes, as reported by industry observers. While Apple and Greenpeace did not have a formal collaboration agreement at the time, the representatives congratulated the Apple CEO on the new commitments and expressed their interest in working with the company. Although the meeting focused on environmental plans, the Apple CEO also had suggestions for how Greenpeace measured organizations' environmental commitments, supporting the idea of an environmental card but emphasizing the need for it to be based on science. He also urged Greenpeace to evaluate companies based on their actions rather than just their claims:

"You put way too much weight on glorified principles and way too little weight on science and engineering. It would be very helpful if your organization hired a few more engineers and actually entered into dialogue with companies to find out what they are really doing and not just listen to all the flowery language when in reality, most of them aren't doing anything."

These discussions dovetailed with the activism Greenpeace used and culminated in an agreement on how Greenpeace and Apple could improve scientific analyses of the use of hazardous chemicals in electronic production lines. This understanding, in turn, necessitated a collaborative relationship

between Greenpeace and Apple to explore steps for addressing Apple's environmental practices, exploring industry processes, and advancing activists' measurement technology. The tolerant campaign, therefore, appeared to be effective in initiating discussions that eventually led to a collaboration agreement. Although data collection focused on the process leading to collaboration agreements, Greenpeace subsequently published reports to elaborate on Apple's production lines and their performance. In January 2010, for example, Greenpeace shared news about changes to Apple's production lines, its environmental cards, and the field-level diffusion of the campaign.

Mobilizing Consumers through Digital Activism in the in the Kit Kat campaign

In 2010, Greenpeace aimed to challenge Nestlé to improve its palm oil purchasing practices to set an example for the food industry. To achieve this, Greenpeace launched an online campaign called Kit Kat on March 17, 2010 (Figure 2). The campaign sought to raise awareness of how Nestlé was sourcing palm oil from suppliers that were destroying Indonesian rainforests, a habitat of orangutans. Greenpeace created digital content to frame the campaign, emphasizing the importance of the initiative and the environmental impact of palm oil on everyone (*diagnostic*). The campaign's explicit goal was for Nestlé to stop using palm oil from controversial sources (*prognostic*). Greenpeace used symbols and language familiar to Nestlé's consumers to motivate them to challenge the company (*motivational*). The most notable example was a YouTube video labeled "Have a break? Give the orangutan a break," which was a parody of Nestlé's original video. The video was widely shared and discussed on social media, receiving over 1.5 million YouTube hits, and becoming Greenpeace's most successful online campaign. The campaign used an *antagonistic* content positioning in its digital activism, i.e., strong language and confronting symbols, to challenge Nestlé's business image. The campaign video showed an office worker biting into an orangutan's finger, spreading blood across his face (Figure 3).

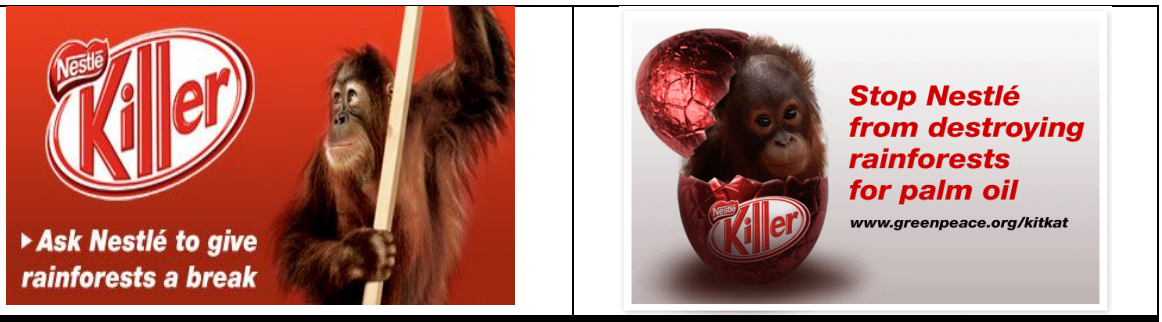

Figure 2. Kit Kat

Figure 3. Kit Kat Positioning

The Kit Kat campaign leveraged Greenpeace's Facebook page as an inspiring activism platform, encouraging people to challenge Nestlé using online comments and promoting consumer networking. Despite the promotive applications of social networking, the campaign's effectiveness relied on managing the risks imposed by using an antagonistic positioning (*preventive*). Specifically, Nestlé responded to Greenpeace's confrontational YouTube video by claiming copyright infringement. However, Greenpeace immediately moved the video to another platform to ensure the audience could continue to participate in digital activism. A Greenpeace supporter's comment on the Vimeo video suggested that Nestlé's reaction ironically intensified activism, as Vimeo helped serve a larger population's needs due to YouTube's use restrictions in some countries:

"I would never have seen this video if you hadn't had it kicked off YouTube. Now I'm forwarding to all my friends, through Facebook, and guess what they are forwarding it to all their mates."

Greenpeace's campaign successfully mobilized consumers and created a growing ecosystem of supporters. However, Nestlé responded by battling with Greenpeace when confronted with the viral

activism. The company's Facebook moderator threatened to delete any comments from fans with the Killer logo as their picture, writing, "*please don't post using an altered version of any of our logos as your profile pic – they will be deleted*." This comment received 190 complaints within 24 hours on its Facebook page. For instance, one consumer wrote:

"This is the best example of how a big corporation can screw up and has no one to blame but themselves; what about emotional intelligence??? the manual says that you should not insult your customers."

Nestlé's response to the campaign was swift, as the company realized the damage to its public image. On April 13, 2010, the chairman of Nestlé's South Asia board issued a letter on the company's website, stating that Nestlé had ceased purchasing palm oil from Sinar Mas and had informed suppliers that it would not tolerate oil from unsustainable sources. The letter acknowledged the campaign's urgency and Nestlé's commitment to collaborating with Greenpeace to address the issue and make changes within the industry. The two-month campaign had incentivized Nestlé to join the Coalition on Palm Oil and gather all interests at the table:

"We seek ways to collaborate with other stakeholders on this issue, and we will participate in the Coalition on Palm Oil that you will participate with a number of companies ... We continue to believe that we must gather all interests at the table."

Greenpeace's response was to publish a post on their site acknowledging their involvement in ensuring the agreement was executed appropriately. Subsequent discussions between Greenpeace and Nestlé focused on negotiating details for implementing plans and bringing industry players to the table. On May 17, 2010, Nestlé made a public post on its site announcing their agreement to use a boundary organization to guide the procurement process and hold Greenpeace responsible for overseeing change implementation. Six years after the initial campaign, in March 2016, Greenpeace published a report ranking 14 companies on their use of sustainable palm oil (as reported by greenbiz.com and foodnavigator.com). The report highlighted Nestlé's significant progress in using certified palm oil and recognized the company as an active collaborator with

Greenpeace.

Mobilizing Consumers through Digital Activism in "Unfriend Coal"

On January 20, 2010, Facebook announced its first company-built data center in Prineville, Oregon. The social media giant touted it as one of the most energy-efficient facilities of its kind, with reduced cooling costs due to the region's climate. Media reports assumed the data center would be powered by hydropower, given Oregon's reputation for environmentally friendly data centers, but a day later, Data Center Knowledge revealed that the data canter's primary power source would be coal. In response, Greenpeace launched the "Unfriend Coal" campaign (Figure 4), urging Facebook to shift to renewable energy sources. In an online letter dated February 3, 2011, Greenpeace called on Facebook to commit to a plan to grow without using coal and instead utilize clean, renewable energy sources.

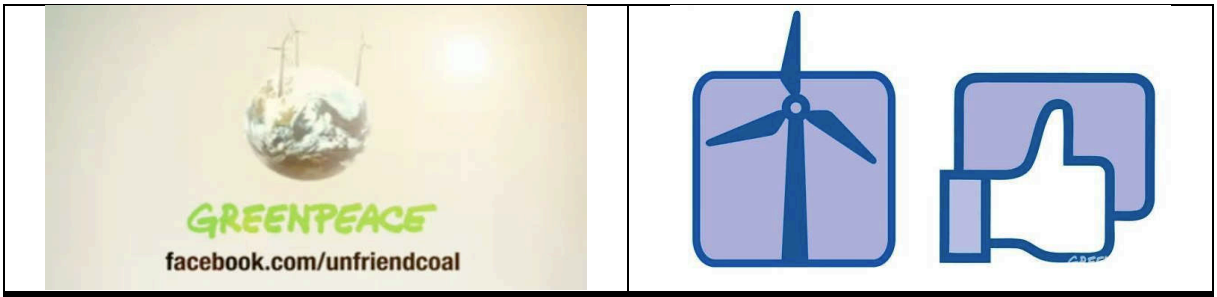

Figure 4. Unfriend Coal

On March 30, 2010, Greenpeace released the online report "Make it Green" on its website. The report highlighted that cloud-based applications like Facebook contribute to significant carbon emissions and emphasized the importance of using renewable energy to power social network companies. Greenpeace framed the campaign by explaining the harmful effects of coal and comparing Facebook's environmental decisions to those of other IT companies (*diagnostic*). The content also signalled the campaign's goal: requesting Facebook to turn to renewable energy in its data centers (*prognostic*). To mobilize Facebook users to build upon the campaign's digital activism content, Greenpeace encouraged voluntary engagement using symbols and language that

Facebook users could relate to, such as "liking," "friending," "unfriending," and "inviting" (*motivational*).

Greenpeace's digital activism content for Unfriend Coal used an *ambivalent* content positioning by combining antagonistic and tolerant elements, i.e., acknowledging the positive contributions of Facebook while criticizing its relationship with coal. A YouTube video targeting Facebook's CEO on September 13, 2010, for example, used a cartoon story to ask him to 'unfriend' coal and 'like' clean energies (Figure 5). The video featured confronting language but also showed a positive attitude toward Facebook's CEO and employees:

"Once upon a time, there was a boy who was very clever, and his name was Mark Zuckerberg … [He] invented Facebook which invented lots of friends for him … A good way of making electricity is by letting cheeky clouds with lips blow windmills around and round. But silly Mark Zuckerberg chose dirty old coal … But [he] can still change his mind. "

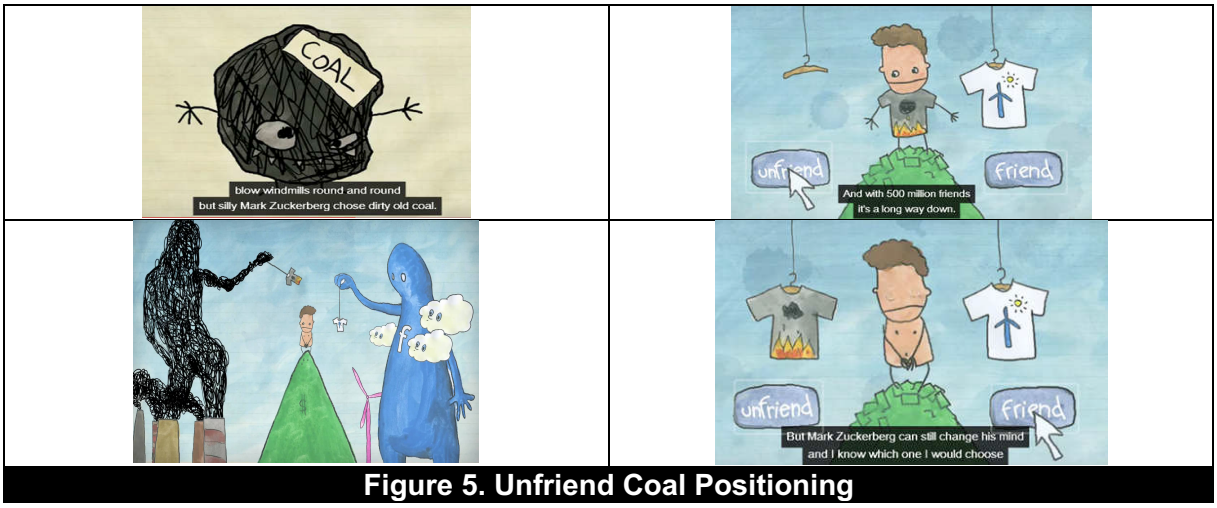

Figure 5. Unfriend Coal Positioning

Facebook's response to Greenpeace's ambivalent campaign was mostly silence, although they occasionally engaged with Greenpeace and explained their stance online. For instance, Facebook's CEO replied to a user in September 2010, stating that "most" of their data centers were already green. Similarly, the CEO replied to another user on his profile, acknowledging the Unfriend Coal campaign's message. Yet, in November 2010, Facebook announced a new data center in North Carolina powered by coal, creating a Green Facebook page to promote its energy efficiency efforts.

Greenpeace responded by thanking Facebook for its positive contributions but urging them to commit to using renewable energy. These examples illustrate how Unfriend Coal's ambivalent approach led to mobilization, agitation, and negotiation to push Facebook to reconsider their data storage practices.

The Unfriend Coal campaign utilized social networking applications, similar to the other two campaigns. Greenpeace encouraged Facebook users to build on Greenpeace's videos and photos, enrich the social network of people supporting the campaign, and attract celebrities' attention. Throughout the campaign, Greenpeace introduced complementary social networking tools and platforms and applied novel features to protect the movement over time (*protective*). On September 1, 2010, Greenpeace began using its blog to publish letters, asking Facebook's CEO to work with activists. By 2011, Greenpeace leveraged various social media features to challenge Facebook. On the eve of Facebook's seventh birthday on February 3, 2011, Greenpeace created a Facebook post using the countdown timer feature. The post asked the company to accept Greenpeace's demand by Earth Day, April 22, 2011. Leading up to Earth Day, Greenpeace challenged Facebook users to record 50,000 comments on a single post within 24 hours to win an Unfriend Coal t-shirt. The comments were short and repetitive, but they set a new world record with over 80,000 comments in one day. These efforts helped sustain and strengthen Unfriend Coal's framing and mobilized a growing community of supporters over the 22-month campaign.

Finally, in December 2011, Facebook announced a concession to use renewable energy and improve transparency in environmental reporting through a collaboration with Greenpeace:

"We are excited to work with them [Greenpeace] to explore new ways in which people can use Facebook to engage and connect on the range of energy issues that matter most to them – from their own energy efficiency to access to cleaner sources of energy."

On the same day, Greenpeace posted a blog confirming the transition of the campaign from mobilizing users to working collaboratively on social ambitions, such as creating communities of

interest around clean energy issues. The post, written by a project leader at Greenpeace US, highlighted the campaign's success:

"Greenpeace and Facebook will now work together to encourage major energy producers to move away from coal and instead invest in renewable energy. Greenpeace and Facebook have also agreed to develop and promote experiences on Facebook that help people and organizations connect with ways to save energy and engage their communities in clean energy issues."

Greenpeace subsequently published reports on the progress made through collaboration towards field-level changes, including phasing out the use of coal-fired electricity in Facebook's data centers. For instance, on January 10, 2017, Greenpeace released a report that scored technology giants based on their power consumption, recognizing the successful steps taken by companies such as Facebook and the broader IT industry.

DISCUSSION

Although prior research and popular attention have focused on SMOs' digital activism to pressure target businesses to make concessions by changing their practices, we examined how a SMO enabled globally distributed participation to achieve collaboration agreements with valuable social change ambitions and mutual benefits. The analysis identified three campaigns that relied primarily on digital activism and led to collaboration agreements. We noted contrasting strategies across the campaigns as the initial data analysis progressed. We considered these campaigns as relevant cases in the research context because they represented diverse dynamics that are observable due to their public activism processes, facilitating access to multiple perspectives and enabling comparison of emerging insights through literal and theoretical replication strategies (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007; Eisenhardt et al. 2016). We now draw from the differences across the campaigns to elaborate on how SMOs may vary their digital activism strategies depending on consumers' loyalty to a business and its offerings to achieve collaboration agreements.

Consumer Loyalty and Digital Activism Strategies

The findings indicated that Greenpeace strategically framed its digital activism to elaborate on the consequences of a social issue, attribute blame, and responsibility to three businesses, introduce practical solutions for advancing social change, and convince consumers that, by joining the campaigns, they could have a tangible impact on the development of change.

Although each of the campaigns was successful, Greenpeace applied varied positioning to shaping campaigns' framings and adopted different strategies for digital activism throughout the campaigns. Importantly, the analysis suggested that the variation in digital activism strategies across the campaigns was related to consumer loyalty to the brands.

Apple's consumers are viewed as strong supporters of a business and its offerings. In the case of Green My Apple, Greenpeace used a *tolerant content positioning* to frame its digital activism content to fit target businesses' recognizable language and vocabulary. It also adopted a supportive stand to articulate the urgency of a social problem whilst signaling a more hopeful narrative based on existing solutions (Den Hond and De Bakker 2007). A tolerant positioning emphasizes activists' appreciation and encouragement of the target business's positive contributions, thereby attributing responsibility to a critical social problem. It would therefore seem suited to consumers with high loyalty who may be reluctant to challenge the target business in a confrontational manner as they do not wish to tarnish their connection with the organization. Greenpeace built on this tolerant positioning to strengthen their calls for change, using a *promotive strategy*, encouraging consumers to frequently and creatively remix existing resources, leveraging digital platforms such as blogs and YouTube to create new content, and continuously challenging the targets.

In response to the activists' tolerant positioning and promotive social networking strategies, target businesses do not remain passive (Greenwood et al. 2011). Instead, they interpret, translate,

and sometimes transform online discussions. They may remain silent to avoid conflict if they are not convinced to yield partially or fully to the demands. However, sustained and increased digital activism can provide valuable opportunities for target businesses to demonstrate their commitment to social issues and establish themselves as leaders in their industry. This positive foundation of appreciation created through digital activism can lead to direct engagement between SMOs and target businesses. In mutual business gatherings, such as the meeting Apple's CEO had with shareholders including Greenpeace representatives, the target business is more likely to enter joint change-related discussions with the SMO, motivated by the potential benefits of seizing opportunities to show care and leadership in addressing social issues. Through sustained and tolerant conversations, the parties can engage in transparent and problem-solving discussions beyond symbolic activities, reducing the risk of co-optation (Austin and Seitanidi 2012). This open conversation platform enables the parties to identify and pursue collaborative initiatives to implement solutions of mutual interest.

In contrast, Nestlé, a company with a long history of serving consumers and producing emotionally engaging products, was targeted by Greenpeace using an *antagonistic content positioning* in the case of Kit Kat. An antagonistic positioning aims to damage the target business's image by using confrontational language and symbols. It thus seeks to mobilize consumers to adopt an adversarial approach, threatening to the company's reputation, which they may be more willing to do as their association with the company is relatively weak.

Choosing an antagonistic positioning comes with advantages but also risks for SMOs. It can lead to quicker and more direct collaboration agreements if a target business is sensitive to the damage to its reputation, but it can also generate resistance from the company, which will require the SMO to devote resources to sustaining consumer mobilisation. For the company, on the other

hand, resistance may increase the risk to their image, if concessions are eventually made (McDonnell et al. 2015; McDonnell and Werner 2016), which may encourage the target business to accommodate campaign demands despite uncertainty about the risks and solutions.

Digital campaigns with antagonistic positioning may have unintended consequences however (Ghobadi and Clegg 2015; Ortiz et al. 2019). During the Kit Kat campaign, for example, Greenpeace demonstrated an ability to adapt quickly by hosting the banned YouTube video on Vimeo, for example, which provided the added advantage of making the video viewable in countries where YouTube is restricted. Although this reaction may not have been planned, it highlights the need for SMOs to have the flexibility to respond to companies' efforts to dampen digital activism. SMOs therefore need a *preventive as well as a promotive strategy* to sustain digital activism.

In 2010, when Greenpeace launched the Unfriend Coal campaign on Facebook, the social media platform was still relatively young and had not yet established a dominant position in the market. Despite this, Facebook had a large and enthusiastic user base who would be reluctant to switch to an alternative provider. Consumer loyalty to Facebook, while relatively recent, was therefore considerably greater than for Nestle's chocolate bar. Greenpeace adopted an *ambivalent content positioning* that mixed both antagonistic and tolerant elements to frame its digital activism in the Unfriend Coal campaign. This allowed the SMO to balance framing the target business as contributing to a social issue while also acknowledging its positive contributions. The ambivalent positioning approach enabled Greenpeace to construct an antagonistic social crisis cycle discourse while advancing a tolerant position that identified a sustainable solution. Such mixed tactics may be seen as recognizing that consumers' loyalty to a target business makes it unlikely that they would

support a purely antagonistic positioning, but also that their loyalty was not so strong that a purely tolerant positioning would be sufficient.

An ambivalent positioning also appreciates that consumers may be cautious in making critical decisions and announcing changes. This can create a playful dynamic between SMOs, mobilized consumers, and their targets, resulting in prolonged digital activism that can inspire field-level changes. Even though Facebook did not accept Greenpeace's challenge, for example, on Earth Day 2011, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) announced its commitment to reducing its carbon footprint; Greenpeace leveraged its posts to highlight the recent development and further challenge Facebook. An extended period of activism can also give target businesses time to evaluate risks and opportunities, and bargain for more gains in accepting demands. As perceived opportunities, strategic gains, and the increasingly competitive environment gather momentum, target businesses may consider working with SMOs as a social responsibility initiative that can improve consumer loyalty and evaluations of their offerings. However, prolonged digital activism poses risks such as consumer fatigue and declining motivation to engage further. SMOs may require dedicated efforts to maintain consumer engagement. A *protective strategy* involves safeguarding the social network, empowering consumers, and gradually introducing complementary platforms and features to sustain their involvement as needed. This approach may ensure the longevity of engagement and help mitigate the challenges associated with activism fatigue.

While extant research elaborates on the role of digital activism in challenging businesses and mobilizing consumers on a larger scale (Albinsson and Perera 2012; Minocher 2019), this research emphasizes the potential of digital artifacts to publicize issues (Kane et al. 2014; Kavada

2015), co-create digital content (Leong et al. 2019; Treré 2015; Xiong et al. 2019), and pressure target organizations (Pu and Scanlan 2012; won Kim et al. 2014).

In this way we contribute to longitudinal perspectives on digital activism by focusing on its role in establishing collaboration agreements between SMOs and businesses rather than achieving particular concessions or compliance. Collaboration agreements require businesses to disclose some of their competitive processes and, hence, such agreements may be seen as evidence of a more profound dedication by businesses to addressing social causes (Cloutier and Langley 2017; Gray et al. 2022). However, the rarity and impact of these business-activist collaborative relationships make them of theoretical interest. Ten years after Unfriend Coal's agreement (2012), for example, industry observers highlighting the carbon footprint of Bitcoin used the campaign to illustrate how cloud computing providers had been persuaded to switch to renewable energy.

We also offer insights into how SMOs effectively use digital activism to target businesses and collaborate on promoting social change. The findings concur with prior research on strategic framing showing how digital activism content can contribute to the diagnosis of issues, provide *prognoses* for possible solutions, and *motivat*e potential activists to pressure target businesses (Choi and Park 2014; Pu and Scanlan 2012; Treré 2015). We further find that collaboration agreements may arise through combinations of additional strategic choices that can influence target businesses' perceptions of risks and potential strategic gains from collaboration with SMOs (e.g., serving as an example of social change and responsible business practices). As elaborated below, these choices include a combination of digital *content positioning* (tolerant, antagonistic, ambivalent) and social networking strategies (promotive, preventive, protective) that may reflect assumptions about consumers.

First, the findings emphasize leveraging *content positioning* and *social networking strategies* to strengthen and sustain SMOs' strategic framing. Content positioning strategies involve selecting an optimal tone for the language and symbols in a SMO's digital activism content to significantly impact the target business, consumers, and the public. While previous studies have emphasized an adversarial approach in digital activism content, some studies have mentioned SMOs' combination of *tolerant* and *antagonistic positionings* to provoke the desired response (van Huijstee and Glasbergen 2010b; Viveros 2017). We expand these findings by showing the relevance of *ambivalent positioning* in digital activism content, which simultaneously communicates antagonistic and tolerant orientations towards the target business. These findings also add to the literature on activism approaches, which typically focus on adversarial framing (Hiatt et al. 2015; McDonnell et al. 2015; Moschieri et al. 2022) by explaining how social networking's viral tactics may demand a more diverse approach to establish a more promising foundation for pursuing field-level changes.

Next, social networking strategy refers to a SMO's approach to utilizing social networking tools and platforms to strengthen consumer activism during a campaign. When matched to content positioning, this can effectively mitigate risks and sustain consumer engagement. The strategy can range from *promotive* to *preventive* to *protective*. The findings highlight the effectiveness of a *promotive strategy*, which encourages consumers to use social networking tools and platforms to create new digital content and mount continuous challenges on target businesses. This strategy, frequently discussed in the digital activism literature (Leong et al. 2019; Selander and Jarvenpaa 2016; Xiong et al. 2019), involves remixing existing resources and creating new information to keep the campaign fresh and engaging. We contribute to risk management in SMO's digital activism by showing how a *preventive strategy* may help to address potential resistance by the

target business in response to antagonistic positioning. This includes identifying alternative social networking tools and platforms that can be used during crises to maintain momentum. An ambivalent positioning, however, can lead to resistance and hence prolonged periods of digital activism that dampen consumers' motivation to continue to engage. Hence, SMOs may need to employ a *protective strategy* that involves gradually introducing a mix of complementary platforms they can switch between to keep consumers engaged and sustain the momentum of the campaign over time.

Second, the findings suggest that Greenpeace adapted their digital activism strategies in ways that appear to reflect assumptions about consumers' loyalty to the targeted brand and their consequent willingness to take specific types of action. This finding contributes to the existing literature that identifies the need for SMOs to adjust their strategies to hold businesses accountable for promoting social change (Albinsson and Perera 2012; Minocher 2019). In making sense of the comparative findings, we considered three potential factors that could have explained consumers' level of brand loyalty. While these factors, such as switching costs, resonate with existing research (Bell et al. 2005; Katz and Shapiro 1994), their reasoning and application in the context of activism are new. Hence, they provide a useful starting point to explore how loyalty-based relationships affect consumers' activism orientation.

Practically, the findings suggest that SMOs can pursue more ambitious goals in their digital advocacy and mobilization efforts by seeking collaborative relationships. They can signal strategic benefits to businesses and potentially achieve a deeper form of social change that can have a ripple effect on other businesses. This is increasingly relevant as digital activism, fuelled by AI-enabled platforms, can increase individuals' exposure to a wide range of social issues and causes. Personalized algorithms and the targeted nature of AI-powered campaigns recommend tailored

content, expanding awareness and motivating individuals to get involved. While strategic framing is traditionally applied in most campaigns, the findings of this study suggest that *digital content positioning* and *social networking strategies* may vary depending on levels of consumer loyalty and relationships with businesses. Some campaigns, such as the Unfriend Coal case in this study, may require patience and sustained efforts, allowing target businesses to gradually explore the benefits of collaboration and find motivations to collaborate, while others—such as Kit Kat—may be ripe for creating fast collaboration agreements.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We envision several opportunities to address and expand upon the limitations of the research.

First, the empirical analysis focused exclusively on the Greenpeace's digital activism campaigns that targeted businesses sensitive to reputational pressures, effectively motivating them to collaborate. Although we did not explore cases beyond Greenpeace, the findings provide insights for investigating activism strategies in various contexts. For instance, the impact of recent movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp in the media industry may not fit the collaboration model with specific businesses, but they do showcase the collaboration between digital activists (e.g., celebrities) and businesses (e.g., media companies). Future research can expand upon the results by conducting diverse investigations into the application of digital activism strategies, such as content positioning and social networking technologies, to mobilize activists with varying degrees of loyalty to specific media companies.

Second, researchers can enhance the findings and our approach to studying consumer loyalty. They can work with SMOs to explore how perceptions of consumer loyalty influence their digital campaigns that seek to establish collaboration agreements. It would be intriguing to investigate whether SMOs specifically considered consumer loyalty in their decision-making or

whether their tactics were unplanned. Future exploration can shed light on whether additional factors were considered in their decision-making process, or whether other tactics were employed. This could enrich our understanding of the complexities of digital activism strategies and the role of consumer loyalty in shaping SMOs' decisions.

We also relied on loyalty-levels using a simple qualitative assessment based on three factors. However, future research might usefully explore additional loyalty-related and non-loyalty related factors that SMOs can consider when formulating digital activism strategies. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, researchers can explore the possibility of assigning weights to these factors. Moreover, the ratings used in the study can be expanded by incorporating various combinations of high, medium, and low levels of loyalty, thus providing a more holistic understanding of the dynamics within consumer-business relationships.

Third, the findings highlight that antagonistic content positioning can elicit strong negative responses from businesses, which may lead members of the targeted organization to overreact. This may be beneficial for the SMO, however, as it may prompt the business to engage in conversations and seek collaboration agreements to compensate for their member’s actions. Not all organisations will necessarily respond aggressively, and future research should investigate cases where target organizations successfully resist antagonistic positioning and explore how SMOs seek to sustain prolonged activism processes. By studying these dynamics, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of effective tactics and approaches for sustaining activism in the face of confrontation and resistance.

Fourth, future research can enrich the conceptualization of ambivalent content positioning. It would be intriguing to explore whether there are different strategies that SMOs employ when

practicing ambivalent positioning, as well as examining how these strategic choices influence the emergence and progression of collaboration agreements.

Fifth, our findings demonstrate the consistent application of specific positioning (tolerant, antagonistic, ambivalent) throughout each campaign, which can be directly attributed to the publicly available data collected for the three cases. To further advance these findings, it would be interesting to identify and analyze cases where activists publicly undergo a shift in their positioning strategies before and after collaboration agreements are formed.

Lastly, this study centered on digital activism that seeks to co-create change through long-lasting collaborative relationships. The findings and resulting theory emphasized the significance of collaboration agreements as crucial milestones. As existing research acknowledges, however, collaborations may encounter challenges and issues of cooptation (Austin and Seitanidi 2012; Baur and Schmitz 2012; Chua et al. 2020). While our study did not have access to private data regarding specific conversations during these collaborations, certain activities following the collaboration agreements suggest that these did not inhibit Greenpeace's activism (e.g., their ongoing challenges to Apple). We encourage future research to collaborate with SMOs to investigate how they evaluate the effectiveness of collaboration agreements and to explore their perspectives regarding the relationship between their choice of digital content positioning and social networking applications and the outcomes achieved through collaboration agreements. We emphasize the importance of investigating cases that elucidate how SMOs and businesses navigate change practices and manage collaborative relationships that arise following digital activism campaigns. This can enhance our understanding of the ongoing dynamics of collaboration, rather than seeing it as a specific event that ends when the collaboration agreement is signed.

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Appendix 1

Case Selection		
Step	**Process**	**Outcome**
1	The Greenpeace timeline of social activism was thoroughly reviewed (https://www.greenpeace.org/international/history/), including the summary of each case, additional material related to each case on the Greenpeace website, and how the target business formulated its relationship with Greenpeace, which led to the identification of 92 out of 105 cases where target businesses accepted Greenpeace's demands as pure concessions (e.g., Barbie/Mattel in October 2011, LEGO in October 2014, and Burberry in January 2014).	This process led to the identification of 13 cases that illustrate the development of collaborations between Greenpeace and various organizations.
2	We considered that some collaboration agreements might have been developed without a history of applying activism, including collaboration with exemplary organizations that voluntarily approached and joined campaigns (e.g., Marks & Spencer, Médecins Sans Frontières).	This process resulted in the identification of ten cases that provide sample information to elucidate the nature of collaboration between Greenpeace and the target business (refer to the table below).
3	We noted that collaboration agreements between SMOs and target businesses are often private and held behind closed doors, limiting the availability of information for field workers to gain insights into their underlying factors. However, there have been cases where SMOs have taken a radical and transparent approach by shifting discussions online and mobilizing customers to lead the way when traditional discussions have not worked, or an urgent change is required. The review of social activism practices in ten cases identified seven cases that were not associated with dedicated online campaigns and fell outside the scope of the research question.	The remaining three cases represent exemplary cases of digital activism since each movement centered on creating and executing a single online campaign (Green My Apple, Kit Kat, Unfriend Coal).

Identifying Greenpeace Cases (Digital Activism/Collaboration Agreement)	
Timeline	**Campaign/ Evidence of Collaboration**
April 2006	McDonald (Soya Chicken Feed, Amazon): “As McDonald’s and Cargill rolled up their sleeves to address the problem of soy-driven deforestation, Greenpeace halted its campaign, and a productive collaboration began. The result became known as the Soy Moratorium.”
May 2007	Apple (Green My Apple): Apple initiated the idea of collaboration to help Greenpeace improve its measuring technology. Greenpeace responded to the challenge by collaborating with an independent Apple laboratory to learn about scientific analyses into the use of hazardous chemicals in the production lines of electronic products.
May 2008	Unilever (Monkey Business): “Greenpeace collaborates with Unilever to ensure that suppliers of palm oil for the company's products are protecting ecologically valuable forests and peatlands in Borneo” “Unilever has agreed to rise to the challenge and lead the way, building a coalition of allies to pressure palm oil suppliers in Indonesia to agree to the moratorium.”
July 2009	Timberland (Not Use Brazilian Deforestation Leather): “Timberland worked with Greenpeace to craft a policy that will require its leather suppliers to commit to a moratorium on purchasing any cattle raised in newly deforested areas within the Amazon Rainforest. “
August 2009	Kimberly-Clark (Kleenex): “The effect of our collaboration has had a much larger effect. It is not just procurement for product lines that have been affected. Kimberly-Clark and Greenpeace collaborate on issues of common interest.”
May 2010	Nestlé (Kit Kat): “We seek ways to collaborate with other stakeholders on this issue, and we will participate in the Coalition on Palm Oil that you will participate with a number of companies ... We continue to believe that we must gather all interests at the table and reiterate our proposal for the creation of a coalition, which gathers all relevant stakeholders.”
November 2010	Companies of the Consumer Goods Forum (Refrigerator Naturally): “Greenpeace will work actively with the leadership of the Consumer Goods Forum to implement the phase-out as swiftly as possible.”
December 2011	Facebook (Unfriend Coal): “Facebook looks forward to a day when our primary energy sources are clean and renewable, and we are working with Greenpeace and others to help bring that day closer. Greenpeace and Facebook will now work together to encourage major energy producers to move away from coal and instead invest in renewable energy.”
December 2014	Best Buy (Best Buyers?): “We [Greenpeace] look forward to collaborating on [Best Buy’s] new procurement policy to see this through.”
May 2015	Asia Pulp & Paper Group (APP) (Protect Indonesia's rainforests): “Greenpeace has been a vital partner and valued critical friend in the design and delivery of the Forest Conservation Policy.” “Greenpeace’s involvement enables us to assist and influence APP’s work on other vital areas where we expect to see substantial progress over the coming months relating to APP’s FCP. “

* Social activism campaigns (2005-2015)

Appendix 2

Concepts & Definitions		
Concepts/Definitions	**Similar Concepts in the Literature**	**Finding Unique to this Study**
1. A collaboration agreement is a formal arrangement between a SMO and a target business to work together toward addressing specific social problems—specifically with a focus on creating field-level changes to industry standards and practices.	(Cloutier and Langley 2017; Gray et al. 2022).	-
2. SMO's strategic framing refers to the SMO's selective processes of choosing the critical aspects of a social cause and making those aspects more salient in the online communication of the cause's primary implications (Benford and Snow 2000).	(Benford and Snow 2000).	-
2.1. Diagnostic framing creates emotionally challenging digital content that engages consumers to grasp the social cause's critical importance and approach the target business for making immediate changes.		
2.2. Prognostic framing creates digital content that clarifies the SMO's demands about how the target business can address the social cause's urgency.		
2.3. Motivational framing applies symbolic digital content that imitates the target business's common language, norms, and symbols to engage consumers and motivate the target business to respond positively.		
3. SMO's content positioning refers to the SMO's dominant language, symbols, and tone of digital content to exert the highest impact on the target business, consumers, and the public.		
3.1. Tolerant positioning refers to content that appreciates the target business's standard norms and values and uses friendly calls to articulate the current social problem as an opportunity to avoid problems in the future.	(Soule 2009; van Huijstee and Glasbergen 2010b).	-
3.2. Antagonistic positioning refers to content that publicly shames a target business and sends threatening messages to blame its practices.		
3.3. Ambivalent positioning refers to digital content that integrates simultaneous elements from antagonistic and tolerant elements to balance between "framing the target business as the source of negative social effects" and "highlighting the target's positive contributions."	-	X
4. SMO's social networking strategy refers to the SMO's dominant strategy to utilizing social networking tools and platforms as to strengthen and sustain activism during the campaigns.		
4.1. Promotive strategy focuses on encouraging consumers to use social networking tools and platforms to create new digital content and mount continuous challenges on the target business, e.g., to remix existing resources and create new information.	(George and Leidner 2019; Leong et al. 2019; Selander and Jarvenpaa 2016; Xiong et al. 2019).	-
4.2. Preventive strategy seeks to mitigate the effects of possible responses by target businesses to digital activism.		X
4.3. Protective strategy seeks to sustain activism over an extended period by gradual introduction of complementary networking tools and platforms.		X

Sample Coding (Green My Apple)	
1. Content Framing	
Diagnostic framing	"Apple could do more to match its environmental record with its hip and trendy image. It is disappointing to see Apple ranking so low in the overall guide. They are meant to be world leaders in design and marketing; they should be world leaders in environmental innovation," *from* ***The Guide to Greener Electronics, Greenpeace International, August 2006.***
Prognostic framing	*"[We] want clean ingredients in all Apple products. [We] want Apple to provide a free take-back program to reuse and recycle its products wherever they are sold," from* ***Green My Apple campaign statements, Greenpeace, September 2006.***
Motivational framing	*"Here at Greenpeace, we love our Macs. But we hate that they're full of toxic chemicals. And we know someone who can do something about it: you," from* ***Green My Apple campaign statements, Greenpeace, September 2006.***
2. Content positioning	
Tolerant positioning	"*Good products and good design ought to be good for the planet. That's an Apple kind of attitude, isn't it? Come on, Steve. Be a hero for the planet, from* ***Green My Apple campaign statements, Apple fan comments, September 2006.*** *"We should applaud Apple for their design efforts, user-friendly products, and great customer service. They should aspire to be like Lenovo and Dell in being more open and progressive about what their products mean to the environment," from* ***Apple Worst, Lenovo First for Eco-Friendly Laptops says Greenpeace, Apple fan post on notebookreview.com, April 2007.***
3. Social networking strategies	
Promotive strategy	*"The Green my Apple website has all the information and the raw materials you need to get you started. If you're creative, create. If you're networked, network. There's plenty to do, and many hands make light work. We want you to create the campaign T-shirt and pen the speech in which Steve Jobs announces," Greening of Apple," from* ***Green My Apple campaign statements, Greenpeace, September 2006.***

Sample Coding (Kit Kat)	
1. Content framing	
Diagnostic framing	*"Nestlé is the largest food and drinks company in the world. Considering its size and influence, it should be setting an example for the industry and ensuring its palm oil is destruction free. Instead, Nestlé continues to buy from companies like Sinar Mas, which are destroying Indonesia's rainforests and peatlands. The companies that produce palm oil are cutting down the planet's lungs and contributing to making Indonesia the third-largest carbon emitter after the United States and China," to* ***Greenpeace's press release on March 23, 2010.***
Prognostic framing	*"Stop buying palm oil from companies that destroy the rainforests," from* ***Kit Kat's online messages throughout the campaign.***
Motivational framing	*"Your support for the Kit Kat campaign has been amazing! The Nestle Facebook admin is hard at work responding to you - and views on the video are 281.000 and rising! CHECK OUT what others are doing to ask Nestle to give rainforests a break," from* ***Greenpeace International Facebook page on March 19, 2010.***
2. Content positioning	
Antagonistic positioning	Kit Kat logo with the letters replaced by 'Killer' and the Greenpeace's YouTube video where the worker snaps off and eats a piece of Kit Kat that turns out to be a bloody orangutan's digit.
3. Social networking strategies	
Preventive strategy	*"The video Nestlé didn't want you to see ... on YouTube - has now moved to Vimeo! Watch, embed, share and if you have a Vimeo account - download it and help us continue spread the word," from* ***Greenpeace International Facebook page on March 19, 2010.***

Sample Coding (Unfriend Coal)	
1. Content framing	
Diagnostic framing	*"In January 2010, Facebook commissioned a new data center in Oregon and committed to a power service provider agreement with PacifiCorp, a utility that gets the majority of its energy from coal-fired power stations, the United States' largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. Other companies have made better decisions for siting some of their data centers," from* ***Make it Green: Cloud Computing and its Contributions to Climate Change, the report by Greenpeace International, March 30, 2010.***
Prognostic framing	*"Facebook needs to commit to a plan to grow without dirty coal, and to use their huge purchasing power to choose clean, renewable energy sources. The longer they continue without a public plan, the more our campaign will heat up - and the more we'll be asking you to participate," from* ***Greenpeace blog post, Facebook, let's commit to Unfriend Coal by Earth Day, April 22, 2011, by Kumi Naidoo, February 3, 2011.***
Motivational framing	*"It's clear that Facebook is paying attention to our campaign and is starting to recognize their responsibility – now what we need is a real plan to unfriend coal. So, to encourage them along, we are giving them a deadline: Facebook: unfriend coal by Earth Day, April 22! Please join me in the campaign [Earth Day countdown timer] here, and don't forget to invite your friends," from* ***Greenpeace blog post, Facebook, let's commit to Unfriend Coal by Earth Day, April 22, 2011, by Kumi Naidoo, February 3, 2011.***
2. Content positioning	
Ambivalent positioning	"*The Unfriend Coal campaign has made it clear that no matter where people use Facebook to find lost acquaintances, post photos, or keep up with friends, they would prefer to do so on a clean and renewably powered platform. This message has been conveyed to the company in many ways, always creative and often quite funny," from* ***Greenpeace's blog post, Unfriend Coal Around the World, by Jodie Vanhorn, April 29, 2011.***
3. Social networking strategy	
Protective strategy	Introduction of new platforms and their new features to intensify activism during the long campaign: *Facebook page (February 2010), Greenpeace blog post/ YouTube (September 2010), Facebook countdown time (February 2011).*